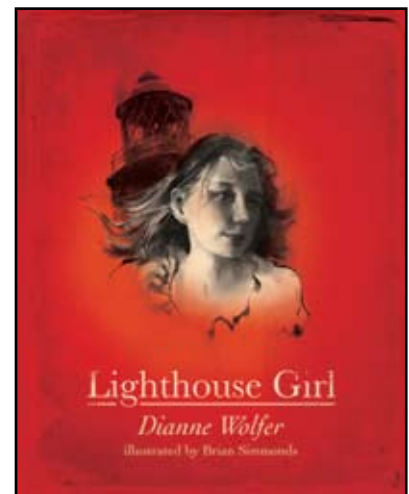


Lighthouse Girl

Dianne Wolfer with illustrations by
Brian Simmonds

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The Story

Fay lives alone with her father on bleak, windswept Breaksea Island. Her isolated life takes a dramatic turn with the outbreak of World War I. Albany is the gathering point and last landfall for all the troops of the combined Australian and New Zealand Imperial Forces, and Breaksea Island is their final glimpse of Australia. Flag-chatting with the troop ships, Fay collects the messages of lonely soldiers to telegraph back home. After the departure of the fleet for the Middle East, Fay continues her long distance conversations with letters and postcards, following the fortunes of her soldiers from Egypt to Gallipoli. Then one day, a single, sad telegram arrives, and the war is brought brutally home. Based on the true story of Faye Howe, this gentle tale brings to life the hardships of those left at home during the war — waiting, wondering, hoping.



The Presentation

Lighthouse Girl draws on fascinating archival material, and interweaves fact with fiction. Dianne Wolfer deftly recreates this period in Australian history from the perspective of a young girl. The poignant text — alternating narrative with diary entries and newspaper extracts — combined with the exquisitely rendered charcoal drawings and ephemera montages, offer young readers a valuable insight into life in remote Australia during the war, as well as a memorable, engaging read.

Author Background

Dianne Wolfer is the author of eleven books for teenagers and younger readers. Her novels have been short listed for various awards and are read in schools around the world. Dianne loves travelling. She has lived in Bangkok, Tokyo, Jumla in western Nepal and now lives on the south coast of Western Australia.

Illustrator Background

Brian Simmonds is a full time fine artist. He has exhibited in many showings and won numerous prizes and awards for drawing, oil painting and mixed media works. *Lighthouse Girl* is his first book.

Interview with Dianne Wolfer:

Dianne, where did you get the idea for Lighthouse Girl?

DW: I began writing *Lighthouse Girl* after reading an article written by Ron Crittal in *The Weekend Australian* newspaper on April 23/24th 2005. This is the part that interested me: Perth man Don Watson tells of his mother, Fay Catherine Howe, daughter of the Breaksea Island lighthouse keeper. She was just 15 and stood on the island signalling to the departing fleet in morse code, almost certainly the last human contact with Australia. Numerous postcards came back to Albany from the Middle East, addressed to "The little girl on Breaksea Island".

I live in the south west and so I knew that in 1914 Albany was the last sight of Australian land for many of the young ANZAC soldiers sailing to Gallipoli. Although I was working on other projects, I kept thinking about the Little Girl on Breaksea Island and her soldiers. I tracked down Don Watson to find out more, and he was enormously generous in sharing his family's story.

In 2006 I applied for a New Work Grant with ArtsWA (now called the Department of Culture and the Arts).

Were you successful?

DW: Yes. At last I could take time out from other commitments to start fleshing out my notes and begin writing Fay's story. I'd imagined a picture book along the lines of *Photographs in the Mud*, and so I had a 1200 word limit in mind. But the story kept growing. Fay had a lot to say. Her story became longer and longer... It ended up being approximately 6000 words.

Isn't that too long for a picture book?

DW: Yes, way too long! Cate Sutherland, the Children's Publisher at Fremantle Press was great. She encouraged me to write till the end of the story and then we could look at how to structure it.

The book is unusual in that it has a lot of archival material as well as illustrations. How did that come about?

DW: Originally I wanted to include scans of Fay's postcards, but sadly they were lost

after she died. I'd seen some wonderful old photographs of the troopships in King George Sound and of the Breaksea Lighthouse, so I spent many hours tracking down old images and searching through microfilms of *Albany Advertiser* articles.

Are those articles real?

DW: Yes.

They tie in well with the illustrations...

DW: Brian's charcoal images are lovely aren't they? The originals are huge and I think their soft smudgy lines give a beautiful contrast to the archival work. Fremantle Press Designer, Tracey Gibbs also did a wonderful job. *Lighthouse Girl* was a collaboration between all of us; Cate, Tracey, Brian and me.

Dianne Wolfer talks with Brian Simmonds:

Dianne: Seeing an artist bring your story to life visually is exciting and sometimes a little unnerving. As *Lighthouse Girl* grew, it became an unusual blend of archival photos, newspaper articles, maps and sketches. Cate Sutherland and I began searching for the right illustrator. It wasn't easy. Cate knew Brian Simmond's work and she thought that his evocative charcoal sketches would compliment the black and white photography and also tie-in with the era of the book setting. She was right. I love the way Brian captures the wild, windswept beauty of Breaksea Island. Although he is an established and successful artist, *Lighthouse Girl* is Brian's first book. I asked whether working as an illustrator is a different process.

Brian: Yes, it is totally different. When I read the story, I could 'see' the images that I wanted to put with the text. Then I needed to develop those ideas. One challenge was to add things that weren't referenced.

Dianne: Can you give an example?

Brian: Devices like giving the lighthouse keeper a moustache... For research, I spent a lot of time looking through books to find images that captured what I wanted to portray. Stills from old movies were the most helpful.

Dianne: I remember I was fascinated to see the springboard image you used for the illustration on page 114. That was based on a scene from the movie *To Kill a Mockingbird* wasn't it? That final scene with Gregory Peck and 'Scout'...

Brian: That's right. It was helpful to use movie stills like that as a reference. Not to copy the image but to capture a similar moment.

Dianne: While you were working on *Lighthouse Girl*, you told me that sometimes you felt like a movie director.

Brian: Yes, it was as if I was engaging a cast of people and I needed to invent sets, lighting and so on.

Dianne: What was the most challenging part of the process?

Brian: Keeping the continuity with character's facial features was challenging. That became easier once Cate took photos of her niece, Ali Babington.

Dianne: Would you like to illustrate again?

Brian: Definitely, for me the process was also like being a jazz musician. Like a jazz player your fingers don't know exactly where they are going until they get there. It was the same for me. My head was filled with images and my fingers then made a mark before I thought too much about it.

Dianne: The marks you made are certainly beautiful. Thank you so much.

Topics for Classroom Discussion

- What first impressions do you get from the cover of *Lighthouse Girl*. What do you expect the book to be about? Why do you think the publisher chose to package the book this way?
- *Lighthouse Girl* alternates between third person narrative and first person diary entries. Why do you think the author chose to use two different writing styles? How else could Fay's story have been told?
- Where is Breaksea Island? Why does it have a lighthouse? Is the lighthouse still in operation? Why/how have things changed?
- Why is Fay so conscious of the weather? Why is she constantly concerned about food?
- Fay spends time observing and recording details about the whales around Breaksea. How have attitudes towards whales changed in the last hundred years? Whaling was big business in Albany during Fay's time. When did the whaling station close down? Why?
- How much do you know about the events leading up to the outbreak of World War One? Who was Archduke Franz Ferdinand? How were Kaiser Wilhelm II and King George V related? Why was Australia automatically at war when Britain declared war?
- Fay describes the excitement surrounding the outbreak of war and the rush of men to sign up. Why do you think people were so enthusiastic about the war? Can you imagine people reacting the same way today? Compare what you know about reactions to the outbreak of World War One with the reactions to the war in Iraq.
- Fay uses semaphore to 'talk' to the soldiers. Is semaphore still in use today? What other methods of communication are there between ships, and from ship to shore?
- Fay telegraphs the soldiers' messages back to their families using Morse code. Who invented Morse code? How does a telegraph work? Where would Fay's messages have been received? How would they get to the families? When were the first telegraph

messages transmitted across Australia? Across the world? Are telegraphs still in use today?

- Why did the ships of the Expeditionary Force travel in convoy? How are soldiers transported to war now? How long did it take them to reach Egypt? Why were they in Egypt? How long were they there for? How did the Egyptians feel about having the troops in camp? How did the troops treat the Egyptian people?
- Fay receives postcards from Charlie and other soldiers. How was mail transported during the war? How long would it take for a postcard to travel from Egypt to Australia then? Now?
- One of Fay's postcards is censored. Who/what is the field censor? Why would the censor block out part of the postcard?
- What would you write to someone about to go into battle?
- What do you know about the landing at Gallipoli? Where are the Dardanelles? Why were they considered strategically important? If the war was between Britain and Germany, why were Australian troops fighting Turkish troops? Why was Gallipoli described as 'our young nation's baptism by fire'?
- What was a field ambulance? What was a field hospital? What role did donkeys play?
- Fay is reliant on newspaper reports to track the progress of the war. How accurate do you think the information would have been? What might newspapers choose not to report? Did the censor have a role to play in war reporting?
- How much did people at home know about the realities of life for the soldiers during World War One? How much do you know now about conditions for the soldiers then? How much do you know now about conditions for soldiers fighting in Iraq today?
- Fay pastes a black feather in her diary. Later in the war, white feathers had a special significance. What was it? Why?

Study Notes

- Long before MSN, texting and Facebook, people used Morse code and Semaphore to communicate. Imagine you are a soldier or medico in Albany harbour in 1914. Write a message to your loved ones using the Morse alphabet (on page 40).
- Make semaphore flags from cardboard or fabric and 'flag chat' in pairs (semaphore alphabet on page 36).
- The Australian War Memorial site www.awm.gov.au contains a wealth of information; photographs, diary accounts, film ... Search archives for key words like 1914, Gallipoli, Albany, nurses ...
- Choose an image from WWI and write about it:
 - try to describe the scene using all of your senses;
 - write from more than one point of view.
- Find the Picture Credits at the back of the *Lighthouse Girl*. Try looking up C02588 and J03261 on the Australian War Memorial site (be careful to type zero not O).
- Visit the Albany Library History Collection site <http://history.albany.wa.gov.au> and look up 2130 and 2614. Search the catalogue for other images.
- Imagine you are somewhere in the photograph on page 32. Describe how you feel.

- Imagine you lived on Breaksea Island in 1914. With a partner write letters between Fay and either Charlie, Andrew or the 'Donkey Man'.
- Choose one of the *Albany Advertiser* articles from Fay's journal and draw an illustration for it.
- What do you think the text from page 48 means, 'she taught me to read the stars – long before she taught me to read books.' Write about something special your mother (or another family member) has taught you.
- Choose one of the following to research: the Country Women's Association (CWA); the Cheops Pyramid; Prime Minister Cook; the history of cinematography; the *Emden*, the *Sydney* and the battle between them; Australian lighthouses; the link between Ataturk Channel (Albany) and ANZAC Cove (Gallipoli).
- Explore the following link to view fabulous images of the troops in Albany in 1914. <http://www.historicalbany.com.au/anzacs.htm> Try to find modern images of Albany and compare them.
- Mustafa Ataturk was the founder and first president of the Turkish Republic. He spent his life working towards the development of peace between people of different backgrounds and is famous for the following words. Write your own response

*"Those heroes that shed their blood
and lost their lives...
You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country,
therefore rest in peace.
There is no difference between the Jonnies
and the Mehmetts to us where they lie side by side.
Here in this country of ours...
You, the mothers,
who sent your sons from far away countries
wipe away your tears.
Your sons are now lying in our bosom
and are in peace.
After having lost their lives on this land they have
become our sons as well."*