



Teachers' Notes  
Written by Dr Susan La Marca

NOTORIOUS PIR

## *Black Jack Anderson* by Elaine Forrestal

*Black Jack Anderson* is the fictional re-creation of the life of a real pirate; the clever, charismatic black American, Jack Anderson, controlled the seas off the south coast of Australia from King George Sound to Kangaroo Island during the 1820's and 30's. Anderson did not plan for this to be his life but he lived it with gusto once it was. This story, though, is much more than a story of piracy; it is also the story of an interesting man and his lover during a time of adventure and growth in the new Australian colony. Through an exploration of these lives, Forrestal engages with the era. Class, gender, the indigenous community, crime and family are all issues viewed through the eyes of the main characters as we follow their eventful lives.

Forrestal's inspiration for the book came from the real life story itself. She describes how it came about in a recent review of the book for the *Sunday Times*:

*"I was ambling through the whaling exhibit at the WA Maritime Museum, researching a story on the Whalers' Tunnel at Fremantle, and noticed a video playing on a loop...I didn't take much notice until the second lap of the room when the three old Albany whalers, talking on the video, mentioned the colourful pirate Black Jack Anderson. I'd never heard of him nor thought WA had anything like a pirate so, intrigued, I started digging."*

From 'Pirates of Esperance' by Jan Hallam (Review of *Black Jack Anderson*) in the *Sunday Times*, June 14, 2008

### Language

#### Writing style

*Black Jack Anderson* is written in the third person; we observe the action from a remote viewpoint. Discuss with students the different ways authors can approach conveying their story and its emotion. Often historical recreations are written from the first person perspective and many novels for young adults adopt this style.

- What benefits does a first person narrative bring to the reading experience?
- What are the benefits of third person narration?
- Students could rewrite one of the passages in the text in first person.

- o How does this change affect the atmosphere/mood of the scene?

### **Terminology**

Due to its subject, and the time in which it is set, *Black Jack Anderson* contains a great deal of specific terminology. For example:

- Luffed (p. 14)
- Lee quarter (p. 14)
- Squally (p. 14)
- Bark (p. 11)
- Get out his slate (p. 26)
- Transom (p. 60)
- Ro'locks (p. 65)
- Avast and belay (p. 65)

This is only a sample of the large number of words used in the text that may be, in the main, unknown to present day readers. Consider how one reads these words.

- Do you need to always know the exact meaning?

Discuss with students how reading something in context helps us to understand what the word might mean. Exposure to new words in this way can build our vocabulary and increase our knowledge of a little known subject.

- Students could:
  - o Construct a glossary of a dozen words and their meanings using only the text as their source of understanding.
  - o Write a short story about the same period using a number of unusual words from the text to give their story flavour and accuracy.
  - o Use their imaginations to create a glossary of new words in the style of the period. Words that are not actually real but sound like they could be.

### **Characters**

#### **Black Jack Anderson**

Black Jack Anderson is a complex and interesting character. Though he is obviously a fugitive from the law he is, in other ways, law abiding and honourable.

Anderson was, according to evidence from the time, an imposing, well-built man. A tough, strong seaman he conveyed a '*certain charisma*' (p. 23) that set him apart as a leader of men – both strong (p. 21 – 22), and principled in the rough and ready way of the times. It is said of him:



‘He was bigger, stronger and could think faster than any of the men and he knew how to inspire loyalty.’ (p. 111).

No ordinary man could have evaded the law, controlled such a raw bunch of men and created an adequate, if primitive, life on Middle Island. Despite these strengths he was also often difficult, quick tempered and stubborn (p. 23). Definitely a man of contradictions!

We are first introduced to Anderson when an unkempt man, two years after the event, tries to report the murder of Anderson to the local magistrate (p. 3 – 5). Anderson, it appears, is part of an event that has haunted this man, for some time. There is an air of mystery around Anderson – from the outset one can imagine him to be the stuff of legend, the centre of attention. We then go back in time to years earlier when Anderson’s father is attempting to find a berth for his young son onboard a sailing ship (p. 10). Anderson is introduced to us here as the strong, hard working son of an honest seafaring man.

- What changes Anderson?
- Can you reconcile the boy we are introduced to at the outset with the man he becomes?

The contradictions of Anderson’s existence, in Forrestal’s interpretation of him, continue throughout the text. He is described as a man who finishes what he starts (p. 21), who cannot discard his bible as much as he might attempt to (p. 31), a man who continues to value his father’s opinion and regrets deserting (p. 38). On the other hand he is a man that can kill another with a punch (p. 29), who looked like an exotic Zulu chieftain (p. 215), a man who always tried to ensure his men received equal shares of any income the group created.

- Consider Anderson’s complex nature. How do his relationships with Dorothy (p. 134, 139, 160) and with Nurla and Bidjara fit with what we learn of him?
- What do you think his father, Reuben (p. 10), would have thought of the man that he became and the decisions that he made?

### Dorothy

Dorothy, like Anderson, was an actual person. But, also like Anderson, the version of her in this book is Forrestal’s view of the character and is not the only interpretation of her. Sarah Hay’s book *Skins* is also about Dorothy’s life. Written for adults, *Skins* is more confronting. It is referred to in Forrestal’s reference list and, like other books in this list, would be a useful place to begin in encouraging further student research of the individual characters in the text.

Dorothy’s relationship with Anderson is central to her own survival and an important part of his story too. Though she is wary of his size and manner, shrinking from his touch in one of their first encounters (p. 116), it is not long before an obvious attraction develops and Dorothy and Anderson begin a relationship that was to become important to them both (p. 134).

Forrestal describes the two as content and connected. Anderson's gift of seal skins (p. 139) and their dancing together (p. 160) are indications of an underlying affection. Dorothy considers herself as happy as she has ever been (p. 184) only plagued by worry for the state of her family back on the mainland.

Dorothy returns to the settlement out of concern for her family. (p. 205)

- What does this, and other actions that she takes throughout the book, tell us of her character?
- What type of person was she?

Consider Dorothy's defence of Anderson (p. 213 & 222)

- What does this tell you of their relationship and of her as a person?
- Why does Anderson leave Dorothy behind? Why does she need to stay behind? (p. 227)

## Women

*Black Jack Anderson* offers a variety of different women for analysis. Dorothy, her mother Hannah Newell (p. 88, 210) and sister Mary (p. 83, 134-5), and the indigenous women Nurla and Bidjara (p. 138) - each of these different women offer a very different picture of what it might have been like to be female during this very harsh and difficult period of Australia's first European settlement. An analysis of the life of each character suggests that this period in history was difficult for all concerned but particularly so for women.

- Was this the case for all countries, races, classes?
- Can you imagine there ever being a female version of Black Jack Anderson, the pirate, or is this a world closed to women? Why?
- Compare the experiences of the white women in the text to that of the indigenous women kidnapped by Anderson. (p. 68)

## Class

There are a number of occasions in the novel when the disparities between classes are made clear by the actions of characters in the text. Consider the way the Captain is treated onboard the ship; for instance he receives different food to the regular ship mates (p. 16). The living conditions of the Newell family (p. 79 – 88) and the lowly status of Dorothy (p. 91 - 92) clearly indicate the lower class status of these people.

- Discuss these passages and look for other indications in the text of class distinction being made. Compare these to the way in which Anderson lives on his island. In particular his adherence to a policy of equal shares for all in whatever wealth is made (p. 50). Though this attitude towards wealth indicates a particular view on equality, his behaviour in relation to the Aboriginal women he kidnaps (p. 68) indicates another view of his own status and their relative position within the group.



### Indigenous people

Discuss the portrayal of indigenous people in the text. They are shown at times to be both hostile (p. 178) and also helpful. It is members of the Cockatoo clan that bring Manning and Jimmy to the settlement when he is close to death.

- How do the portrayals in the text sit with the students' knowledge of the period and of the interactions that took place between whites and the indigenous population?

Anderson attempted to trade goods for two young aboriginal women (p. 68) from the Ngarrindi clan, but this transaction went tragically wrong and ended with the women being kidnapped by Anderson.

- What does the incident tell us about the opinions held by Anderson and his colleagues of the indigenous population?
- How do you think Nurla and Bidjara view their life with Anderson? (p. 138)
- What does the text reveal of their feelings?

The indigenous women have very different views on the world and how it works, a fact that causes friction and misunderstanding at times. For example, Bidji's view of Church's writing (p. 184);

- Are their differences reconcilable, or are the groups always separated by their views and beliefs?
- Explore what attitudes the groups share.

Dorothy is one of the only people on the island who takes the time, and makes the effort, to communicate with the two indigenous women that Anderson kidnapped (p. 138, 162 & 182, 184).

- Why do you think she does this?

Bidji is murdered after witnessing Anderson's killing. The others hear both the gun shot and her '*keening cry, like that of an animal in deep distress*' (p. 231).

- What does this tell you of her feelings for Anderson?
- Did she have to die?

### **Honouring Survival**

Anderson demonstrates what Forrestal terms '*a great respect for survivors*' (p. 76), and Johnno is an embodiment of this. In many ways all of the characters in the book are survivors of different sorts, often against great odds.

- Why does Anderson respect survivors in particular?
- Do we have the same views today, or does our society value different attributes?

Anderson

## Crime

Re-read the sections detailing Anderson's arrest and trial (p. 212 to 224).

- What does the trial show us of the nature of each of those involved; their personalities, aims and needs?

Anderson's murder is a brutal act (p. 231). It is only one of a number of deaths and mistreatments described in the text. We often think of our time as the least safe. Many feel crime rates are high and some even long for the 'good old days' when the world was innocent and safer.

- How do our times compare?
- Research crime statistics from different periods of Australia's history. Is our modern world really more dangerous?
- In what ways were these earlier times simpler and more innocent, or is this an inaccurate interpretation?

## Early Australian settlement/Historical period

Early in the novel Jack Anderson's father is singing the praises of his son to a potential employer (p. 10 – 11). Captain Carpo suggests that reading and writing will not be very useful skills onboard ship.

- What skills are highly prized during this period amongst those who wish to go to sea?
- Compare this to the skills a modern day young man would need to succeed in the world of work.

The settlers need to be incredibly resourceful if they are to survive in what are inhospitable conditions far from civilised society. Dorothy and her fellow shipwreck survivors have an even more difficult time on Black Jack Anderson's island.

- Explore the text for examples of the characters' resourcefulness. For example Mr Church makes ink from local ingredients (p. 98 & 106).

Simple things like the availability of food and dental care are often taken for granted in our modern society. In *Black Jack Anderson* the shipwrecked group could starve without the help of Anderson (p.102) and the gap-toothed grins of all of the sealers (p. 159) make it clear that the life of early white settlers in Australia was harsh and unforgiving.

- Explore other examples in the text of how difficult life was for the average settler. The life of the Newell family is a good example of struggle under difficult conditions. What contributes to their problems?
- Research could support this exploration through an examination of the health of earlier settlers, life expectancy, etc.

The experience of Manning and Jimmy as they walk towards the settlement - alone, hungry and seriously under threat of losing their lives (p. 167, 186-8) is horrific. By the time they are delivered to the settlement by the Aboriginals of the Cockatoo group the men are skeletal, almost dead (p. 197 – 198).



Newell does not even recognise Jimmy (p. 201) he is so affected by his time in the bush.

- Do you think the men would have survived without the intervention of the Aboriginals?

William Buckley is well-known for having survived many years living with the indigenous population after having escaped from his convict life.

- Research his story. How does his experience fit with that of the characters in *Black Jack Anderson*?
- Are similar accounts to be found in the stories from other countries that also experienced colonisation?

## The Sea

The sea has been used as a metaphor in fiction over countless centuries and in a variety of cultures. Man has had both a link with and an aversion to the sea that has often influenced the way we live our lives. As a geographical obstacle the sea has both dominated civilizations, divided people and, in conquering it, different groups have explored and colonised previously unknown lands.

- Consider the sea in fiction, poetry and song - how is it represented?
- What words are used to evoke the feel of the sea?
- Are there any common elements across different texts?

For example, John F. Kennedy (1917 - 1963) said of the sea:

*All of us have in our veins the exact same percentage of salt in our blood that exists in the ocean, and, therefore, we have salt in our blood, in our sweat, in our tears. We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea -- whether it is to sail or to watch it -- we are going back from whence we came.*

- How does this compare with the views of the characters in the text?

On page 180, in *Black Jack Anderson*, the sea is described as:

*'the great love of their lives'*

And it is said that the sea:

*'freed and cleansed them' (p. 180)*

These are very strong emotional descriptions that make it clear that the sea has an important role in the lives of the people in the text.

- Compare these descriptions to those in other explorations of the sea.

How the characters earn a living from the sea is central to the text and underlines its importance to them. At one point it is said:

*'in a boat they became a united force'* (p. 180)

Their work on the boat binds them to the sea and each other. This is contrasted with relationships that are usually stormy and dysfunctional, ruled by disharmony. At sea, at work on a boat, the group comes together.

- What is the modern day equivalent? What unites us strongly? Work? Sport? Family?

## Pirates

The cover of *Black Jack Anderson* has a descriptive teaser – *'Australia's most notorious pirate'*

- What do you imagine when you read such a phrase? Does the life of Black Jack Anderson fit with this view?
- Did you know Australia had pirates? Why does it not seem to fit our perception of our historical past? Perhaps our outlaws have been predominantly bushrangers and our tendency has been to look to the outback rather than the sea for our sense of adventure. Discuss

Compare Black Jack Anderson with well-known mythical pirates from popular culture such as Captain Hook from *Peter Pan*, Captain Jack Sparrow from *Pirates of the Caribbean* or even Pugwash from children's cartoons and books.

- Consider similarities and differences.
- What makes a 'real' pirate? Is there such a thing?
- Research pirates from different cultures comparing them to the fictional characters discussed as well as to Anderson and his colleagues. This website (<http://www.kipar.org/piratical-resources/pirate-fame.html>) contains an excellent list of links to famous European pirates. It would be a good place to begin. Very interesting comparisons will also be made with Asian pirates.

## Fanciful, fun activities

Pirates have an important place in our culture. Their representation has not always been serious though, they are often a figure of fun in stories, sometimes ridiculous, often stereotyped. They offer opportunity for an exploration of the fun possibilities inherent in the pirate myth and its representation in our culture.

- Don't miss "Talk Like a Pirate Day" celebrated each year on September 19th.

Are you suited to be a pirate? Find out by taking the personality test at [www.talklikeapirate.com/](http://www.talklikeapirate.com/)

International Talk Like a Pirate Day – Teacher's Page

<http://www.talklikeapirate.com/teachers.html>

<http://www.talklikeapirate.com/juniorpirates.html> (for junior pirates)

Includes links to activity ideas and amusing tools like the English to Pirate Translator



Lots of "ar" words to help you and your students talk like a pirate  
<http://www.morewords.com/contains-by-length/ar/>

- Discovery Channel Podcasts - Pirate Stories  
<http://www.podcastdirectory.com/podcasts/969>  
This five part Discovery Channel series is entertaining and informative.
- Music - The Theme Show - A collection of 24 very different pirate songs from Gilbert and Sullivan through to the Muppets  
[http://ishtarandromeda.libsyn.com/index.php?post\\_year=2006&post\\_month=09&post\\_day=12](http://ishtarandromeda.libsyn.com/index.php?post_year=2006&post_month=09&post_day=12) (Pirate theme playlist in mp3 format)
- National Geographic – various pages on different aspects of pirating.  
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/whydah/main.html>
- Biographies of Pirates, Privateers and Explorers  
<http://www.thepirateking.com/bios/index.htm>  
Good collection of information about ships, knots and people, including a glossary of terms.

### The Author's Note and References

The author's note details Forrestal's meticulous research but also acknowledges that *'at times the evidence was sketchy at best, and occasionally I altered details to suit the story I wanted to tell'* (p. 245).

- Discuss how the information given in the author's note makes the reader feel about the veracity of a story.
- Can historical re-creation ever be truly accurate? Discuss.

In filling in the gaps and adding fiction where fact is unknown Forrestal is doing nothing unusual in the realm of historical 'faction' re-creation. Consider what this means for most stories that we take to be the truth about any event from the past.

For example:

- Did Marie Antoinette really say *'let them eat cake'*?
- Was an apple falling on Newton's head really the impetus for the discovery of gravity?
- Did Washington really cut down a cherry tree?

Consider also the version of history that we take to be true.

- Who wrote history? From what gender, class or race did most historians come?

Napoleon Bonaparte said:

*History is the version of past events that people have decided to agree upon.*

Winston Churchill said:

*History will be kind to me for I intend to write it.*

And Virginia Woolf said:

*For most of history, Anonymous was a woman.*

In Forrestal's reference list is a book called *Skins* by Sarah Hay. This book is Hay's telling of Dorothy's story. It is an adult version of her very difficult life with Anderson and his men and offers an alternative view of her story. Sections of it could be used as a comparison with *Black Jack Anderson* to further extend a discussion of the importance of interpretation in history re-creation.

(For a useful review of *Skins* that appeared in *Australian Book Review* see <http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/2328/1312/1/59.pdf>)

Forrestal very generously lists the references that assisted her in compiling this book. Collect examples of some of her primary sources.

Encourage students to consider what information these primary sources brought to the story.

- Could the same facts have been interpreted by a different author in another way?
- The students could respond to a primary source from Forrestal's reference list re-creating a section of the story in an entirely different way in light of a different interpretation.

## Further Reading

### Pirates

Barrie, J. M. *Peter Pan*

Clark, Sherryl *Pirates of Quentaris*

Crowley, Bridget *Ship's Angel*

Higgins, Simon *Thunderfish* (present day pirates)

Higgins, Simon *Under No Flag* (present day pirates)

Lawrence, Caroline *The Pirates of Pompeii*

Lee, Tanith *Pirates!: the true and remarkable adventures of Minerva Sharpe and Nancy Kington, female pirates*

Lee, Tanith *Piratica. II: Return to Parrot Island: being the return of a most intrepid heroine to sea*

Lee, Tanith *Piratica. III: the family sea: being the gallant tale of a fearless heroine and a fatal secret*

Masson, Sophie *The Tempestuous Voyage of Hopewell Shakespeare*

Matthews, John *Pirates Rogue's Gallery*

Meyer, L. A. *Bloody Jack*

Mould, Chris *The Icy Hand*

Oppel, Kenneth *Skybreaker*

Stevenson, Robert Louis *Treasure Island*



**Early Australia**

Bunney, Ron *Eye of the Eagle* (Indigenous Australian experience of white arrival)

Murray, Kirsty *Market Blues* (Early Melbourne)

Newton, Robert *The Black Dog Gang* (The Rocks, Sydney 1900)

Nicholson, John *Cedar, Seals and Whaling Ships*

SBS Television, *First Australians* (a history of Australia from an Indigenous perspective. See [www.sbs.com.au/firstaustralians](http://www.sbs.com.au/firstaustralians) for information on educational copies of the dvd)

**Women in History**

De Vries, Susanna *Great Pioneer Women of the Outback*

Freeman, Pamela *The Black Dress: The Early Years of Mary Mackillop*

Inserra, Rose *Women in the Convict Era: 1788-1868*

Park, Ruth *Playing Beatie Bow* (Early Sydney)

Scutt, Craig *Mary Bryant: The Impossible Escape*

Selzer, Anita *Governors Wives in Colonial Australia*

**True Accounts**

Atwood, Alan *Burke's Soldier*

Crew, Gary & Mark Wilson *Young Murphy: A Boy's Adventure*

Greagg, David *Burke and Wills Forgot the Frying Pan*

The life of William Buckley – the convict who escaped and survived, living for 32 years with the indigenous people of coastal Victoria

[http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/ergo/william\\_buckleys\\_escape](http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/ergo/william_buckleys_escape)

<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010158b.htm>

The survival of James Johnson – sole survivor of an 1854 shipwreck in which 121 people died.

<http://image.sl.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/ebindshow.pl?doc=q027/a632;seq=70>

<http://www.armidaleindependent.com.au/pages/2007070415.pdf>

**The Sea**

Hemingway, Ernest *The Old Man and the Sea*

Melville, Herman *Moby Dick*

The Sea in Poetry

<http://www.poemhunter.com/poems/sea/>

Jack  
Anderson