



TEACHER NOTES

Teacher Notes by Belinda Bolliger

WALKER BOOKS

About The Book



THE RIDING GALLERY

CREATOR: SALLY MURPHY (AUTHOR)
& MARTINA HEIDUCZEK (ILLUSTRATOR)
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Exploring the true story of the St Kilda merry-go-round during World War I, by Australia's most revered verse novelist.

In Melbourne's St Kilda, as World War I begins, Anton, a German immigrant, fulfills his dream of creating the most beautiful steam-driven "riding gallery" – a merry-go-round – in the world. Evelyn, who has just moved to the city, befriends local boy, Rory, but the war, and anti-German sentiment, soon takes its toll on the children, Anton, their families and the riding gallery itself.

Based on true events, this is a cleverly structured, multiple point-of-view story, including poems created from contemporaneous newspaper headlines, and Sally Murphy at her finest form.

About the Author

Sally Murphy grew up loving books, babies and beaches, and nothing much has changed. Now she is grown up (though she tries hard not to be), she thinks a perfect day is one which involves reading, writing, walking or swimming at the beach, time with her six (also grown up) children, her grandchildren, and her animal babies. When she isn't doing these things, Sally is a university academic, teaching teachers how to teach.

About the Illustrator

Martina Heiduczek grew up in a small village on the Baltic Sea in Germany. Here you could find her mostly galloping through the forests with flying piggy tails on her Shetland pony, drawing or reading. She studied illustration and graphic design in Hamburg. These days she is living with her family on the Gold Coast, Australia, creating illustrations that are quirky, poetic at times, textured and mostly colourful.

About the Writer of these Notes

Belinda Bolliger worked as an editor and publisher of children's books for over twenty-five years. She was the Children's Publisher at Hodder Headline (now Hachette Australia), and Children's Commissioning Editor and Publisher for ABC Books/HarperCollins. She has worked with many award-winning authors and illustrators, including Libby Hathorn, Garry Disher, Frances Watts, Judith Rossell and Matt Ottley. Belinda was editorial manager for Australian Standing Orders (Scholastic) for over 11 years, reviewing and selecting the most suitable new releases from Australian publishers to send to schools around the country. Belinda now works as an associate agent at Key People Literary Management and as a freelance children's editor and project manager.

THEMES

History • War • Families • Multiculturalism • Prejudice

CURRICULUM LINKS

English (language; literature; literacy) • Humanities and Social Sciences (history; knowledge and understanding; civics and citizenship) • The Arts (media arts; drama; visual arts) • Health and Physical Education (personal; social and community health)

For ages 8-12 years

Teacher Notes

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

The Riding Gallery is mainly set in St Kilda, Victoria, in the years 1914 to 1918.

- What do you know about St Kilda? Using the internet, find images and information from the 1900s about this beachside suburb. You might find the following websites useful:
 - www.stkildahistory.org.au
 - <https://stkildamelbourne.com.au/about-st-kilda/>
 - <https://stkildajunction.blogspot.com/>

Consider the following questions and topics:

- Who are the Traditional Owners of the land in this area?
- How did the suburb get its name?
- What was society like in St Kilda during the 1900s? What did people wear? What did they do in their recreation time? What was school and education like during this time?
- How many men and boys from St Kilda enlisted to fight in World War 1?
- When did Luna Park open?
- Why do you think St Kilda became a tourist destination?
- How has St Kilda changed over the years?

VERSE FORM AND LANGUAGE

The Riding Gallery is written as a verse novel, which is when a story is told through poetry rather than prose.

- Why do you think the author chose to write the story of *The Riding Gallery* as a verse novel?

- How does a novel written in verse affect the way you read and understand the story?
- Do you find this form of storytelling effective and enjoyable? Why or why not?
- What are some of the poetic techniques that the author has used in the novel? For example, while the poetry in *The Riding Gallery* doesn't necessarily rhyme, there is a beautiful rhythm to many of the lines:

'I hope St Kilda has lots of kids

For me to play with.

But

the sea!

the sea!

the sea!' (p 7)

- What are some other techniques the author has used? How do these techniques help to tell the story and convey the characters' thoughts and emotions? Think about the repetition of 'thud thud thud thud', punctuation, multiple voices, the use of italics and so on.
- Find examples of similes and metaphors in the verses. What do you think they add to the story?
- As a class, discuss how the structure of a verse novel influences your emotional connection to the characters and the events.
- Are there particular verses or chapters that stood out to you? Why?
- Vocabulary: Some of the words in *The Riding Gallery* may be new to you, particularly some of the language used in the newspaper 'found poems'. For example, 'exigences', 'manful part', 'British prestige' (p 8). As you read the novel, write down the words and phrases that are new to you and use a dictionary from your library or online to find their meanings. Create a new vocabulary list on the whiteboard.

CHARACTERS

- The way *The Riding Gallery* is written is very effective in revealing the thoughts and personalities of the main protagonists – Evelyn, Rory and Anton. How has the author achieved this?
- Did you feel that you got to know the characters well?
- Activity: As a class, rewrite one of the poems as prose then compare and contrast the verse version and the prose version.
- Discuss the device the author uses called ‘A Poem for Two Voices’. What does this device add to the story and your understanding of Evelyn and Rory?
- Activity: Perform the Poems for Two Voices in the novel. Discuss the differences and similarities between Evelyn and Rory revealed by these poems.
- What else do you think the Poems for Two Voices achieve in the novel? Discuss where they appear in the story and why the author might have chosen to have them there.

FOUND POEMS

In the Author’s Note at the back of the book, Sally Murphy explains that the pages in the novel that show newspaper headlines are ‘found poems’. She says, ‘*This means they are written using only words and phrases that appeared in original news articles from 1914-1918...*’ This is a very clever and creative way of using historical resources in the novel.

- Activity: In small groups, find some current good news stories and rewrite them as found poems. Each group can share their found poem with the rest of the class. Afterwards, as a class, discuss how you found this activity. Was it challenging or easy? How effective are everybody’s poems in telling the news of the day?

VERSE NOVEL BOOK CLUB

Form a verse novel book club where you read and discuss different verse novels, such as award-winning novels by Pip Harry and Sherryl Clark. This website provides a great list of some of Australia’s best verse novels for 8-12-year-olds: <https://sway.cloud.microsoft/s/2SoONOemm8J40vjt/embed>

POETRY SLAM ACTIVITY

A poetry slam is an event where poets perform spoken word poetry to a live audience and to a panel of judges. Create a Poetry Slam competition (or you may decide to simply have a performance rather than a competition). The following website provides the rules of a Poetry Slam: www.venturacollege.edu/community/diversity-in-culture/performer-submission-form.

HISTORY: WORLD WAR I

In 1914, war broke out in Europe. Australian men and boys rushed to enlist in the armed forces. The war was to continue for four years and cost 20 million people their lives.

- What do you know about World War 1?
Research:
 - Why war broke out.
 - Why did Australia join the fighting and what role did we play in World War 1?
 - How did the war affect Australian men, women and children both during and after the war? Consider the changes that occurred on the home front (industry, school, communities, the role of women etc).
- How does the war affect Anton, Evelyn, Rory and their families? Can you think of ways that war impacts communities today?

- Discuss: Despite the challenges faced by the characters in *The Riding Gallery*, there is hope and resilience in the story.
- How do the characters find ways to cope with difficult situations?
- How do Australians today remember and commemorate those who fought in World War 1?
- What are some of the ways we can learn from the experiences of people who have lived through war?
- *Lusitania*.
*The name of a ship
I knew nothing about
until it was sunk.*' (p 63)
The sinking of *The Lusitania* is featured in the novel. Find out more about this event in history and how it impacted the war.
- Activity: Using verse form, write a diary entry from the perspective of an Australian soldier during World War 1.
- Activity: In small groups, prepare a short presentation to share with the rest of the class about a specific aspect of World War 1 (for example, women's roles, Gallipoli, life in the trenches).
- Activity: Create a timeline of key events during World War 1, focusing on Australia's involvement.

CHARACTER STUDY

Evelyn hopes that her new neighbour will be a girl and Rory hopes that Evelyn will be a boy. How are they both surprised by each other?

Quote 1:
'EVELYN

War!

When Dad shows me the headline

my heart

thud thud

thud thuds'

Dad's eyes are shining but I feel scared.' (p 9)

Quote 2:

'RORY

War!

Australia is at war!

When Da

Shows us the headline

My heart pounds.

How thrilling!' (p 11)

Quote 3:

'ANTON

War!

Australia is at war.

My heart sinks

when my wife, Mary Anne, reads me the headline.'

(p 13)

- How do each of the main characters respond to the news about the outbreak of war? Find a couple of lines in the novel (different to the ones above) that illustrate their response. What do their responses say about their characters?
- Discuss how the author uses the different characters' voices to express different attitudes about the war and about anti-German sentiment. Find some other examples from the three main characters that show their different ways of thinking. Do you think the attitudes are right or wrong? Is it possible to understand different opinions and attitudes even if they are different to your own?
- In the quotes above, discuss the way the author uses the heart as an expression of feelings.
- Write a verse (it can be as short as the extracts above) that shows you being excited about something and then being scared about something. What device will you use to show your feelings? Perhaps your stomach leaps or sinks, sinks, sinks? Perhaps your body shakes, shakes, shakes with fear?

ANTON

- Quote:
*'I have dreamt of a bigger
better ride
a ride to match those of my childhood
a ride of such magic
and beauty
and awe'* (p 2).
Why do you think Anton wanted to build the most beautiful merry-go-round? What does it tell us about his character and his dreams?
- What was anti-German sentiment and how did it affect German immigrants and their families in Australia during World War 1? In your answer, think about Anton's experiences and why he eventually had to hand over the riding gallery to somebody else.
- Do you think Anton's treatment by some of the people in St Kilda was fair? Why or why not?
- What does the word 'prejudice' mean? Is it okay to be prejudiced towards someone because of their ethnic or cultural background?
- How do you think it might feel to be classified as an 'alien'? Improvise a role play where an alien from another planet lands on Earth and is treated with great suspicion by those around it. After the role play, as a class, discuss how it made everybody feel.
- Anton's dream is to create a merry-go-round and create joyful experiences for those around him. The war changes his dream. Can you think of a time when something challenged your own dreams? How did you respond?

EVELYN

- Write a paragraph about Evelyn's character. What does she love? What are her hopes, dreams and fears? Would you like to be her friend?

- What does Evelyn's reaction to Rory's feelings about Anton say about her?
- Write a letter from Evelyn to Rory that explains why she thinks Rory is being unfair about Anton.

RORY

- What do you think about Rory? Write a paragraph about your impressions of Rory.
- How might Rory's feelings about Anton have been heightened by his brothers fighting overseas?

ST KILDA ESPLANADE AND ITS ATTRACTIONS

Quote:

*'But the best thing of all is the Esplanade
and the funfair
and Luna Park
with its huge mouth
looking like it might swallow the
crowds going through it.
Some of the rides are only for grown-ups and you
won't catch me on the Scenic Railway soaring above
the crowds.
Not yet.
But the swings
and merry-go-rounds
are suuuuu-perb!'* (pp 40-41)

- The author's descriptions of St Kilda are very descriptive and vivid. Based on the description in the quote above, draw your impression of what St Kilda might have looked like at this time in history. Now use the internet to find some images of what it actually looked like. How does your artist's impression differ from the reality?
- The author explains that Weniger's is a real merry-go-round. There are many images of the merry-go-round on the internet (one can be found here: www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7148900/what-goes-around-comes-around/).

Research the merry-go-round and track its history from its glory days at St Kilda to its restoration and transportation to Canberra. Has anyone in the class seen or had a ride on the merry-go-round?

- Find out more about the real people involved in building the original ride – Anton Weniger and Mr Thomson.
- Find images of different merry-go-rounds from around the world. Which is your favourite and why?
- Activity: Design your own merry-go-round. Choose how you will show your design – it may be a digital design, a collage, an artwork with paint, pencils or crayons, a diorama or made from papier mâché. Some things to think about for your design:
 - What will it be called?
 - What will your customers ride on (horses, exotic animals, mythical creatures)?
 - What music will play?
 - What colours will you use?
 - Luna Park is another attraction that has a long history (in both Victoria and Sydney) and was inspired by the first Luna Park in Coney Island, New York. Create a poster presentation about Luna Park and its history. Create your own images of the amazing face that features as the entranceway to the parks.

Quote:

'And here it is!

Made by the Gebruder Bruder

all the way in Waldkirch

in the Black Forest . . .

Each pipe

(there are more than two hundred)

the Glockenspiel

the percussion

together playing grandly

as if an orchestra

is hiding

in the depths of the gallery.' (p 59)

You can find images and more information about the amazing organ that was part of Anton's merry-go-round at <https://www.ohta.org.au/organs/organs/CanberraCarousel.html>.

Listen to a recording of organ music and write a poem that describes the music and how it makes you feel.

ENDING

- The story ends with a time jump and it is now 1974 in Canberra. Evelyn has taken her granddaughter to see Anton's restored merry-go-round. What do you think might have happened to Evelyn after the war and after Anton has left St Kilda? Do you think Evelyn and Rory remain friends? Write a short story about her life.
- Why do you think Evelyn decided to take her granddaughter to see the restored merry-go-round? What significance might the merry-go-round hold for Evelyn and her family?
- Conduct an imaginary interview with Evelyn in 1974.
- Write a letter from Evelyn to Anton after the war.
- Create a photo album with 'photos' (drawings or cut-out images) and captions that tell the story of Evelyn's life. Each page can represent a different period of Evelyn's life, showing her family, significant events and ending with the restored merry-go-round.





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