

Teaching notes

Armistice Day: the New Zealand story

What it is and why it matters

By Philippa Werry

A non-fiction children's book from New Holland Publishers

Synopsis:

Armistice Day: the New Zealand story is a fascinating look at a part of New Zealand's history and culture that many people know little about. It will be especially relevant during the centenary years for the First World War (2014-2018) but also covers the aftermath of that war.

The book traces the origin and development of Armistice Day from 1918 right up to the present day, including its renaming as Remembrance Day. It helps children to understand why and how we remember these events and encourages them to think about and celebrate peace.

The text is written in a clear, easy-to-understand style with many illustrations. At the back of the book, ideas are given for follow-up activities and for websites to look at.

About the author:

Philippa Werry is a children's writer who began her career writing for the *School Journal*. Since then, her non-fiction, stories, plays and poems have been widely published. Several of her books have featured in the Storylines Notable Books lists and her historical novel *Enemy at the gate* was shortlisted for the New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards in 2009.

Her non-fiction book *Anzac Day: the New Zealand story* (also published by New Holland) was shortlisted for both the New Zealand Post Book Awards for Children and Young Adults and the Lianza Book awards in 2014. *Waitangi Day: the New Zealand story* was shortlisted in the Children's Choice section of the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults in 2015.

Philippa lives in Wellington and visits schools around the country as part of the Writers in Schools programme; she is an online writing tutor and maintains several writing blogs. For further info, see

<http://www.philippawerry.co.nz/>

The story behind the book:

This is a book that grew out of other books I've worked on, in particular the Anzac Day book. I wanted to find out more about how the First World War ended and what happened afterwards, especially when I came across the story of the 1919 Peace Day celebrations, which I'd never heard of before.

Armistice Day in New Zealand today isn't as well-known as Anzac Day, although for many years it was. *The 11th of the 11th of the 11th* (which refers to the moment at 11am on

the 11th day of the 11th month – November - in 1918, when the Armistice came into force) was a phrase that everyone understood, and the “two minute silence” was almost religiously kept, in schools and offices and factories and outside on the streets. Everyone would stop whatever they were doing, women would bow their heads, men would take off their hats and for two minutes there would be total silence.

But I grew up being aware of the meaning of it because my mother was English, and for her – living in London before and after WW2, and serving during the war as a driver for the Air Force – Armistice Day held a special significance.

After several years of researching and writing about war, I have enjoyed the chance to write about peace, and to look for peace memorials rather than war memorials. It has felt positive and constructive, but at the same time, I wanted to make the point that the effects of war don't magically end when the fighting ends.

As with the Anzac Day and Waitangi Day books, I received help from librarians, archivists and many others who shared their expertise or their photos. Making these connections is a real reward of writing a book like this. I have tried to put together a history of Armistice Day from different viewpoints, without glorifying war but honouring the memory of those who served and died for their country, to show why it has been important in the past and what it might mean for us today. I think it's important that children gain a deeper understanding of their country, their history, their story.

My two grandfathers both fought in the First World War (in Gallipoli and on the Western Front) and my great-great-aunt Louisa Bird (Great Aunt Louie to the family) was one of the first New Zealand nurses to go overseas in 1915. My father was in the Royal New Zealand Air Force in the Second World War and my mother was a driver for the RAF in England. On my husband's side, one grandfather was in the cyclists' battalion in the First World War and the other was in the Pacific in the Second World War.

Writing style and design:

This is a non-fiction book for 8-12 year olds, but teenagers and even adults will also learn many things they didn't know from it, and younger children may be interested in the photographs and other illustrations.

The content is based on extensive research and the book contains a wide range of images, both historic and contemporary. These include photographs, portraits, paintings, newspaper articles and advertisements, maps, diaries, stamps, posters and a timeline. The book also contains non-fiction features such as contents page, index, bibliography, glossary, picture credits and text acknowledgements.

The images have been carefully selected with three aims in mind:

- to expand on and deepen understanding of the text
- to capture children's attention
- to cover as many parts of New Zealand as possible

The text is clear but succinct, so each section could be expanded on with further research if wanted. It starts with a definition of the word “armistice”, and an introduction about what and when Armistice Day is, then describes the final months, weeks and days of the First World War, leading up to the signing of the Armistice (Chapter One) and outlines what happened next, including the influenza epidemic and how the servicemen and women got home again (Chapter Two).

The aftermath of war (Chapter Three) covers how the war cemeteries were designed and developed, and the growth of battlefield tourism and pilgrimages. Chapter Four focuses on peace memorials, peace makers and other days for marking peace, and Chapter Five on how Armistice Day and Remembrance Day are marked today in New Zealand and around the world.

The final section contains a poem by Lorna Anker, *Ellen’s vigil*, (pg 56) and a picture of an empty panel of marble amongst the Rolls of Honour in the Hall of Memory at Auckland War Memorial Museum, with its poignant inscription, “Let these panels never be filled” (pg 57).

The book is intended to be inclusive, in that it doesn’t just focus on men who went to fight, but also on women who served as nurses, and families who stayed behind and waited for news, good or bad. It is not meant to glorify war, but to recognise its cost.

Classroom discussion points:

Children will come to this text with differing levels of knowledge and understanding. Many children will have been to Anzac Day services, but they may not know when Armistice Day is or what it commemorates. Some children may have relatives who have served or are serving in the armed forces. Others may have lost family members to war, or have personal experience of it. The topic of war therefore needs to be handled sensitively and with respect.

1. How are Anzac Day and Armistice Day similar, and how are they different? Why is it important for us to remember the events of 25 April 1915 and 11 November 1918?
2. Many young men went off to fight as soldiers in the First World War, but men and women served in other ways as well. Who else went to war? (eg nurses, doctors, chaplains, stretcher bearers, orderlies, postal workers, cooks.)
3. Why is it important to remember those who went to war? Talk about whether you have seen any of the sites mentioned or pictured in this book, or describe any other war or peace memorials that you know.
4. What made people become conscientious objectors? (pg 26) Was it easier or harder for them than signing up to fight? What was life like for them during and after the First World War? (David Hill’s novel *My brother’s war* may be a good starting point for discussion.) What were the special challenges faced by prisoners of war (pg 27), both in New Zealand and overseas, and how do you think they coped with them?

5. Maori and Pacific Islanders who signed up to fight in the First World War (pg 22-23) were uprooted from their own culture and thrust into a very different world. What challenges did they face and what differences did they have to adapt to?

6. Le Quesnoy has a special place in New Zealand's war history. What happened there on 4 November 1918 (see pg 10) and why is there still a special link between the people of that small French town and the people of New Zealand? How is that link shown?

Classroom activities:

1. Use a large map of New Zealand and put coloured drawing pins in places mentioned or shown in the illustrations (eg Dunedin, Devonport, Akaroa, New Plymouth, Christchurch, Wellington, Featherston, Auckland, Tikitiki, Rotorua, Somes Island, Hastings, Rawene, Mt Maunganui, Port Chalmers, Castlepoint, Kaimata, Cambridge, Le Bons Bay, Mokau, Timaru, Oamaru). Find out who has been to any of those places. Which one is closest to where you live?

Use Google Maps or a large map of the world and pinpoint places mentioned in the text (eg England, France, Belgium, Turkey, Egypt, New York, South Korea, North Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan.) Find out who has been to any of those places.

2. Draw or create a map of your local area and mark any places, buildings or structures that have connections not to war but to peace. They may not be obvious, but you might be surprised at how many there are. They might be peace memorials (peace poles, bells or flames), peace walks, plaques commemorating the end of the war, streets named after figures of peace, trees or museum exhibits.

3. Read the poem at the end of the book ("Ellen's vigil"), or listen as someone reads it out loud to you. You might want to listen to it two or three times. Talk about any words or lines that you don't understand and see if you can figure out the meaning together. What pictures does the poem make in your head? Draw or paint your response to the poem, or write your own poem about war that has names in it, like this one.

4. *Pokarekare ana* (pg 24) is a much-loved Māori waiata that was taken overseas by soldiers in the First World War. The words and tune are easily found online (eg <http://folksong.org.nz/pokarekare/>). Listen to the song, or even better, practise and sing it yourselves. What do you think the soldiers felt or thought about when they sang this song overseas during war time?

5. Use books or the Internet to pinpoint dates of important battles or other significant events; then work out when the centenary will occur. Find out what is being planned for centenary events in your local area, in New Zealand or overseas. (Look at WW100.govt.nz) Why do people want to mark a centenary? What would be a fitting way to do so? Could you plan a centenary event for your school or community? How could you make it focus on peace as well as war?

6. Find out more about the history and geography of a country where fighting took place in the First or Second World Wars. If you were going to visit the war cemeteries in that country, how would you get there? Use Internet travel sites to work out transport, accommodation and costs.
7. How is Armistice Day marked in your local area? Plan your own special event for Armistice Day.
8. Peace Day celebrations in 1919 went on for three or four days (pg 40). How would you celebrate peace? Make up your own Peace Day celebration, either for 1919 or for today.
9. The influenza epidemic of 1918 (pg 17) had a terrible effect on New Zealand. Today we have antibiotics and better medicines, but people can still get sick. How would you look after someone who was sick with flu?
10. Carry out one of the activities listed on pg 55.

Websites:

A number of websites are listed on pg 60.

Extra information about Anzac Day for extra learning:

1. Recommended books about war and peace include:

Picture books:

Jennifer Beck, *The bantam and the soldier*
Eleanor Cooper, *Sadako and the thousand paper cranes*
Joy Cowley, *The duck in the gun*
Tracy Duncan, *Grandad's medals*
Michael Foreman, *War game (about the Christmas truce)*
Ali Foster and Viv Walker, *The eels of Anzac bridge*
Glyn Harper, *Le Quesnoy: The Story of the Town New Zealand Saved*
David Hill, ill by Fifi Colston, *The red poppy*
Bob Kerr, *After the war*

Younger fiction:

John Boyne, *Stay where you are and then leave*
Susan Broucker, *Brave Bess and the Anzac horses, Dreams of warriors*
Jackie French, *The donkey who carried the wounded*
Michael Morpurgo, *War horse*
Sally Stone, *Pandemic: Spanish flu 1918*

YA fiction:

Jackie French, *A rose for the Anzac boys*
David Hill, *My brother's war*
Kirsty Murray, *The year it all ended*

Non fiction

Raymond Huber, Peace warriors

2. People

Find out more about:

- Any of these people mentioned in the book: David Lloyd George, Prime Minister William Massey, Woodrow Wilson, Vladimir Lenin, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Edward Harrison, Orville Wright, Vera Brittain, Dr Margaret Cruickshank, Darcy Hadfield, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Alexander Gillies, Kate Sheppard, Fabian Ware, Lorna Anker, Gandhi.
Explain what their connection is to Armistice Day, or to the First or Second World War or other wars, or to peace.

- Any other person who works or has worked for peace. (They don't have to be famous. Perhaps you know someone in your own family who is a peace-maker.)

- Herbert Green.

Herbert Green took several of the photographs in this book. He was a newspaper photographer before he enlisted, and when WW1 ended, he worked for the War Records Office, taking photographs in England and Europe. Look at the picture credits (pg 62) to find out which photographs he took, or find more on this blog post: <http://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2014/08/31/from-war-to-peace/>

Choose a photograph that you like or find interesting, and describe what you think is happening in it.

3. Poetry

War poetry covers a wide range. Some poems portray war as a heroic and noble adventure. Others emphasise the waste and futility of war.

Here are some to start with (all easily available online). What do you think the poet was saying about war in each case?

“Drummer Hodge” by Thomas Hardy (about the South African war)

“Everyone sang” by Siegfried Sassoon

“Dulce et decorum est” by Wilfred Owen

“Strange meeting” by Wilfred Owen

“My boy Jack” by Rudyard Kipling

“Grass” by Carl Sandburg

“Naming of parts” by Henry Reed (written during WW2)

NZ poems about war and peace include:

“Armistice” by Lorna Staveley Anker in *The Judas tree* (Canterbury University Press, 2013)

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“Memories of war” by Brian Turner

“Homecoming – Te Hokinga Mai” by Vincent O’Sullivan, written for the return of the Unknown Warrior