

Review - Henry Appleton Boy Hero and the Burgess Gang

Read NZ Te Pou Muramura

<https://www.read-nz.org/school-library/henry-appleton-boy-hero-and-the-burgess-gang>

School Library review By Karen Seth, teacher at Upper Harbour Primary School, Auckland.
Highly Recommended

OPENING SENTENCE

Correct oppression. Henry had always been taken by this phrase, and decided it would be his guiding philosophy. But, as he soon discovered, it was a philosophy that could bring a heap of trouble, and usually involved a heap of pain.

'Henry Appleton, Boy Hero' is a story about a young boy whose family live in rural Whakatū, Nelson, Aotearoa, New Zealand, and are struggling to make ends meet.

Henry is a romantic idealist who loves dime novels from America, stories about cowboys and outlaws. He dreams of one day becoming a writer and illustrator of a dime novel himself. When things get really tough for his family, Henry's adopted father must leave and head for the goldfields. Henry wants to join him, desperate to show that he is a 'real man', but things don't go according to plan.

John Evan Harris creates an enticing world with vivid imagery and fast paced action that young people will be ensnared by. He describes characters' physical appearances as well as personality traits to make it easier for children to distinguish between them - and to draw them (great for a lesson!). He draws upon a great deal of research about historic events and the local area.

The story is supported by sketches, great for students who like a little help with visualising. These generally come after the scene so as not to give things away, which I appreciate.

There are appendices to support teaching or further reading: resources for reading about the area and history, dime novels and writing about them, and suggestions of places around Whakatū, Nelson which are worth a visit.

This story is a prequel to "The Physician's Gun". Both are inspired by true events.