

TEACHERS' NOTES

WRITTEN BY JANE PULFORD



Soldier Boy

Anthony Hill

Background Notes from the author

Early in 1999, when I was helping the Governor-General prepare his Anzac Day speeches for delivery at Gallipoli I came across the story of Jim Martin, the youngest known Anzac. It was mentioned in the briefing material sent from the Australian War Memorial. Weaving Jim's name into the speech for the Lone Pine service, I suddenly thought, 'There's a book in this!'

Indeed there was! Enquiries to friends at the Memorial showed that quite a lot was known about him. Most of his surviving letters and effects had been deposited in the memorial collections by his family in 1985, and his story was often told to visiting school children by the education section. The wonder of it was that, apart from a photo and caption in John Robertson's *Anzac and Empire*, Jim's story had not been put into book form before.

Soldier Boy is the result: a book which, in one of those symmetries, ends where it began, with the Governor-General's speech at Lone Pine. I was also struck by how, so often during the research and writing, my own experience touched elements of Jim Martin's story. For instance, after many enquiries I discovered that his nephew, Jack Harris, lives not far from me in Canberra. He was able to put me in touch with other family members, and bring together much new material to shed light on Jim's family background.

Then again, it was by pure serendipity that I found out Mr Roy Longmore – one of the last two surviving Anzacs – had also served in the 21st Battalion. Through the courtesy of his son I was able to visit him and, from the words of the living, get some glimpse into the vanished reality of the Gallipoli campaign.

Once I began writing, all the research I had undertaken (and which I still carried in my head) from a previous story I had started on the horrors of the Vietnam war, began flooding back. Images, conversations, whole slabs of sentences and paragraphs about military training dropped onto the page from the abandoned manuscript.

I realised from my own visits to Canungra and the Royal Military College Duntroon, that while many of the externals of military life – weaponry and transport – have changed from the First World War, the internals have not. The relationships between officers and men, and between the men themselves, are much as they ever were. And I imagine even bayonet practice and the discipline of the target range has not altered much.

In all these ways, during the composition of *Soldier Boy*, my own experience kept making contact with what must, at this distance, be the imagined reality of Jim Martin's life. It underpinned much of what I was trying to do with the book: to blend the voices of the storyteller and biographer. To attempt a synthesis between the differing approaches to truth taken by writers of fiction and non-fiction, into a form sometimes known as 'faction' but which I prefer to call a 'biographical novel'.

As I see it, the form requires the author, on the one hand, to remain true to the historical facts of the story so far as they can be discovered – and where they can't, to suggest some plausible explanation for what happened and why. In this respect, I have had to assume certain aspects of Jim Martin's story: his visit to Aunt Mary in the country (chapter Five) for example, to account for why Jim described himself as a 'farm labourer' on his enlistment form; and in the absence of any surviving letter, to imagine his personal experience on the *Southland*.

I have been careful, however, not to alter any known fact; but rather to openly acknowledge these inventions and to base them on the records and eyewitness accounts of those who were there. By so doing, I hope, if new material *does* come to light, it will be possible to incorporate it in another edition while maintaining the intellectual integrity of the book as it appears. To this extent, *Soldier Boy* is grounded in external truth.

On the other hand, a 'biographical novel' does permit an author to explore the inner life of the subject: to write of the myriad thoughts, feelings, emotions, doubts, confusions, contradictions and spiritual longings that are part of the reality of every human being. They are the very stock in trade of the novelist; yet they are usually denied the strict writer of non-fiction, unless they have been placed on the written or oral record (and then usually in some carefully self-edited form).

Thus I have felt free to imagine the thoughts, the fears, the prayers and conversations of the people in Jim Martin's story. I based them on known statements where I could ('Never mind, Dad. I'll go instead'); but otherwise I allowed them to flow in their own channels. And it was surprising to discover how often these fictional devices allowed me to approach what I believe to be the essential truth of a situation.

By trying to re-live Amelia's thought processes when confronted by Jim's threat to run away, it became much easier to understand why she signed the consent form. I could see why she didn't simply tell the authorities that her son was only fourteen. Otherwise she risked losing him forever. Which, in fact, is what happened – but Amelia couldn't know that at the time. By imagining Jim's fears as he lay sick and dying in his dugout, I began to realise why he didn't report to the medical authorities. The shame of discovery was more than the boy could bear.

The sensible thing, for both mother and son in their circumstances, would have been to do the opposite of what they actually did. But we are not always rational beings. Emotion often provides a much stronger motive for action. And the great virtue of fiction is that it helps to convince the reader of the truth of that in a way non-fiction, with its emphasis on objective 'fact' and external logic, rarely can.

Whether or not I have wholly succeeded with *Soldier Boy*, I am persuaded of one thing. Given the right story, the form offers the writer a marvellous device to keep the narrative moving. It gives scope to explore an aspect of the past, to stimulate the outer action and to maintain the interest of young readers, while also allowing the freedom to explore the inner world of character, contemplation and meaning.

Anthony Hill

Suggestions for classroom activities based on *Soldier Boy*

Below are some suggestions for approaching the novel. The novel lends itself to students undertaking individual tasks and some group research. Classroom talks or presentations would compliment this text.

Before the reading

- Ask students to look closely at the front cover – without looking at the back cover. What questions come to mind? Why is the scroll included? What sort of novel do they think it will be?
- Discuss students' initial responses. Read the back cover together. Hopefully this will elicit a discussion of Anzac Day and the Gallipoli Campaign.
- Briefly outline who were Allies and who were enemy. Point out that Constantinople and Istanbul are the same city. Discuss why Anzac Day is so significant in Australian History. A brief look at the enclosed maps would be useful.

During the reading

If you are attempting a whole class reading, it is sometimes useful to have a few easy tasks for students to complete whilst reading. This helps students concentrate and focus on the text.

There is a chart in Appendix A which is suitable for note-taking. This is an important skill for all students. Teachers could allocate one or two students to be responsible for each topic during the reading. Students would note page references and make brief notes in column one only. Students could then report back to the rest of the class at the end of each chapter or lesson. Alternatively, this could be a general classroom or homework exercise if students undertake their own reading. Students could then fill in column two after the reading. This should result in some good discussion and/or a written response comparing their lives with that of Jim Martin.

A further task might be to mark on a map of the world/Middle East some of the major place names Jim passes through on his journey. A more detailed map of the Gallipoli peninsula is included in the text and in much of the reference material on the subject.

NB: The chart would probably be better reproduced on A3 to allow for large handwriting.

Discussion following the reading

Much of the appeal of this text to junior secondary level is that the main character is fourteen years of age – roughly their age. How do they feel about going to war, the appeal of the army life, love of the Empire, loss created by war? If you have a multicultural class, some students may have direct experience of war and this would need to be considered when embarking on a discussion of this nature. The use of column two in the chart would be instrumental in prompting discussion and/or a writing piece.

Part A: Themes – workbook activities

Family Relationships

Jim

- What sort of a young man is Jim?
- What events show that he is willing to take risks while also being conservative?
- Outline the events in Jim's wartime experiences for which he is not prepared.
- How did the following contribute to his growing up?
 - school cadets (see chapter three)
 - enrols in army (p 38)
 - being AWOL (p 49)
 - character development (pp 65–73)
 - sinking of the Southland (pp 78–85)
 - crying (p 124)
 - fear (p 96)

Amelia

- Describe Amelia's character.
- Why does she sign the papers (p 37)?
- What events give you an insight into her character?
- Was she typical of women of that era? Explain.

Charlie

- Write a short character profile of Charlie. Include his occupations, interests, war service and role as a father to Jim.
- How does he react to Jim going to war?

Siblings

- Briefly describe Jim's family.
- Alice was pregnant when she got married (p 53). What does this tell us about the morality of that time? Why might the author have included this information?

Mateship

Cec Hogan

- Cec becomes a great friend of Jim's. What qualities does Cec have?
- Cec's family give him a book of Burns' poetry/songs. What does this tell us about them? Compare and contrast Jim and Cec's family (pp 69–70).
- The boys begin to confide in each other. Why? What do they have in common (p 60/p 80)?
- What does the letter to Jim's parents (p 133) tell us about Cec?

The enemy

- Briefly outline who were on the side of the British/Australians and who were the enemy.
- Before going into battle, the Anzacs can't wait to get into 'Abdul'. 'All that remained was to claim their first kill. Their first Turk.' (p 104) How do Jim's feelings change when he comes face to face with the enemy? (pp 108–109, pp 120–121)
- Why is it easy to hate someone you don't know?

The Allies

- Describe the exchanges between the Anzacs and the French sailors (pp 88–90). What impression do you get of the French? How does this compare to your previous knowledge of French people?

Honour/Patriotism

In 1901 Australia became a Federation, but we were still part of the British Empire. What did being part of the Empire mean?

Empire Day

- Research Empire Day. It was held on May 24 on Queen Victoria's Birthday. (p 21, p 22/p 48) Try an encyclopaedia. Students with older relatives such as grandparents could ask them about their memories of this. It was still celebrated in the 1940s.
- How and why would this have been celebrated?
- Compare and contrast Anzac Day and Empire Day.
- What role does England play in Australia's life today?

The Battalion Song

- Read the words of the Battalion Song contained in Appendix III (p 160). Discuss some of the references to the Germans and Belgians.
- Why do the troops sing the Battalion Song. (p 76/p 95) What is the effect of such a song? In what situations are these *type* of songs used today? Why?

Flags

- A flag is essentially a coloured piece of fabric. Research the current Australian flag. What do the components of the Union Jack and Southern Cross stand for?
- What is the role of the flag during wartime?

- Why are some people seeking to change the Australian flag? Why might this upset some older people? What should be included? What is your opinion on this subject?
- How does a country arouse Patriotism?
- Would you fight for Australia?

Part B: Learning activities

Writing activities

Journals and letters

Read some of the letters contained in Appendix I (p 147). How do they differ from the body of the novel? (i.e. spelling mistakes, punctuation, forms of address.) Brainstorm some of the reasons for this. Discuss the letter as the main form of communication in the absence of telecommunications.

- Students could write one or more journal entries into Jim's journal.
- Write a journal account from Cec's point of view after he and Jim confide in each other about their age.
- What impression might Cec have of Jim and the Martins?
- Write one of the letters from Amelia (or another family member) to Jim that he did not receive.

Recruitment Campaigns in Australia.

- It was voluntary to go to WWI. Why did young men want to go?
- Find some real examples of recruitment posters of that period. What do they feature? What enticements were made by the recruitment posters? In what ways was war glamourised? (both texts and the Internet are useful sources)
- Design a recruitment poster encouraging young men/women to go to war in 2000. What would you include? How might the posters differ for male and female recruits?

News

- Brainstorm the ways in which news was communicated in 1915. Discuss the role and purpose of different forms of news such as newspaper and radio.
- Design the front page of the daily Melbourne newspaper when Jim's death is made public, October 25 1915. Include weather reports, summary news, sport headlines etc. as are presented in the current front page of the newspaper. Photos could easily be imported from one of the recommended web sites. (There are also some examples of actual news reports available on the Internet e.g. www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/ and also www.news.bbc.co.uk. See Internet section of notes) Write up on computer using one of the writing package newsletter formats.
- Using the same scenario as above, write the radio news report when Jim Martin's death becomes known. Include the full report with weather, sport, other headlines and other war news. Remember that radio news requires shorter sentences and often a quick 'grab' from a spokesperson from somewhere like the army. Present to class in person, on audio or video tape.

Writer's technique

When fact meets fiction

- The film *Titanic* is a recent example of a true event that has been fictionalised. (There are many other examples of novels and films, choose an appropriate model for your students – biographies are a good example.) Discuss with students the sorts of original sources the writer can take information from. Consider all the references in the Afterwards, Appendixes and References that Anthony Hill has used. Teachers may also like to photocopy and discuss Anthony Hill's introduction to these teaching notes.
- Anthony Hill takes the original letters and other primary sources and creates what he calls a 'biographical novel'. Why does the author use this format for this type of novel? What are the advantages and limitations of this format? Did the students enjoy the style or find it frustrating? What sorts of questions does it generate? Where does the author have to make assumptions?
- Students should select an incident from the news such as a disappearance, flood, earthquake or discovery of a body or scientific discovery and create a story from the facts. Some research should be done in order to make this realistic. (At times students are at pains to point out that this sort of writing is lying. They

are very concerned about what is the truth. Reassure them that what they are writing is fiction with a factual basis. It is not wrong. Many great stories have been sparked by real events.)

- Anthony Hill is an adult writing from a fourteen-year-old point of view. Rewrite a section of the novel in a modern setting from a fourteen-year-old point of view. Account for the changes you have made.

Oral activities (groups)

- 'Death on the battlefield comes for somebody else.' (p 77) Discuss.
- Debate the topic 'War is not the answer'.
- Imagine you're going to war. You can take five personal items. What are they?

War Poetry

- Throughout the novel there are references from Cec Hogan's book of Robbie Burns' poetry. Why would the author have included these? Consider the pages where Burns is quoted and discuss with students the impact of the quotes.

Robert Burns *Scots Wha Hae* (p 64, p 98)

Kipling's *Recessional* (p 32)

- There are many examples of war poetry that would compliment the study of this text. The following are just a few to consider, there are many more. How do the poems' image of war and Jim's dreams of serving at the front differ? Compare and contrast some of the poetry and the Battalion song.

Wilfred Owen – *Dulce et Decorum est*

- Futility
- Anthem for Doomed Youth

Kenneth Slessor – *Beach Burial*

- Depending on your class' level and ability this could prompt the writing of their own poetry, reading of further poetry and individual recitals. There is also a text titled *Men Who March Away* which is an anthology of war poetry.

A guided approach to select passages

- 'Never mind, Dad. I'll go instead.' Read pages 34–37 when Jim tells his parents he wants their permission to join the army. How does his father Charlie react to his wanting to join up? Why might he be more supportive than Amelia? Which parent do you feel Jim was closer to? Why? What insights into Jim's character do we get from his behaviour in this chapter?
- 'I just want to be an Anzac now and able to take their place,' said George Broadbent. 'I'm sick of Egypt, I'm sick of training. I want real work to do.' (p 71) What is George's image of the real work the men have to do? How does this compare to the reality outlined in the Gallipoli chapter? What was the fate for many soldiers? (see page 136–139)
- 'But it was no wonder, Amelia Martin told herself in her grief, that her son should want to enlist, though he was only fourteen. The idea of the boy soldier was all around him.' (p 22) Outline the many ways in which joining the defence forces was promoted in 1914. How does this compare with the idea of entering the forces today? Why have things changed? How are other countries different to Australia in this regard?

Part C: Group class presentations

In groups or pairs, students could research one of the following topics and make a presentation to the class. Students should make use of texts, reference books and the Internet.

- Research Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Who was he? What were his main achievements?
- Present an overview of the Gallipoli Campaign: how many were injured, how many were killed. What number of Australians, British, New Zealanders, etc. What strategies were employed?
- Investigate the story of Simpson and his Donkey. Why is this famous? What does it tell us about the reality of war?
- Rising Sun Badge. What is the significance of this badge?
- Research the ships of WWI – (students could look for the *Berrima* and the *Southland*) and maybe the hospital ships. What role did they play in the war? (*Internet good for this*)
- Present a discussion of the Anzac uniform. What did it consist of? Consider coats, boots, socks, hats etc. What fabrics were they made from? How were they washed? What were puttees and why were they used? In what ways was the uniform inappropriate for Gallipoli?
- Some students may have memorabilia of WWI (eg the Egyptian tablecloth p 63) including medals from Grandparents, bits of uniform, tins etc. These students could give a talk to class outlining their origin and significance.
- Investigate the sorts of diseases that soldiers caught in WWI. What symptoms did they have? What treatments and vaccinations were available? Describe the role of the hospital ships; what specific problems did they experience? www.cimm.jcu.edu.au/hist/aif/landing.html
- Who was Colonel John Monash? Why was he famous? What is he known for today?
- What pranks and games did the Anzacs and the Turks play on each other? Use this novel and other sources to give a discussion.
- What is the significance of the Lone Pine Memorial? (see p 70 and the end of novel). Visit the AWM website.
- In 1914 there were no computers or mobile phones. What methods of communication were available during WWI in the battlefield?

(Students should refer to books, encyclopaedia, newspaper articles from the time and make use of the Internet.)

Part D: Specific activities using the Internet

The Internet is a great source of information on the topic of Gallipoli and WWI.

Students could start by using a search engine and typing in Gallipoli. For specific information type in more key words: eg *Gallipoli and Campaign* or *WWI and ships*. Alternatively, teachers can select one or more website of their own choosing – particularly for whole class research and set their own activities.

The following are just a few of the hundreds of sites that are particularly educational, accurate and easy to use for students.

www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/

The Boards of Studies NSW Educational Resources index.

This is an outstanding site. If computer access for the whole class is available, then one or several tasks could be designed by the teacher using this site alone. It has great photos, information and primary sources on lots of different topics. Good for original newspaper reports and some maps, also.

<http://awm.gov.au>

The Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

This is a fantastic site. It is very educational and particularly good for historical details of current commemorative services. The site has its own Site Search facility so students can search for their own topic within the site e.g. *WWI and Uniform*. The site includes a commentary from the Turkish point of view which might be interesting for some groups. There are also photos and other primary sources such as Honour Roles, war documents and so on.

www.worldwar1.com/pharc007.htm

Trenches on the Web – Photo Archive: *Gallipoli Then and Now*

This site mainly contains photos. It has some good detail and some interesting photographs.

www.news.bbc.co.uk

The site is interesting for actual examples of the news from WWI. Because it is a BBC site it obviously has a British focus and much of it is about battles in WWI, not necessarily Gallipoli. It does cover some of the Gallipoli campaign from the British point of view. Some examples of reports from a young Australian reporter called Murdoch.

Part E: Further activities

A class viewing of the movie *Gallipoli* would compliment the study of this text. There are a few brief sites on the movie on the Internet, one with study notes.

www.10.pair.com/~crazydvweir/gallipoli/index.html

Appendix A: Comparisons in time

Take brief notes in the first column WWI during your reading of the novel.

Aspect of life	World War One 1914-1918	2000s
School life		
Empire Day		
Disease		
Food		
Role of women/girls		
Street Parades		
Cadets/Army		
Domestic life – Baking Family size		
Slang		
Anti German Sentiment		

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