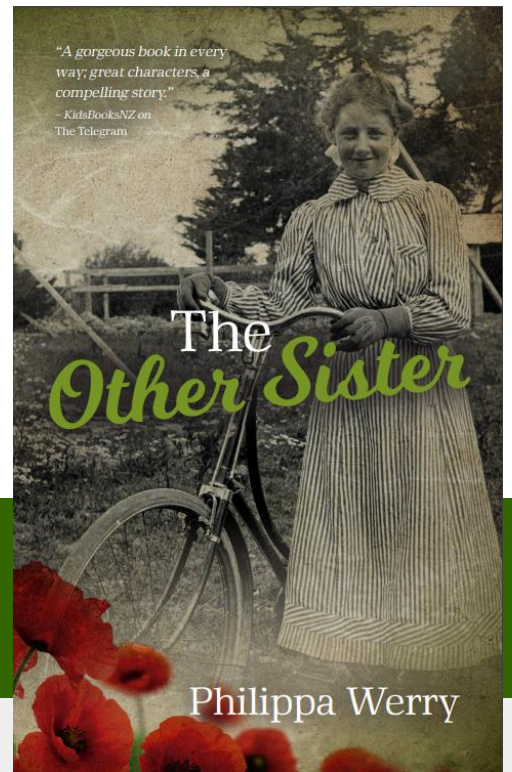


# The Other Sister

by Philippa Werry



PIPI PRESS



## Synopsis

Thirteen-year-old Tilly Thomas lives with her widowed mother and older sister Beaty in a small country town still reeling from the aftermath of World War One and the influenza epidemic. Tilly feels very much in her older sister's shadow; during WW1, Beaty was a telegram girl with the challenging job of cycling around town delivering telegrams, often containing bad news, to people's front doors.

## About the Author

Philippa Werry was born in Christchurch and grew up in Wellington, Auckland and New Plymouth. From age six, she wrote stories and poems for the Children's Page that appeared every Saturday in the Evening Post newspaper. She now writes fiction, non-fiction, poetry and plays for children and young adults on many different topics. She finds history particularly fascinating and her interest has produced titles such as *This is Where I Stand*, *The Telegram*, *Enemy at the Gate*, *Anzac Day*, *Lighthouse Family*, *Armistice Day*, *The New Zealand Wars* and *Best Mates*. Philippa lives in Wellington with her husband and children.

<http://www.philippawerry.co.nz/>; <https://philippawerry.co.nz/the-other-sister/>

## Writing Style

*The Other Sister* is a historical novel set in a small, unnamed New Zealand town in 1920, just after the end of World War One and the influenza pandemic. The text is written in the first-person past tense. The main character is 13-year-old Tilly (short for Matilda) Thomas. Secondary characters include her mother, older sister Beaty (the heroine of *The Telegram*), school friends Molly, Olivia and Ingrid, neighbours Hannah and Daniel, Daniel's fiancée Nurse Beale, and the Matron, nurses, cook, gardener and patients at the convalescent home for returned soldiers. Other people in the town who play significant roles include the Lady Principal, teachers and other students at the girls' secondary school, the Mayor and his bereaved wife, Daisy Meadows - recently returned from driving ambulances in the war - and Jim Yee, the Chinese delivery boy.

*The Other Sister* has been written for the 10-14 age group, helping students to understand what life was like in the aftermath of war and a pandemic, and at a time when opportunities for young women were opening up, but in many ways were still restricted. It was also a time when migrants from other countries faced prejudice and discrimination. At the back of the book, there is a historical note about the role of women in war time, the armistice and the influenza epidemic. There is also a biography of the author. On pages 279-281 there are some photographs from the time.

## Themes

Friendship

Family

Courage

Resilience

Life post pandemic

Migration

The role of women in society

## Writing Style

- Look at the front and back covers. What do the images on the front suggest to you? What do you learn from the text on the back?
- Based on the title and the information on the covers, what do you think this story is about? Who is the main character? Who is the “Other Sister”?
- How do you know what year the story is set in? What major world event has recently ended? (pg 5)
- What, or who, is everyone waiting for as the story opens? (pg 6) What do you learn about Tilly from the opening chapter? What do you learn about Beaty and Hannah? (pp.6-9)
- How would you describe the scene at the railway station? What are the reactions when the soldiers step off the train? (pp.10-11) Why are some people critical of Abe’s new wife? (p.12)
- What is an “In Memoriam” notice? Where and why does Tilly read them? Why does Beaty think she shouldn’t? (pp.14-16)
- What kind of jobs were available to young girls on leaving school? (pp. 18-20) Why does Tilly feel she and Molly are starting to drift apart? (pp.20-22)
- What is it about her favourite book heroines that appeals to Tilly? Why does she feel lucky? How does she feel about her new school? Why does Beaty know the best way to get there? (pp. 23-25) What does Tilly know about the convalescent home? (pp.25-30)
- What does Matron ask Tilly at the Red Cross garden party? What is Tilly’s reaction? (pp.34-38) Who is Turkey Jack? (pp.40-41) Who is Archie Atkinson, and what is Beaty’s connection to him? (pp.39-42)
- “It’s important to me,” I muttered. Why does Tilly think it’s vital for her to get an education? (pp. 47-49)
- What are the conflicting feelings Tilly has about her new school uniform? (pp. 50-53)
- What happens on Tilly’s first day at the convalescent home? How does she feel before, and afterwards? (pp. 54-58) Who does she meet, and what are her duties? (pp.58-65)
- “The convalescent home was like an Alice-in-Wonderland world where everything was upside down.” Why does Tilly feel that it is so different to the world outside? (pp. 66-68)

- What happens on Tilly's first day at her new school? Why is she late? Who does she make friends with, and how? (pp.72-85)
- Who was Violet Walrond? Why are both Tilly and Michael interested in her? (pp.87-90)
- "Many of them still have battles to fight, in their bodies and in their heads." What does Matron mean by that? (p.92) "If anyone was comforting anyone it was him and not me". Who is Tilly talking about, and what does she mean? (pp. 93-96)
- Who is Jim Yee, and how does Tilly meet him? (pp.103-107)
- Why is it hard for Tilly and Olivia to make friends with Ingrid? How do they become "the gang of three" in the end? (pp.108-121)
- What is Tilly's "marvellous Idea" and why does her mother not agree? (pp. 127-130) What does Tilly mean by, "The future's so invisible?" (p.132)
- Why does Tilly say, "Beaty, I don't think I'm a very good peace scout"? (p. 149) Why does she get in trouble with the Principal? (p.160)
- How was the Anzac Day service similar to Anzac services today? How was it different? (pp. 164-173) What is 'shell shock' and who suffered from it? (pp. 176-179)
- "It was at that moment...that I had the biggest and best brainwave of my entire life so far." What was Tilly's brainwave, and what was the result? (pp. 192-201)
- Who is Mrs Stewart and why does Tilly start visiting her? (pp.202-210)
- "He was different from everyone else I knew." In what ways is Jim Yee "different"? How does Tilly's friendship with him develop? (pp.224-226) What is the significance of the bunch of violets and the apple? (pp.228-232)
- What do you think Mrs Stewart's note to Tilly meant? (p. 247)
- Who is Daisy Meadowes, and why does Tilly start spending time with her? (pp.251-256) "My dears, have you heard about the Indians?" What is Mrs Robinson's news, and what are the reactions to it? (pp. 258-264)
- What is Armistice Day, and who was the Unknown Soldier? (pp.276-279) Why doesn't Tilly get to the Armistice Day ceremony? (p.279-284)
- "I didn't forget my change." What is Jim telling Tilly when he says that? (p.289)
- What does Caleb have for Tilly? (pp.305-306) What does the gardener give her? (pp. 307-308) "How brave and honest and bold was I prepared to be?" What decision does Tilly make at the end of the book? (p.309)

## ACTIVITY 1: FAMILY TREE

Discuss with your students about family trees and whakapapa. Get the students to draw a family tree of their own family members including great-grandparents, right down to themselves. They can put the names in a traditional family tree design or design it themselves.

## ACTIVITY 2: LIFE HISTORY

Write down in order the main events of Tilly's life. Write down in order the main events of your own life.

## ACTIVITY 3: INTERVIEW A CHARACTER

Choose a favourite character from the book and write down what you know about them. Draw up a list of questions that you would like to ask them. Exchange lists with another class member and try to answer some of the questions.

## ACTIVITY 4: REAL PEOPLE AND PLACES

Pick one of the real people listed on pp.314-315 and write a short story (biography) about his or her life; or choose one of the real places listed on p.314, and find out more about it and the people who lived there.

## ACTIVITY 5: MIGRATION / OUR MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY

Some characters in the book (or their families) came here from countries like China, India and Germany. Choose one of those countries, or any other country from which people have come to New Zealand, and find out some things you didn't know about it. Present your information as an essay, on a poster or in an oral presentation.

## ACTIVITY 6: WAR MEMORIALS

Choose a war memorial that is near where you live. (It might not be a statue, but some other form of memorial, like a hall or memorial gates or a rotunda.) Find out as much as you can about when it was built, who designed it, who paid for it and when it was unveiled.

## ACTIVITY 7: SPEECHES

There are several speeches in the book, for example, the speeches at Anzac Day and at the war memorial unveiling, as well as speeches given by the Lady Principal and the Prince of Wales. Choose a topic for a speech and write and deliver it.

## ACTIVITY 8: LETTERS

Write a letter from one of the men at the convalescent home to a family member, or from a family member to someone at the home.