



# REWI ALLEY – NEW ZEALAND HERO AND OPTIMIST

INSPIRATIONAL WEB BASED  
SOCIAL SCIENCE ACTIVITIES FROM



[www.nzedge.com/heroes/alley.html](http://www.nzedge.com/heroes/alley.html)

New Zealand Edge is a website that promotes a new and optimistic way of thinking about New Zealand's identity, people, stories, achievements, and place in the world. In this social sciences unit we take students on an optimistic journey to celebrate Rewi Alley – a New Zealand Hero and Optimist. The following unit is focused on the continuity and change strand where students will ask questions, gather information and examine the way that Rewi Alley tackled important issues and participated in social action during an extremely turbulent time in Chinese history. **Levels 3-6.**

## INTRODUCING REWI ALLEY

- Have students ever heard of the expression Gung Ho? What does it mean? Tell students that today it is a slang expression in English meaning 'work together' but it originated in China in 1939 as a description of small industrial enterprises that were introduced to China by a famous New Zealander – Rewi Alley.
- Introduce students to Rewi Alley by telling them that he first went to China in 1927 and spent over 60 years of his life helping the Chinese people. Do students know anything else about this famous and controversial man? Have students Visit: <http://library.christchurch.org.nz> > **select kids, type in Rewi Alley into the search box** and read a brief thumbnail sketch of his life (or print out for students). From their preliminary reading, what events do they consider to be in the four or five most important achievements. List for future reference and comparison.

## INTRODUCING [www.nzedge.com/heroes](http://www.nzedge.com/heroes)

- Have groups visit this section of the site and scroll through the categories. Have them list any NZ 'Heroes' that they have heard about. Locate Rewi Alley under the Optimists section. What is their understanding of the word 'Optimist'? What characteristics do they possess?
- Have students in groups or as individuals carry out online research to be able to find answers to questions posed and take part in the following discussions and activities.

## INTRODUCTORY IDEAS AND PREDICTIONS

- The introductory section lists many descriptors of the multi-talented Alley. Through discussion, ensure students understand the meanings of the descriptors, **eg** what is...  
- a revered citizen - an industrialist ...
- From the descriptors given, have students predict the type and scope of activities he took part in China.
- Identify the main purposes of all 66 books he wrote.
- What clues to the type of man he was is given by his asking his family not to believe writings about him – both good and bad.
- What further insight into Alley does the sentence 'the god of digging the long drop where it could not contaminate the well water' give us?
- What do students think is meant by the idea that Alley was one of few foreigners to create an 'authentic ripple'? Speculate on why this would be difficult for foreigners. Discuss.

## MAJOR DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

- Explain to students that when Alley arrived in China in 1927, the country had overthrown their Emperor and the Nationalists (blues or Guomintang) were trying to rule this vast country. Describe the conditions for the workers that Alley found when he first arrived in Shanghai. How much effect do students think these would have made to the formation and increasing popularity of the Communists (reds)?
- Have students list the incidents and atrocities that gradually influenced Alley to secretly side with the Communists. What reasons can students find for Alley doing this?
- What major problems for Alley were caused by the Shanghai invasion by the Japanese in 1937? Discuss the effect of Chinese industry being clustered around the ports. What was the revolutionary solution that Alley proposed to the Chinese government?
- Identify reasons for the success of the Gung Ho projects. Introduce students to the idea that although Alley thought of these as co-operative projects to give people skills, work and money to live, they looked to the Nationalists like part of a Communist philosophy to overthrow them. What eventually made the Gung Ho projects unworkable and what was Alley's simple solution to this?
- Help students understand the simple and practical ideas behind Alley's philosophies in action at Shandan Baillie School. Why would he describe them as the happiest days of his life? List the satisfactions he must have found.
- Tell the students that there has been strong criticism of Alley, both in New Zealand and around the world, for continuing to help the Chinese people after the Communist government took over China. Have them carefully look through the text to find reasons why he continued to work with and try to promote international understanding of the people of China - even if it was obvious that government policies and revolutions/movements were harming and killing millions of people. Debate the stand and actions he took.
- Rewi Alley is described as an optimist. List the optimistic actions he took to try and improve the lives of his adopted people. Why do we and China regard him so highly today?
- Have all students contribute to a wall chart display that list his most significant achievements and a written paragraph to justify why he can be regarded as one of New Zealand's 'Heroes'.

