

Citizenship, identity and belonging

‘When the state turned up here or the British Crown turned up here, they didn’t come here to be citizens. They came here to take over this country and to turn it into an England in the South Pacific. Now when they did that, they denied themselves a wealth of knowledge and a wealth of understanding. Every little place that you go to throughout this country there are people, there are kuia and kaumātua, who have the most incredible knowledge of each whānau area, each hapū area. There is a huge amount of knowledge held by our kuia and kaumātua, held by our whānau and hapū that is denied to all tauwiwi who come here, and I think that’s really, really sad. For me you can’t actually be a true citizen of this country unless you actually understand the country you live in, and for me most New Zealanders haven’t got a clue about this country.

What they know about is a layer that was brought in by the British and laid over the true country, and they put a layer that was about Pākehā being supreme and under that they put that Māori are inferior. So all of our extensive knowledge got put under there, and they built up these myths, myth upon myth upon myth....

It’s a whole lot of rubbish. I look at them and I think “You poor people. You don’t know what you’re missing out on. You’d love it if you knew, but you haven’t been allowed to know.” And for me they can’t be proper citizens, or even full citizens of this country because they don’t know about this country.’

—Professor Margaret Mutu (Ngāti Kahu, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Whātua and Scottish)

Teaching activity



Use the following questions:

- 1) What do you think is important in order to understand the place where you live?
- 2) To what extent do you agree with Mutu, that to be a ‘proper citizen’ of this country you must understand Māori culture and this place prior to colonisation?
- 3) How important to you is the idea of belonging to a country/nation-state?
- 4) How strongly do you identify as a New Zealander?
- 5) What other kinds of belonging do you value?
- 6) What are ways in which national identity is expressed? Are there expressions you feel connected to/distant from?