

Unit written by Dr Pam Macintyre & Dr Susan La Marca

***Lighthouse Girl***  
**by Dianne Wolfer**  
**Illustrated by Brian Simmonds**

**Year 7**

**Background**

This finely illustrated story is based on true events during the First World War, the early days of 1914. It provides a different perspective on this historical event and contributes greatly to our appreciation of the effects of war on individuals, especially young people. It centres on Fay, whose fifteenth birthday is heralded by the outbreak of war. She is the daughter of a lighthouse keeper on Breaksea Island off Albany on the south west coast of Western Australia. She lives with her father, the other lighthouse keeper, Joe, and her donkey, Jacko, her mother having died and her siblings living on the mainland. In the journal her father gives her on her birthday, Fay details events of a distinctive daily life against the background of war in Europe. She witnesses first hand the massive troopship movement as the Australian and New Zealand ships, thirty-eight in all, stop en route to take on provisions, in King George Sound.

While the soldiers await the journey to the Middle East, Fay communicates with them via semaphore flags and writes down their messages to telegraph home. One particular young soldier, Charlie, becomes a correspondent and friend, sending postcards from Egypt and then Gallipoli, until the inevitable happens.

Told via Fay's diary entries, third person narrative, documents and evocative illustrations this is an accessible text that offers much in terms of historical detail, personal tragedy and resilience, and an innovative narrative structure.

**Objectives**

*Encountering literary texts and creating their own will engage students partly because of what they might learn about human experience and what they might learn about how language has been used, and can be used by them to create particular emotional, intellectual or philosophical effects.*

*Students continue to apply what they have learnt about literature when creating their own texts.*

ACARA (2009) *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English*, page 8

*In English, students read, view, write, compare, research and talk about texts and learn about the ways language shapes and reflects attitudes in different times and places. In History, they develop understanding of how the world has changed in the past and may change again. They communicate their understanding in a variety of texts, including oral presentations and written essays.*

*The diverse and rich selection of texts used in the English domain provides interesting reading material to enrich the study of history; with fiction and non fiction set in the periods of time being studied. The English domain interconnects with the History domain in not only developing skills such as reasoning, analysing and interpreting, but in providing a sensitive human perspective through the study of texts.*

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2009) *VELS English – Relationships to other Domains: The Humanities- History*. Page 43  
<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/english/relationships.html#history>

## **Focus**

### **Ways of telling**

There has been considerable controversy in Australian literary and historical circles over the differences between writing historical texts and historical fiction. *Lighthouse Girl* weaves fact and fiction through a multifaceted narrative construction that includes actual documents such as newspaper cuttings and photographs and a third person narrative, first person diary entries and an illustrative text. It then allows students to interrogate the relationship between known facts and the imaginative recreation of historical events. The author, in a note at the end of the book, tells us where she has invented.

It is fruitful for students to analyse what each element adds to the experience of reading about an event that happened and a life that was lived nearly a century ago.

Discuss for instance, what the third person narrative allows – the feelings and perspective of others as well as of the central protagonist, Fay. How the illustrations add atmosphere and emotion.

Such an analysis allows students to explore how different styles of writing are used for different purposes, such as the formal tone and register of the newspaper reports, the personal voices of Fay and Charlie, and the descriptive, removed narrative.

## **Focus**

### **A different time: different life: different attitudes**

As students read the story invite them to record what is so different about Fay's life and their's today. This could be done on a class wiki. Below are

some suggestions but students will want to record what they find interesting or surprising.

- **Fay's life:** she lives an unusual life on an island off the coast of Albany. She hunts for food – rabbits, mutton birds, eats nettles and is dependent on the supply boat for supplies and communication.
- **Loneliness:** her only friend is a donkey, apart from the soldiers she writes to.
- **Daily tasks:** Fay occupies her life with preparing food, '*routine of cooking, cleaning, darning socks and shooting rabbits*'. Relaxes by drawing and writing in her journal. She doesn't go to school or do school work.
- **Ethos of war:** young men '*can't wait to fight the Kaiser*' proud of '*our men answering to defend the 'Mother Country*'. Compare this to today's wars.
- **Communication:** before Skype, mobile phones and the internet: semaphore, morse code, telegraph, post cards
- **Whaling:** an accepted part of life. Compare to today's' attitudes to the killing of whales.
- The reality of **death:** her sister, her mother, Charlie.

### Assessment

Write about an event in your life (real or imagined) using different modes of telling: write from the 'outside' in a third person narrative which will include perspectives of other people; write personal diary entries in the first person; include photographs/documents. Think about the voice you will give yourself.

**Debate:** Form students into sets of teams of 3 students each. Your topic is: 'Life at fifteen in Australia was simpler in 1914 than it is today'. Divide teams into Affirmative and Negative. Use *Lighthouse Girl* as your primary document for 1914, your life and current times for the present day.

#### Affirmative planning

First speaker: define topic (key words and their meanings)

Introduce team theme and other speakers' topics, as well as your own.

Make arguments (first speaker affirmative has no rebuttal).

Third speaker can only introduce one new point in addition to their overall summary of the team's case and rebuttal of the opposition's argument.

Second and first speaker should have 2-3 points per speech which need to be developed and linked back to the team theme/case.

#### Negative Planning

All speakers have to rebut the opposition's argument.

Third negative does not introduce new points.

Be prepared to redefine and correct opposition's definition.

First speaker must state whether or not the team agrees with the opposition's definition.

This will be ideally peer-assessed with students giving clear evidence for the winning teams – one for the affirmative, one for the negative.

### **Related Reading**

#### **Girls**

Another famous light house girl was the English Grace Darling. You might like to research her. There have been various books written about her.

Grace Bussell, another West Australian is called the Australian Grace Darling as she helped rescue shipwrecked sailors at just sixteen. Her story is told at <http://www.susangeason.com/nonfiction.html#a>

#### **Stories of war**

Blackman, Jenny *Our Enemy, My Friend: The Diary of Emma Shelldrake, the Adelaide Hills, 1915*

Davidson, Leon *Scarecrow Army: the ANZACS at Gallipoli*

French, Jackie *A Rose for the ANZAC Boys*

Hartnett, Sonya *The Silver Donkey*

Lawrence, Iain *Lord of the Nutcracker Men*

Lawson, Sue *Finding Darcy*

Morpurgo, Michael *Private Peaceful*

Palmer, Tony *Break of Day*

#### **Illustrated**

Jorgensen, Norman *In Flanders Fields* Illustrated by Brian Harrison-Lever

Lockyer, John *Harry and the ANZAC Poppy*

Stanley, Elizabeth *Night without Darkness*

Wolfer, Dianne *Photographs in the Mud*, Illustrated by Brian Harrison-Lever

# Lighthouse Girl

*Dianne Wolfer*

illustrated by Brian Simmonds