

## LIGHT HORSE BOY

Dianne Wolfer

Illustrations by Brian Simmonds

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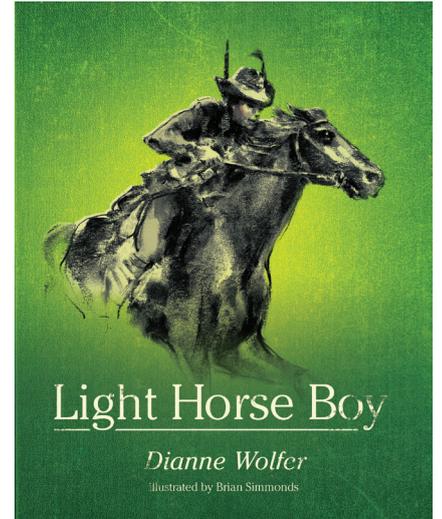
ISBN (HB): 9781922089137

Themes: Adventure, Historical, War, Death and Bereavement, Animals

Year level: Y3 to 9

Cross-curriculum: History

Awards: Shortlisted, Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Award 2014



### About the Book

In 1914 Jim and Charlie abandon the Australian outback for the excitement and adventure of the 'war to end all wars'. They sign up for the Light Horse Regiment and sail to Egypt in a fleet of 38 troopships carrying 30,000 soldiers and over 7000 horses. But Jim and Charlie soon discover the brutal realities of life on the frontline.

*Light Horse Boy* explores World War I battles through the eyes of a gentle young man who loves horses. The story is told via text and letters, interspersed with stunning charcoal sketches by Brian Simmonds, primary source documents and historical photographs.

The story stands alone but can also be read as a partner book to *Lighthouse Girl*.

### About the Author

Dianne Wolfer is author of fourteen books for teenagers and younger readers. Her latest title is *Light Horse Boy*, which can be read as a companion novel to Dianne's previous title, *Lighthouse Girl*. Based on the true story of Fay Howe, daughter of the Breaksea Island lighthouse keeper, who relayed messages for the departing ANZAC troops, *Lighthouse Girl* was shortlisted for the 2009 NSW Premier's History Awards and the WA Premier's Book 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.



Dianne enjoys combining her love of history with writing fiction. Her picture book *Photographs in the Mud* (also a recommended History Curriculum text) was inspired by a research trip along the Kokoda Track. It was recently published in Japanese and is used as a reference for international workshops promoting peaceful 'discourse analysis'. Dianne is an active member of writing groups, including the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) 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 graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art from Curtin University and worked for *The Sunday Times*, *New Idea* and an advertising agency before becoming a professional artist in 1990. He has since earned his living by painting portraits and busking as a portrait artist in galleries, hotel lobbies and even on a Mediterranean cruise ship. Simmonds has exhibited his sketches, oil paintings and mixed media works throughout his career, won numerous prizes and his work is found in many private and public collections across Australia. In 2009 he was shortlisted for the Children's Book Council Crichton Award for Best New Illustrator for *Lighthouse Girl*. In 2011 the book *The River* (Fremantle Press) featured 84 of his illustrations alongside poetry and prose from Western Australian writers. Simmonds has taught drawing courses as an extension program at The University of Western Australia and teaches 'Art for Recreation' at the City of Nedlands Tresillian Centre.



## Study Notes

### A. Before reading

1. Complete the table below. Record your predictions or prior understanding of what these words mean, then look them up in a dictionary and record their actual meaning.

|                      | My understanding | Dictionary meaning |
|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| p. 4 Farrier         |                  |                    |
| p. 7 Governess       |                  |                    |
| p. 8 Swag            |                  |                    |
| p. 10 Bandolier      |                  |                    |
| p. 19 Rendezvous     |                  |                    |
| p. 20 Semaphore      |                  |                    |
| p. 22 Millpond       |                  |                    |
| p. 25 Squall         |                  |                    |
| p. 26 Court Marshall |                  |                    |
| p. 36 Menagerie      |                  |                    |
| p. 53 Bully Beef     |                  |                    |
| p. 54 Stalemate      |                  |                    |
| p. 64 Telegraphy     |                  |                    |
| p. 66 Shrapnel       |                  |                    |
| p. 84 Convalescent   |                  |                    |
| p. 84 Stoush         |                  |                    |

Extend this table as you read the book, adding any unfamiliar words you come across.

2. As a class, or in small groups, consolidate your knowledge of the First World War. You might like to do this as a simple list or table, or using a graphic organiser such as a mindmap.
3. Explore the Australian War Memorial website, in particular the section on the First World War (<http://www.awm.gov.au>).
  - a. The Collections section of the AWM website is a great place to trawl for evocative World War I images. Dianne spent months trawling through thousands of images in the collection before selecting the photographs in the book. To see some of the images she chose, go to <http://www.awm.gov.au/search/collections>. Choose First World War from the drop-down box then try entering these key words: nurse, camel, horse, pyramid, trench.
  - b. Think of three new words to enter then share your favourite image with the class. Explain why you chose it.

## B. During reading

4. Read pages 2–8. What does the text suggest about the attitudes the following Australians had towards the war?
  - a. young men
  - b. families of recruits
  - c. society in generalProvide evidence for your answers.
5. After reading Jim's letters to his sister on pages 6–11, write a letter back to him from Alice that describes how you are feeling about him joining the army and leaving for the frontline. You might also include details about how Alice and the family she works for feel about the war in general.
6. On page 20, in his letter to Alice, Jim includes a diagram of the troop ships lined up in King George Sound. Write a passage – a diary entry, a newspaper article, or letter to a friend – that describes this sight from the perspective of a local resident.
7. Jim and his friends name their joey mascot 'Rufus'. What is the joke in this name? (hint: Jim suggests Alice say the name aloud.) Why do you think that mascots like Rufus the joey and Billy the rooster were so important to the troops?
  - a. Dianne had great trouble deciding between the dozens of fantastic images of mascots. Follow these cute links and choose a favourite:  
<http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P05006.007>  
<http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P07771.001>  
<http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P04447.006>  
<http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/304910/>  
<http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/H15733/>
  - b. Write a short story from the point of view of one of these mascots.
  - c. Further reading on animals at war: *Animal Heroes* by Anthony Hill; *M is for Mates* produced by the Australian War Memorial; *The Donkey who carried the Wounded* by Jackie French; *Simpson and his Donkey* by Mark Greenwood; and for older readers – *Horrie the Wog Dog* by Ion Idriess – in this latter, discuss how attitudes and language have changed since the book's publication. Which terms are no longer acceptable and why?
8. On pages 26–27 Jim writes about the German ship *Emden*. How does Jim's tone change throughout the series of letters?
9. *An aeroplane flew overhead today – what a splendid sight.* p. 36  
What future events are foreshadowed in this line? What does this line tell us about the character of Jim, and the young men that he represents? As you read the story, make a note of other examples of foreshadowing and what they tell us about Jim.
10. Look up the word 'redact' in a dictionary and write the definition. What words have been redacted from Jim's letters? Why has this been done? Who has done this?
11. Read Jim's letter on page 42. What do the short sentences suggest about how the character is feeling and what is going on around him?
12. *We're working around the clock taking stretcher cases to the beach to be shipped back to Egypt. We use donkeys to help transport the wounded.* p. 47  
Read about the Anzac legend of Simpson and his donkey. What qualities of the Australian 'digger' does it highlight? Discuss these qualities in relation to *Light Horse Boy*.

13. *Once his face was bandaged, Jim helped sort the bodies. Sometimes it wasn't possible to separate the Turks and Australians.* p. 50  
 Why do you think the author has included this line? What is she suggesting about this, and perhaps all, wars?
14. The story alternates between the third person narration and the first person letters between Jim and his sister Alice.
- Why do you think the author has included all these points of view?
  - What would be the story's impact if it were told only in the third person? What would be its impact if we had only Jim's letters? Or only Alice's replies?
  - Is the story's presentation through multiple points of view effective in communicating with the reader?
15. The book has a strong visual component that includes Brian Simmonds' charcoal illustrations, black and white photographs, and a natural arrangement of envelopes, telegrams and letters. Why do you think the book's creators chose to do this? What effect does the book's design have on the reader?
16. In his letter on page 65, Jim tells Alice about the German Taube aircraft. What does he mean when he says, 'Taube means little pigeon in German, but Alice, these birds lay big eggs.'?  
 As a class, explore metaphor as a literary technique.
17. *Telegraphy will be a big change for Chook, but there'll be good prospects for him after all this is over.* p. 64  
 What is Jim referring to? Use the photograph below the letter to assist you.
18. Refer to the photograph on page 64, and the wedding photograph of Alice and Chook on page 76. What do you think has happened to Chook after he was injured? Why is he sitting down in his wedding photograph?
19. How do you think the soldiers' injuries affected them after the war? Were all injuries physical? How might mental and psychological war injuries affect people in the long term? You may like to read more about shell shock (and its modern superseder, post-traumatic stress disorder).
20. *Young Fred idolises Tom, but I threatened to box his ears when he asked to see his wounds ... poor Tom blushed.* p. 69  
 What does Alice's letter suggest about the attitudes of the following people at home towards war?
- the families of the soldiers
  - children and youths
  - the wounded who have returned home
21. Using a table such as the one below, compare Jim's and Alice's letters on pages 74–77. What do they show about the different experiences of war? (an example has been provided)

| Jim's experiences  | Alice's experiences   |
|--|---|
| e.g. misses out on important family events such as his sister's engagement | e.g. knits socks and other practical items to send to the front |

### C. After reading

25. On page 20, Jim writes to Alice about Fay, the girl he and the other boys communicated with, who lives on Breaksea Island in Albany. Jim says that she's a whizz with semaphore and sends telegraphs on behalf of the boys.  
 Using morse code or semaphore, write a letter to a classmate.  
 Diagrams of semaphore and morse code can be found at:  
 Semaphore: <http://peoriaseacadets.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/semaphore.gif>  
 Morse code: [http://peoriaseacadets.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/morse\\_code\\_alphabet.jpg](http://peoriaseacadets.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/morse_code_alphabet.jpg)  
 You may wish to read Dianne Wolfer's previous book, *Lighthouse Girl*, which tells Fay's story in a similar way to Jim's.
26. Do you think that the war was what Jim and Charlie expected when they signed up?  
 Write a letter from a much older Jim to his 17-year-old self. What advice would he give to himself? Do you think that he would tell him not to go at all?

27. Throughout the story, and in the author's prefatory notes, several references are made to Sandy, Major General Bridges' horse.  
Why do you think this horse was so special? What did it symbolise to the soldiers and people at home? In doing so, you may find the following links helpful:
- <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/horses/sandy.asp>
  - <http://maribyrnong-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/australias-last-warhorse-to-have-maribyrnong-memorial/>
  - You may also like to find out about Bess, the only horse that returned from New Zealand: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/memorial-bess-horse>
  - <http://www.nzmr.org/bess.htm>
28. Using a map of Australia and Europe, plot out Jim's journey. On your map, make notes of the important events that happened in the places Jim visited.  
You could extend this debate by discussing the actions of Australian soldiers at other World War I battle sites such as Villers-Bretonneux. In this French town, the local school's classrooms display the sign: '*N'oublions jamais l'Australie*' (Let us never forget Australia).
29. Why were Jim, and other Australians, even participating in a war so far from home? Do you think it was right for Australia to join the war? Should we have sent troops to Turkey? Why or why not? Conduct a class debate on this issue.
30. Since World War I the world has seen many changes. Compare Australia in 1914 with Australia today, using evidence from the book to support your answer. You may like to consider such areas as technology (e.g. communications, travel and transportation, weapons) and society (e.g. job types, urban development, men's and women's roles in society).

## Additional Resources

*Light Horse Boy* video and classroom activity.

<http://fremantlepress.wordpress.com/2014/05/14/light-horse-boy-video-and-classroom-activity/>