

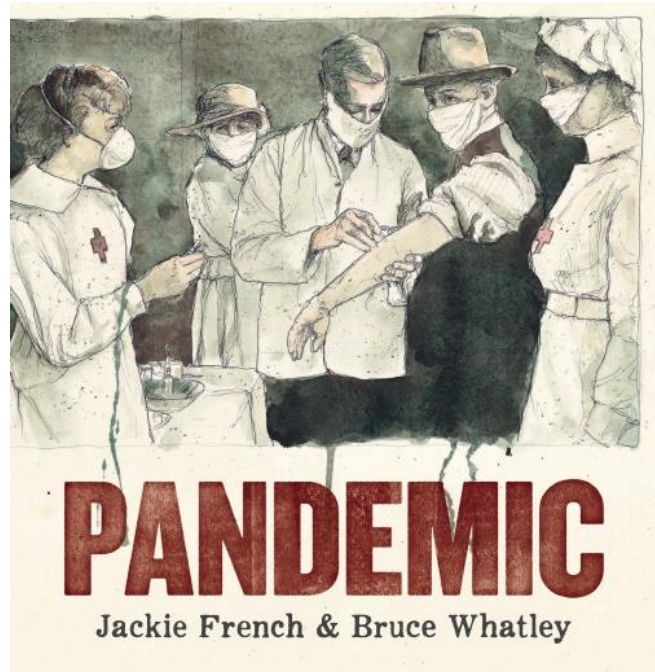
# Pandemic

Author

**Jackie French**

Illustrator

**Bruce Whatley**



## Synopsis

At the end of WWI, over a hundred years ago, soldiers returned home from the war and brought with them the Spanish Flu. *Pandemic* is the story of how one woman and a group of local children spent their time helping others. This story of how one community of people lived through a global pandemic in a time before the internet, before on-line grocery deliveries, and before there could be any possibility of a vaccine, brings hope and a message of compassion and kindness to us all from an era long gone. In 1920 many schools and businesses were closed, and people who were ill would quarantine themselves behind closed doors and drawn curtains. But people still needed to eat, and livestock and gardens needed to be tended, so the woman who one day would become Jackie French's great-grandmother, together with a group of local children, spent their time helping others. They looked after the animals, milked the cows, tended the vegetable gardens, and cooked soup to distribute to the sick and quarantined. Just like today, people wore masks when they left the house, and the streets were quiet and empty. There was no cure, and quarantine and self-isolation were the only weapons people had to fight the easily spread illness. And just like today people helped each other and eventually, with the help of quarantine, masks, kindness, and time, the flu stopped ravaging the nation, and people could finally return to the lives they had been living before.

## About the Author

**Jackie French AM** is an Australian author, historian, ecologist and honorary wombat (part time), 2014-2015 Australian Children' Laureate and 2015 Senior Australian of the Year. Her multi-award- winning books range from provocative historical fiction to hilarious international bestselling picture books.

## About the Illustrator

**Bruce Whatley** jumped into the unknown world of picture books after a career in advertising as an Illustrator and art director. Since 1992 Bruce has written and/or illustrated over 80 children's picture

books. Though based in Australia his work is published internationally and in 2014 was included in the Bologna Children's Book Fair Exhibition.

### Themes

Global Pandemic; compassion; kindness; quarantine; masks; community; WWI; historical perspectives; hope.

### Writing Style

Written for the most part in third-person narrative voice, French directly addresses the audience in the first person when introducing the character of her Great-grandmother. The narrative is chronologically uncomplicated, and the sentence structure is universally short and to the point, whilst maintaining the evocative simplicity and emotional depth that French's writing is known for. The descriptions of the children undertaking tasks and chores that were common to daily life in the 1920s are clear and easily comprehensible by even the youngest of readers, while the matter of fact tone of French's writing makes the entire situation utterly relatable. Through the entirety of the book, French maintains a strong focus on the key philosophy of helping others. Every act that the characters engage in, is presented as being done with the clear intent of helping the community, and as a result the book is a heartwarming and hopeful glimpse into a time long gone, where people were struggling with a situation that is in essence sadly familiar to everyone today.

### Illustration Style

Created using a soft toned palette of neutrals and natural shades, Whatley's artwork is crafted in his inimitable style of washed edges, realistic figures, and subtle variation in depth and darkness that reflects and enhances the emotional tone of the textual narrative it parallels. Figures are realistic and facial features and body-language are expressive, and the palette and colour choices are reminiscent of artwork and images from the era shown. The illustrations consist of full, half and three-quarter page spreads, as well as occasional vignettes. The edges of the artwork at times blends and bleeds into the white-space surrounding it, and at others there is clear delineation, while the grim depictions of wartime and illness contrast with the hopeful sun-soaked scenes of the latter half of the story.

## TEACHER NOTES

- 1) Before reading the story, as a class look closely at the cover and title, and discuss what you can learn from the title and artwork. Some things to include in your discussion might be:
  - What is a pandemic?
  - When do you think this book was set?
  - What is happening on the cover of the book?
  - Who do you think the story is about?
  - What do you think might happen in the story?
  - Have you read any books by Jackie French before, and if so what were they?
- 2) When is *Pandemic* set? How long ago did the events in the story happen?
- 3) In *Pandemic*, the children in the story and Jackie French's great-grandmother all spent a lot of time helping others. In 2020 the world is very different than it was 100 years ago - and not many people in

a town or city will have cows that need milking! But people are still people now, and many groups and individuals have all been trying hard to help each other through the difficulties faced during the current pandemic. Can you think of any examples of people helping others that you have seen or heard of, or experienced, during the COVID-19 pandemic 100 years after the one in the story?

- 4) What are some things that you or your family can do or say to help others (or even yourselves) during the COVID-19 pandemic, or during other difficult times? As a class discuss all the different things that you can do, and use your discussion to help you make an inspirational poster about helping others.
- 5) How was the way people handled the Spanish Flu pandemic similar to how people are handling the COVID-19 pandemic? What are the things you can see in the story that are the same things we are doing now, and what is very different? Why do you think some things are different now?
- 6) What are the two things in the story that Jackie French credits with helping to end the pandemic in 1920? Do you think that these two things could also help end the pandemic in 2020? Why/why not?
- 7) How does reading this story make you feel? How do you think you would have felt if you had read it last year? How do you think that children might feel reading it in five or ten ~~years time~~ years' time? Create an artwork that you feel represents how you felt while reading the story. Your painting can be anything from an abstract swirl of colours, to a detailed sketch of a specific situation. Caption your artwork with a brief description of what it represents to you and why.
- 8) How do you think the children in the story felt about the pandemic? Why do you think they felt this way? Do you think that being able to help others changed how they were feeling, and if so why and in what way?
- 9) Which is your favourite part of the story? Why do you like this bit the best?
- 10) What sort of music were people listening to in 1920? Find a recording or recreation of some music that was popular at the time and listen to it. How is it different to the music you are listening to now?
- 11) What sort of soup did the children in the story help make? What is your favourite type of soup to eat today? Write down the recipe for your favourite soup and share it with your class. You might even like to make a class recipe book filled with everyone's favourite soups!
- 12) In the story, Jackie French's great grandma makes lemon barley water for people with sore throats to drink. Have you ever heard of lemon barley water before, or tried to make it? Search online for a recipe and try making some yourself.
- 13) What do you think it means when Jackie French's great grandma says *hearts need food too*, and what does she do to help feed the hearts of the people around her? What is something simple that you could do to help feed the hearts of the people around you?
- 14) How do you think Bruce Whatley created the illustrations in *Pandemic*?
- 15) Experiment with watercolour paints and pencils, and create an illustration of an event during the COVID-19 pandemic inspired by Whatley's artwork.
- 16) How does looking at the pictures of all the soldiers make you feel? How does looking at the pictures of the children helping others make you feel? As a class discuss how the artist conveys feeling in his illustrations. What techniques has he used, and how are the pictures different from each other?