

LIGHTHOUSE GIRL

Dianne Wolfer

Illustrations by Brian Simmonds

ISBN (PB): 9781921696572

Themes: World War I, family, growing up, futility of war, geographical isolation

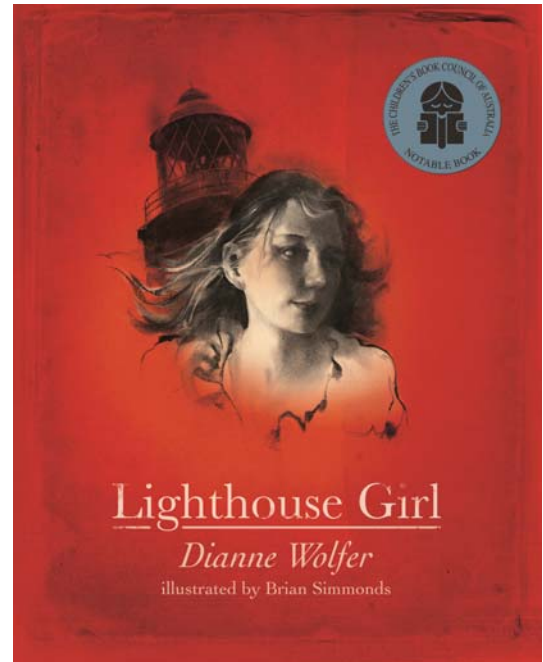
Year level: Y4 to 8

Awards: Winner, Picture Book Award, WAYRBA 2010;

Shortlisted, Western Australian Premier's Award 2009;

Finalist, Children's Book Council of Australia Crichton

Award for Best New Illustrator 2008



ABOUT THE BOOK

Fay lives alone with her father on bleak, windswept Breaksea Island, but her isolated life takes a dramatic turn with the outbreak of World War I (WWI). Fay collects the messages of lonely soldiers heading to the frontline. She is their last hope of getting messages telegraphed back home. After their departure for the battlefields of Egypt and Gallipoli, she follows their fortunes and continues her long-distance conversations with letters and postcards. Then one day, a single, sad telegram arrives, and the war is brought brutally home.

Based on the true story of Fay Howe, this gentle tale brings to life the hardships of those left at home during the war — waiting, wondering, hoping. *Lighthouse Girl* was shortlisted for the 2009 NSW Premier's History Awards and the WA Premier's Awards. It won the children's choice 2010 West Australian Young Readers' Book Award and is an ASLA recommended reading text for the National History Curriculum.

'Full of evocative illustrations, sepia photographs and news clippings, Wolfer's book transports. A great one for early and older readers alike' —Frances Atkinson, *The Sunday Age*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dianne Wolfer is author of fourteen books for teenagers and younger readers. Her latest title, *Light Horse Boy*, follows the journey of a young soldier who sails with his horse from Melbourne with the 1st AIF in 1914. The book explores Jim's journey to Egypt, Gallipoli and the iconic battles of WWI's Desert Campaign. *Light Horse Boy* can be read as a companion volume to *Lighthouse Girl*.



Dianne enjoys combining her love of history with writing fiction. She is an active member of writing groups, including the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, and served for six years as their WA Advisor. Dianne loves travelling and has spent much of her life overseas. She lives on the south coast of WA.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Brian Simmonds was born in Subiaco and worked for many years as a lithographer in the printing industry while studying art in the evenings. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art from Curtin University and worked for *The Sunday Times*, *New Idea* and an advertising agency before he became a professional artist in 1990. He has since earned his living by painting popular portraits and busking as a portrait artist in galleries, hotel lobbies and even on a Mediterranean cruise ship. His drawings, oil paintings and mixed media works have won numerous prizes and can be found in many private and public collections in Australia. In addition to his illustrator book credits, Brian is the author of two books of paintings, *The River* and *Rottnest Island*.



STUDY NOTES

LITERACY: COMPREHENDING TEXTS THROUGH LISTENING, READING AND VIEWING

(A) Before Reading

Considering the context of the book

1. Discuss the history of World War I:
 - a. How and when did the war break out?
 - b. Which countries were involved? (Cross-curricular link – Geography: have students locate different nations on the world map)
 - c. How long did the conflict last?
 - d. What was Australia's role in this war?

Visit the Australian War Memorial website with your class to explore this information and view some photographs from the time period: www.awm.gov.au/atwar/ww1

Alternatively, you may like to have older students research these questions and compile a written report using the above points as subheadings.

Anzac Day

Have students discuss the following as a class:

1. What is Anzac Day?
2. What does the acronym ANZAC stand for?
3. Why is this day special to Australians?
4. How does Australia remember its fallen soldiers? (e.g. Dawn Service; national Anzac Day ceremony)
5. Allow students to pair-share memories of how they have previously commemorated Anzac Day or Remembrance Day with their families or schools.
6. Do you have any children in the class whose parents or grandparents serve/have served in the armed forces?

Visit the Australian War Memorial website with your class to access information about Anzac traditions: www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/anzac/anzac-tradition

Incursion

Invite a war veteran or current member of the Australian Defence Force to talk about Anzac Day and share some memories of military service.

Considering the title and blurb

7. Ask students if they know where 'Breaksea Island' is located.
 - a. Locate it on a map of Western Australia.
 - b. Note that it is close to Albany. Have any students visited Albany? What was it like in comparison to where we live – colder? Examine the map on page 13 of the book.
8. Have any students visited a lighthouse before? Does anyone know the function of a lighthouse?

Predicting

9. Create a whole-class prediction chart detailing what students think may happen in the story.
 - a. What first impressions do you get from the cover of *Lighthouse Girl*?
 - b. What do you expect the book to be about? Explain why.
 - c. Why do you think the publisher chose to package the book this way?

Note: It is often interesting to keep this chart to look over at the end – have the class count how many predictions were true/false.

Expanding vocabulary: clarifying unfamiliar terminology

Younger readers may be unfamiliar with some of the words in the story (e.g. semaphore). As your class progresses through the text, create a list of unfamiliar terms. Have students work in pairs to use the dictionary to locate definitions.

First Mention	Word	Meaning
p. 8	petrels	
p. 9	imperial	
p. 9	contingent	
p. 9	imposed	
p. 12	gales	
p. 12	telegraph	
p. 12	the Sound	
p. 12	mutton	
p. 14	coolroom	
p. 16	breaching	
p. 16	pod	
p. 16	overhang	
p. 19	Leeuwin Current	
p. 23	sou'westerlies	
p. 23	cove	
p. 28	funnels	
p. 28	forestays	
p. 28	Mother Country	
p. 29	dock	
p. 29	fleet	
p. 30	mascots	
p. 32	The Commonwealth	
p. 32	naval	
p. 32	leave	
p. 32	detachments	
p. 32	regimental	
p. 33	nautical mile	
p. 35	semaphore	
p. 43	telegram	
p. 50	cinematographers	
p. 56	convoy	
p. 56	sailing formation	
p. 56	footage	
p. 57	cold cuts	
p. 58	knoll	
p. 58	vast	
p. 60	darning	
p. 61	armada	
p. 61	formidable	
p. 61	aggregate tonnage	
p. 63	swell	
p. 63	pylons	
p. 63	granite	
p. 65	vicinity	
p. 65	tenor	
p. 65	inscriptions	
p. 66	rations	
p. 68	correspondent	
p. 68	incandescent	

p. 74	shearwaters	
p. 82	uncanny	
p. 82	plumped	
p. 82	mooring ropes	
p. 89	pneumonia	
p. 92	convicts	
p. 96	the Allies	
p. 99	shrapnel	
p. 99	field hospital	
p. 104	the continental shelf	
p. 117	peninsula	

(B) During Reading

Comprehension strategies to practise (Y4–8)

- Slowing reading rate for comprehension
- Self monitoring for understanding
- Inferring
- Summarizing
- Identifying key ideas/themes
- Drawing Conclusions

Visual art as a storytelling medium

- Point out to students that in picture books, illustrations are equally as important as the written words in communicating the story.
 - Compare and contrast *Lighthouse Girl* with a novel or biography about World War I. What do the children notice? What makes a picture book different to a novel?
 - List some conventions of the picture book genre.
- In groups of four, have students examine the illustrations in detail.
 - What style has the illustrator used to draw the characters – realistic, cartoon, artistic, fantasy?
 - What medium has he used – collage, black and white, watercolour etc.? What effect does this create?
 - Where has the illustrator positioned objects on the page and what effect does this create?
 - Why has the illustrator used only a black/grey/white palette for the pictures?
 - What impact do the historical photographs and documents have? Do they change the mood of the story/add a sense of authenticity?
 - Why do you think the illustrator included charcoal sketches?

History and Geography: research and discussion questions

- Fay is based in Breaksea Island.
 - Locate Breaksea Island on a map.
 - 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?
- How much do you know about the events leading up to the outbreak of World War I?
 - Who was Archduke Franz Ferdinand?
 - How were Kaiser Wilhelm II and King George V connected?
 - 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?
 - Do you think people would react the same way today? Why? Use examples.
- Fay uses semaphore to 'talk' to the soldiers.
 - Is semaphore still in use today? Why?
 - 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?

- c. Where would Fay's messages have been received?
 - d. How would they get to the families?
 - e. When were the first telegraph messages transmitted across Australia? Across the world?
 - f. Are telegraphs still in use today? Why?
18. Consider the ships of the Expeditionary Force.
- a. Why did the ships travel in convoy?
 - b. How long did it take them to reach Egypt?
 - c. Why were they in Egypt?
 - d. How long did they stay there?
 - e. How did the Egyptians feel about having the troops in camp?
 - f. How did the troops treat the Egyptian people?
 - g. How are soldiers transported to war now?
19. What do you know about the landing at Gallipoli?
- a. Where are the Dardanelles?
 - b. Why were they considered strategically important?
 - c. If the war was between Britain and Germany, why were Australian troops fighting Turkish troops?
 - d. Why was Gallipoli described as 'our young nation's baptism by fire'?
20. Wounded soldiers were often treated very near to the combat zone.
- a. What was a field ambulance?
 - b. What was a field hospital?
 - c. What role did donkeys play?
21. Fay pastes a black feather in her diary. Later in the war, white feathers have a special significance. What is it?

English: research and discussion questions

22. *Lighthouse Girl* alternates between third person narrative and first person diary entries.
- a. Why do you think the author chose to use two different writing styles?
 - b. How else could Fay's story have been told?
23. Fay receives postcards from Charlie and other soldiers.
- a. How was mail transported during the war?
 - b. How long would it take for a postcard to travel from Egypt to Australia then? And now?
24. One of Fay's postcards is censored.
- a. Who/what is the field censor?
 - b. Why would the censor block out part of the postcard?
25. What would you write to someone who is about to go into battle?
26. Fay is reliant on newspaper reports to track the progress of the war.
- a. How accurate do you think the information would have been?
 - b. What might newspapers choose not to report?
 - c. Did the censor have a role to play in war reporting?
27. How much did people at home know about the realities of life for the soldiers during World War I?
- a. How much do we know about conditions for the soldiers in World War I? □
 - b. How much do we know about conditions for soldiers fighting in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan today? Refer to the following website for details of this mission: www.geneva-academy.ch/RULAC/current_conflict.php?id_state=16
 - c. How much do we know about conditions for soldiers fighting in the Second Gulf War in Iraq (2003–2009)? Refer to the following website for details of this conflict: www.awm.gov.au/atwar/gulf

Science: research and discussion questions

28. Fay spends time observing and recording details about the whales around Breaksea.
- a. How have attitudes towards whales changed in the last hundred years?
 - b. Whaling was big business in Albany during Fay's time. When did the whaling station close down? Why?

LITERACY: COMPOSING TEXTS THROUGH SPEAKING, WRITING AND CREATING

(C) After Reading

Comprehension activities

29. Comprehension-based questions/activities can be adapted from the discussion points above. Have students write paragraph answers supporting their claims with at least one quote from the text.
30. Read the 'About Fay' section at the back of the book. Create a table with the headings 'Fact' and 'Fiction' that lists the elements of the book that are historically accurate, and those that Dianne Wolfer changed/created for the story.

Written activities

Descriptive writing

31. The Australian War Memorial site (www.awm.gov.au) contains a wealth of information – photographs, diary accounts, film etc. Search the archives for key words like '1914', 'Gallipoli', 'Albany', 'nurses' etc. Choose an image from WWI and write about it. Try to describe the scene using all of your senses, and write from more than one point of view.

Letter writing

32. Imagine you lived on Breaksea Island in 1914. With a partner write letters between Fay and either Charlie, Andrew or the 'Donkey Man'.

Report writing

33. Choose one of the following to research and write a report on your findings:
 - a. Country Women's Association (CWA)
 - b. Cheops Pyramid
 - c. Australian prime minister Joseph Cook
 - d. History of cinematography
 - e. The ships SMS *Emden* and HMAS *Sydney* and the battle between them
 - f. Australian lighthouses
 - g. The link between Ataturk Channel (Albany) and Anzac Cove (Gallipoli)
 - h. How people on the home front in Australia contributed to the war effort

Personal opinion piece

34. 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 Mehments 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.

Creative writing

35. Long before Twitter, 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 code alphabet (see page 40).
36. Make semaphore flags from cardboard or fabric and 'flag chat' in pairs (see page 37).
37. This book strongly establishes setting and captures a unique sense of place. Adjectives are used to create imagery that appeals to multiple senses. Write a description of your favourite setting in the book. Give it to a partner to sketch. Does what they imagined resemble what you intended? How effective was your description?
38. Fay claims, *We're like castaways* (p. 80). Write a story about a character that lives in a remote setting.

Poetry

39. Pretend that you are Fay after learning of Charlie's death. Write a free verse poem on the theme 'loss'.

Writing postcards

40. Illustrate and write a postcard from Albany (Fay to Charlie) or Egypt (Charlie to Fay).

Create a historical document

41. Keep a journal like Fay's for one month. Collect newspaper articles and include sketches and photographs. Include ticket stubs from events you have attended (such as the cinema program on page 81).
42. *Lighthouse Girl* is set in 1914 – that's one hundred years ago. Might someone living one hundred years from now look at your journal and find it old-fashioned? What aspects of life do you think will change in the next century? You may like to consider such areas as technology, travel and society.

Debate

43. Debate the validity of each of the following quotes in teams of four. Research and provide historical evidence/statistics to back up your claims.
- 'War can only be abolished through war, and in order to get rid of the gun it is necessary to take up the gun.' –Mao Zedong
 - 'The absence of war is not peace.' –Harry S Truman

Excursion

44. Visit a lighthouse nearby your school and explore the history of the building, including the stories of any shipwrecks off the coast of the lighthouse.

CROSS-CURRICULAR LINKS

Art

45. Choose one of the *Albany Advertiser* articles from Fay's journal and draw an illustration for it.
46. Explore the following link to view fabulous images of the troops in Albany in 1914: www.historicalalbany.com.au/anzacs.htm. Try to find modern images of Albany and compare them.
47. Find the Picture Credits at the back of *Lighthouse Girl*. Try looking up C02588 and J03261 on the Australian War Memorial site.
48. Visit the Albany Library History Collection site: <http://history.albany.wa.gov.au>. Look up 2130 and 2614. Search the catalogue for other images.
49. The Country Women's Association (CWA) sends Fay wool to knit scarves to send to the front. Have your class knit scarves.
50. Make paper chain decorations for your classroom (like Fay does for Christmas, p. 70).
51. Create charcoal sketches in the style of the book.

Music

52. The news clipping on page 9 lists three songs played by a band. Listen to these songs as a class. What instruments can be heard? What lyrics are particularly powerful? How does each song make students feel? The songs are:
- 'The Red, White and Blue'
 - 'Auld Lang Syne'
 - 'The Girl I left Behind Me'

Science

53. What is the Leeuwin Current?
54. Write a report on the history of whaling in Australia.
55. Explore the theory of buoyancy – how does it work? Read the list of ships on page 57 – what was their fate in WWI? How many were sunk?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Interview with the author: Dianne Wolfer's inspiration for creating *Lighthouse Girl*

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

I began writing *Lighthouse Girl* after reading an article written by Ron Crittal in *The Weekend Australian* newspaper on 23–24 April 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 fifteen 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 southwest 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?

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?

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?

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?

Yes.

They tie in well with the illustrations ...

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.

Conversation between the author and illustrator: the artistic process

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 Simmonds' work and she thought that his evocative charcoal sketches would complement 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 characters' facial features was challenging. That became easier once Cate [Children's Publisher at Fremantle Press] 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.