

Teaching notes

Best Mates: Three lads who went to war together
By Philippa Werry and Bob Kerr
A children's picture-book from New Holland Publishers

Introduction:

Best Mates is a poignant look at an important part of New Zealand's history. It will be especially relevant as the centenary approaches for the First World War and its battles (2014-2018).

The text is accompanied by illustrations by Bob Kerr. At the back of the book, factual information about the Gallipoli campaign is included, along with a map, a diary entry and a list of websites to visit.

About the author:

Philippa Werry is a children's writer whose non-fiction, poetry, stories and plays have been widely published. Her work has appeared in the *School Journal*, other educational publications and various anthologies, and some stories have been broadcast on Radio New Zealand. *The Great Chocolate Cake Bake-off* and *A Girl Called Harry* were both included in the Storylines Notable Books List (2008 and 2011) and *Enemy at the Gate* was shortlisted in the Junior Fiction section for the NZ Post Book Awards 2009. Her most recent books include *Anzac Day: The New Zealand Story* (New Holland, 2013) and *Lighthouse Family* (Scholastic, 2013.) Philippa lives in Wellington and participates in the Writers in Schools programme.

'I have tried to present the story of the Gallipoli campaign without glorifying war, but honouring the memory of those who served and died for their country, to show why we remember it, and why it still matters today. I think it's important to realise that war affected everyone, not just those who went to fight, but also the families who stayed behind and waited for news, good or bad.'

About the illustrator:

Bob Kerr was born in Wellington, grew up in Tokoroa, and attended Auckland University, gaining a Diploma in Fine Arts with Honours in 1974. His books include *Terry and the Gunrunners* (story by Stephen Ballantyne; later adapted into a six-part television series by Television New Zealand), *Terry and the Yodeling Bull*, *Terry and the Last Moa*, *The Optimist*, *The Day of the Rain* and *The Day of the Snow* (story by Joy Cowley), *Mechanical Harry*, *Strange Tales from the Mall*, *Mechanical Harry and the Flying Bicycle* and *After the War*. Many of these titles have been shortlisted for, or have won awards, including AIM Children's Book Awards 1993 Best First Book for *The Optimist*, New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards 1997 Children's Choice Winner for *Mechanical Harry* and Russell Clark Award 2001 Winner for *After the War*.

Bob has been on the New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards judging panel in 2005 and 2012. He has also exhibited widely as a visual artist. You can see a list of his exhibitions at: <http://bobkerr.co.nz/>

'In books like this, about real historical events, I study photographs taken at the time. We were lucky because some of the soldiers took newly-invented small cameras with them (even though they were not supposed to). The landscape also had to be accurate. Fortunately, I had been to Gallipoli and taken lots of photographs. That was very helpful.'

I start by doing pencil drawings of the pages and then I discuss these with the author and the publisher. When we all agree they are what we need, I trace them on my light box onto a sheet of special Italian-made paper and add the watercolor. (See pencil drawing of the Turkish soldiers in the trench as an example; the finished picture is on page 21 of the book.)

For a happy part of the story, such as the picnic on page 26, I use bright, cheerful colours and for a sad or a dramatic part, such as when Harry gets shot on page 17, I use dark, dramatic colours. I also try to keep the action in the pictures moving from left to right because that is how we read.'



Synopsis

Best Mates looks at the First World War through the eyes of three boyhood friends who grow up together, go to school together and sign up together.

Harry, Joe and the (unnamed) narrator follow the route that many other young men took, taking the train to training camps and then a troopship overseas, arriving in Egypt and marvelling at the foreign sights, before being sent to the Greek island of Lemnos to prepare for the Gallipoli campaign. They take part in the first landings at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. Joe gets sick and is sent off to a hospital ship (and then probably to a hospital in Egypt, although this is not mentioned) and Harry dies in a ‘big battle’ in August (which was when the battle of Chunuk Bair occurred).

Later in the war, Joe and the narrator are reunited and they eventually return to New Zealand, get married and raise families. Over the years they stay friends, but the two of them never forget Harry. Eventually they save up enough money to make the long trip back to Turkey – by air this time – so they can visit his grave and say a proper farewell.

The story deals with issues of death, war, time and memory in a sensitive and thoughtful manner. It is best suited to readers 5+ years.

Before reading *Best Mates*:

Look at the front cover and ask students for their responses.

- What are ‘best mates’ like? What makes someone your ‘best mate’?
- When and where might the story be set?
- What do you think might be going to happen next?

Look at the back cover and read out the blurb.

- What has happened to the three small boys?
- What is the ‘Anzac spirit’?

Comprehension:

Pgs 2-5

- How old do you think the three young boys are in the first picture? How can you tell them apart? How can you tell this is a New Zealand scene?
- How old do you think they are on the train? How can you tell them apart?
- What does NZR stand for on the side of the carriage?
- Who are they waving goodbye to? Why are they in uniform?
- Where are the ships going? Who is waving goodbye?
- What country are they in now? What is 'different and strange' about it?

Pgs 6-11

- How do the soldiers get to Gallipoli? Why are they going there?
- What does the Aussie (Australian) soldier expect to happen when they get there?
- How do you think the soldiers are feeling as they wait?
- How do they get to shore?
- What happens when they land? Was the Aussie soldier right?
- Why does Joe tell the others to run?

Pgs 12-15

- Why are the soldiers 'digging in'? What is a trench?
- Which is the Turkish side? Which side belongs to the Anzac (Australian and New Zealand) soldiers?
- What is the weather like? How can you tell?
- Why does Joe get sick? What happens to him?
- Why does the hospital ship have a cross on the side?

Pgs 16-21

- How long have the soldiers been on Gallipoli now?
- What happens to Harry in the battle?
- Why does his funeral service have to be quick?
- Only one of the three 'best mates' is left at Gallipoli now. How does he feel? What does he think about the Turkish soldiers? Why has his opinion of them changed?
- What is the weather like now? How can you tell?

Pgs 22-25

- Why do the Anzac soldiers leave Gallipoli? How do they feel about leaving?
- Why do they have to keep very quiet?
- How is the scene on pg 24-25 similar to the one on pg 8-9? How is it different?

Pgs 26-31

- Who are the people having a picnic? How can you tell this is a New Zealand scene again?
- Where are Joe and the narrator going in the aeroplane? How old do you think they are now?
- Who do they meet on the beach?
- What do they do when they find Harry's grave? Why did they want to make such a long journey?
- What did you learn on pgs 30-31 that you didn't know before?

Classroom discussion points:

Children will come to this text with differing levels of knowledge and understanding about Gallipoli and the First World War. 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.

Read the story aloud to the class, allowing plenty of time for students to take in the illustrations on each page. On a second reading, stop and ask students to describe what they think is happening in each picture. Encourage more advanced readers to read to each other.

1. Why were the three boys so excited to sign up and go to war? What did they think war would be like? How did their view of war change?
2. How do the illustrations show what war was like, for the Turks as well as for the Anzacs?
3. 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, cooks.)
4. Why is it important to remember those who went to war?

Classroom activities:

1. On a large map of the world, find the places that appear in the text (Gallipoli, Egypt, Lemnos.) How long would it take to get to Europe now, and how long did it take then? What differences would the soldiers have noticed? (eg language, food, climate, the seasons, clothing, scenery, historical sites.)
2. Imagine that you are one of the three boys in the story. Write a diary entry for the day that you sign up, or the day that you sail away to war. How do you feel?
3. Write your own poem, letter or diary entry, from the point of view of either a Turkish or an Anzac soldier, or draw or paint a scene from the Gallipoli campaign.
4. Write a letter to a brother, cousin, father or son serving as a soldier in the First World War, or a sister or aunt working as a nurse. What would you ask them about their life? What would you tell them about yours?
5. Draw a time-line and try and work out where to plot events in the lives of the three 'lads who went to war together.'
6. Carry out some research into the Gallipoli campaign, or any other First World War campaign that New Zealand was involved in. Summarise your findings in a poster or give an oral presentation.
7. Bob Kerr has taken great care to portray an accurate representation of the Gallipoli landscape. Describe what it looks like. How is it similar to a New Zealand landscape? How is it different?
8. What is a centenary? Find out what is being planned for centenary events of the Gallipoli landings and First World War in your local area, in New Zealand or overseas (Look at WW100.govt.nz). Could you plan a centenary event for your school or community?
9. Find out more about Turkey. When tourists visit Turkey nowadays, what do they go and see? What can they see at Gallipoli? Use Internet travel sites to find out more.
10. Design an alternative book cover for *Best Mates*. Include the title, the name of the author and illustrator and an illustration that would make someone want to read the book.
11. Design a poster about *Best Mates* for a library book display. It needs to have a brief summary about the book and illustrations that show the settings and events in the story.
12. Describe how Bob Kerr has illustrated the story. Which is your favourite picture, and why?

13. How is Anzac Day marked in your local area? Describe an Anzac service you have been to.

14. Draw or create a map of your local area and mark anything with a connection to war, eg war memorials, RSA halls, plaques on schools, gates or hospitals, street names, bridges, trees or museum exhibits.

Websites:

A number of websites are listed on pg 31.

Extra information about Anzac Day for extra learning:

Recommended books about the First World War (and other wars) include:

Picture books:

Jennifer Beck, *The Bantam and the Soldier*

Joy Cowley, *The Duck in the Gun*

Tracy Duncan, *Grandad's Medals*

Ali Foster and Viv Walker, *The Eels of Anzac Bridge*

Glyn Harper, illustrated by Bruce Potter, *The Donkey Man*

Glyn Harper, *Le Quesnoy: The Story of the Town New Zealand Saved*

David Hill, illustrated by Fifi Colston, *The Red Poppy*

John Lockyer, *Lottie Gallipoli Nurse*

Patricia Stroud, *Caesar the Anzac Dog*

A.J. Toledo, *Wearing the Poppy*

Feana Tu'akoi, *Lest We Forget*

Younger fiction:

Susan Bocker, *Brave Bess and the Anzac Horses, Dreams of Warriors*

Jackie French, *The Donkey Who Carried the Wounded*

Michael Morpurgo, *War Horse*

Sandy Nelson, *The Ghosts of Iron Bottom Sound*

Dianne Wolfer, *Lighthouse Girl*

Non-fiction:

Philippa Werry, *Anzac Day: The New Zealand Story*