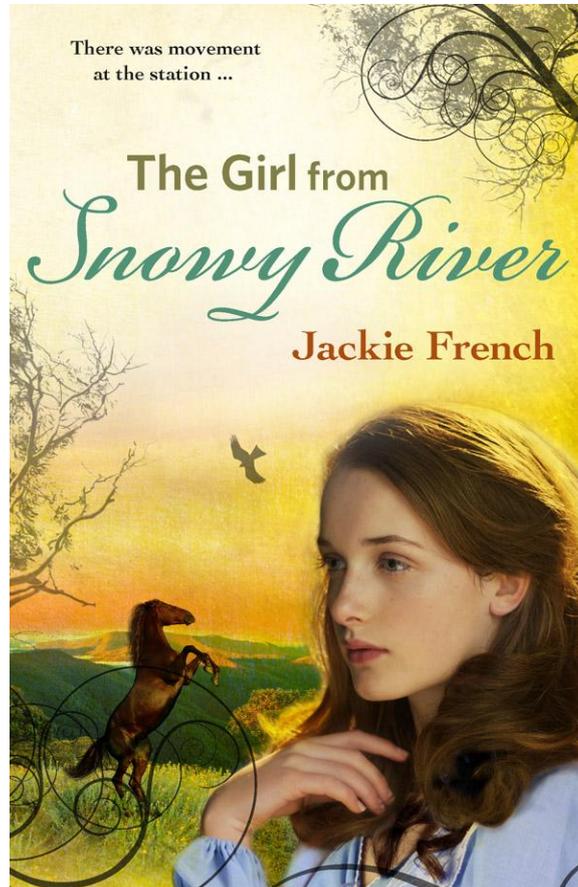


The Girl from Snowy River

TEACHER'S NOTES



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BOOK DESCRIPTION

'War is all of us, she thought. All who fought, and all who cheered as they enlisted, as those young men marched away.' (p 176)

This novel is a moving story of a young woman's survival in the aftermath of World War One. Flinty (Felicity) McAlpine is thirteen when her two brothers set off to war, and sixteen in 1919 when only one of them returns: the eldest Andy has been emotionally damaged and Jeff dies on the front. Her mother suffers a heart attack when she hears the news, and then her dad succumbs to influenza the following year, leaving Flinty to look after young Joey and Kirsty. Their small farm in the high country of the Snowy River mountain ranges barely brings in enough to support them. Her other sadness is that her neighbour and friend Sandy whom she had hoped would become her partner, has also come back damaged and barely speaks to her. Why won't any of these men tell her what happened in the war? And how is she going to keep this family together?

Flinty is not easily discouraged, so when she hears of a prize-winning brumby muster she sets off bravely, despite the fact that the men participating regard this young 'boy' as being too 'green' to enter. She surprises them with her horsemanship and earns one hundred pounds and a new horse to train – Snow King. The family fortunes seem to have changed, but inevitably there are still further hurdles to encounter, and one proves almost insurmountable. Flinty feels very isolated on the farm with two children to care for, before companionship comes from a surprising quarter. One evening down by the nearby rock, she meets Nicholas, a double amputee, and they begin to meet regularly. Much to her surprise though she discovers that Nicholas's injury is not from WWI, but that he is a Vietnam War veteran, living in 1969, and staying nearby to assist in his recuperation! These two 'ghosts' have much to learn from each other, and it is this strand in the narrative which lies at its heart. For history is not a series of unrelated events; all are connected and history repeats itself over and over again. Flinty gains a deeper understanding of what her brothers and Sandy have been through and is able to offer sanguine advice to Nicholas as well. So this novel is about the legacy of war and how veterans and their families survive during and after a conflict.

WWI was a huge shock to generations of men and women in Australia, who struggled to adjust to the death of so many, and to the return of psychologically wounded and damaged men. It also robbed a whole generation of women of marriageable partners. And it robbed the nation of men and women fit and able to carry on the work so proudly imagined by Federation. Nurse Burrows has had experiences on the war front, similar to those of Rose in the second book in the series, and has become a singularly independent woman as a result. Flinty admires women like her, but she also reveres the stay-at-home mothers like Mrs Mack who have had to endure so much in order to keep their lives and those of the men they love, on track.

This is the second title in a planned series 'The Matilda Saga,' The first being *A Waltz for Matilda* (1892–1915). *The Girl From Snowy River* will be followed by another three sequels explained in the back of this book. The characters of *A Waltz for Matilda* return briefly in this one – Matilda and Thomas O'Halloran of Drinkwater Station (p 75) – and later Andy is

offered a job with them. This novel too is seen through the symbolic narrative prism of another of A.B. (Banjo) Paterson's much loved poem *The Man from Snowy River*, and is also connected to that work, because Flinty learns that future generations will know her as 'The Girl From Snowy River'.

The Girl from Snowy River shares similarities with *A Waltz for Matilda* in that both explore themes which have forged our nation – the philosophical questions of ownership and use of the land, about social justice, women's rights, the responsibility of governments, the myths which form nationhood, racism and prejudice, the sustaining power of Indigenous beliefs, and the efficacy of war. All of these issues come together when Flinty accepts the help of the Clancys and also realises that she is bonded to this place in some fundamental way. It is about a strong young woman who survives major challenges, and some unspeakable tragedies. It is also a story of love – of Flinty's yearning for Sandy and her love for Nicholas, and about how she becomes a woman. It's about the power of storytelling and writing too (p 224), in how Flinty encourages Kirsty to learn by telling her the Story of Mountain King. It's a moving and sweeping narrative about another remarkable young woman's strength and resilience, and her fierce tenacity and will to survive. 'The land has its seasons, and so do people. We've had the season of war. Now, finally, it is as though we are getting our season of peace. It is blossom time at last, and the season of fruit to come.' (p 312)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jackie French is a multiple award-winning author who deals with a very wide-range of topics. Of her books she says on her website that:

There were over 140 at last count, slightly more than we have varieties of apples. If something is worth doing you may as well go heart and soul and boot leather ... I write for kids and adults, fiction, history, gardening, pests control, chooks and some that must be a nightmare for book shops to work out what genre they are. Have a look at 'which book?' for a probably not quite up to date list of what is where and for whom.

Her websites offers further detailed and fascinating insights into her life and work.

www.jackiefrench.com.au

AUTHOR INSPIRATION

The Girl From Snowy River

I fell in love with 'Clancy of the Overflow' when I was seven years old. But when I moved to the bush, and met the women of the land – women like a ninety year old neighbour who rode in a white lace blouse and tartan skirt and never opened a gate if it could be jumped over – I wondered why the bush poets had made all their women just wives and mothers, sweethearts who 'wait by the sliprails for you' or the sad, beaten mother of 'The Drover's Wife'.

The women I knew drove their cattle from Queensland to Adelaide, as their mothers and grandmothers and great grandmothers had done. Just say the name 'Nancy of the Overflow' and you can see her, in her battered hat along the gum trees. She'll ride as hard, and far, as any man – and make the damper at the end of the day, too. It'll be a good one.

And what of 'The Man from Snowy River'? I loved that poem, as well. But no one who loves horses would ever 'race them down the mountain like a torrent down its bed', not when the 'hidden ground was full of wombat holes, and any slip was death.'

Was Paterson's poem based on a real ride, just as 'Waltzing Matilda' was based on a tragedy by a billabong?

It was. But Paterson changed that story, too. On that real ride the young man rode his horse to death. When 'the stockmen tell the story of that ride' it was a cautionary tale. A willing horse will force itself till its legs or heart breaks, for the rider it loves. You do not ask that of your horse.

The Girl from Snowy River also continues the story of Australia begun in *A Waltz for Matilda*. The new nation has been tested by war. It is over, but you never do leave the past behind.

My father-in-law fought at Gallipoli. Like most of his generation, he never spoke of what he had endured, though his lingering horror almost destroyed his family. Boys I knew marched off to Vietnam. But when they returned, few wanted to listen. Those two experiences, the men and wars divided by fifty years, were the basis for Flinty McAlpine's meeting with the crippled soldier from 1969. She needs to listen, and he to talk. Both need outsiders to be able to see their worlds clearly. Together they will create futures for each other.

And once again, this is a love story to the land. *A Waltz for Matilda* is set on the plains. *The Girl from Snowy River* is set in the mountains. Both are part of the land where I live, a valley deep in a flat tableland, surrounded by mountains that is the core of my life and my writing. Each book in this series will show another side of this land. Book Five will take you to its secret heart.

CHARACTERS

- **The Significance of Character:** Characters are the heart of any narrative, the catalysts for action, and the central core around which all other narrative aspects must revolve and work. In this work there are several major characters (some of whom figure briefly in the action) and a cast of minor ones.

Discussion Point: Apart from Flinty, which character did you consider to be central to the novel's plot and themes, and why?

- **Major Characters:**

Felicity (Flinty) McAlpine is a loving, caring, and fiercely independent teenager, a great horsewoman, a resourceful housekeeper and later a successful writer; **Andy**, Flinty's brother, is restless and keen to escape the memories of war and their home; her younger brother **Joey** is clever and very curious about the world; her younger sister **Kirsty** is, despite being only eight years old, already in love with fashion and the idea of being a 'lady'; her friend **Sandy Mack** is a kind and thoughtful man; his mother **Mrs Mack** is a stalwart woman of the country who is full of wisdom and is endlessly resourceful and supportive; **Nicholas**, a double-amputee befriended by Flinty, who turns out to be a Vietnam veteran.

Discussion Point: Which of the main characters did you find most appealing, and why?

- **Minor Characters:** Her **father** features only briefly in flashbacks but we learn that he was damaged by war service in India and that he and her **mother** were real country people who have instilled strong values in their children; **Dusty Jim** is a local, often drunk rouseabout who says some suggestive and surprisingly wise things on occasion; **Dr Sparrow** is a drunken doctor who fails to respond adequately to Flinty's injury; **The Clancys** are drovers who befriend and help Flinty when she's ill; local teacher **Mr Ross** is a lover of literature; **Sister Gwendalyn Burrows** is the nurse who was engaged to Sandy's elder brother Rick, who also died in the war; **Matilda and Thomas O'Halloran** are the owners of Drinkwater Station and main characters in the first novel; **Bertie Morris** is the damaged fellow soldier and friend of Jeff.

Discussion Point: Is there a minor character who might have played a larger part? Why would you have liked to have seen more of this character?

- **Character Arcs** are the curve on which key events show how a character grows or develops in response to events and to interactions with other characters in the novel.

Activity: Choose a character and trace an arc on which key events indicate some aspect of their personality or change in their behaviour (e.g. Sandy has to learn to trust again and to put his war experiences behind him; Kirsty has to learn new skills after Flinty has her accident).

THEMES

World War One and its Aftermath

- The action in this novel takes place after WWI.

Discussion Point: What commentary does *The Girl from Snowy River* make about WWI?

- Many little known facts about WWI are now being explored in fiction and non-fiction. Flinty has only Empress her horse left of all the horses her father once ran on their property. After war broke out the government requested they be donated to the war effort, but when war ended they weren't sent home; most died in far flung places such as Egypt.

Activity: Read Pamela Rushby's recent novel *The Horses Didn't Come Home* (HarperCollinsPublishers, 2012) about the role played by Australian horses at Beersheba in the Sinai Desert in 1917. Read it and other information about this topic.

- Visit the website for 'Shell-Shocked: Australia After Armistice': this exhibition was curated by the National Archives of Australia in 2009 and is touring the country.

www.naa.gov.au/visit-us/exhibitions/shell-shocked.aspx

Activity: Have students access some of the educational materials (and view the exhibition if possible).

- Men were recruited by patriotic marches described by Jackie French in her notes at the back of this book (pp 334-336).

Discussion Point: Jackie French speaks in these notes of the high level of mortality and terrible casualties amongst one such group known as 'The Men From Snowy River March'.

Discussion Point: How unethical was it of government to encourage such young men to enlist in this sort of persuasive fashion? Read some of the first person accounts on the Australian War Memorial site to gain an inkling into the attitudes of these very young soldiers. 'First World War Diaries'

www.awm.gov.au/collection/records/awm4/

- Soldiers were often sent into battle with little or no understanding of the terrain, or of the cultures they would be fighting against. Girls and women like Flinty, left at home, had even less idea of where their loved ones were.

She hadn't known there were rice paddies in France or Flanders. Dad had the paper delivered with the mail, once a week, so he could put little flags on the big map in the kitchen that showed the battlefields and Mum would know who had lost someone and when to bake a cake for the memorial. But the newspapers just gave names and places, not what the land was like. (pp 29-30)

(This is the moment we as the reader realise that the man in the bathchair with metal wheels is not talking about WWI; he's a veteran of the Vietnam War.)

Discussion Point: How different/similar were Nicholas's experiences of being sent overseas to a foreign country, to Andy's?

- Men who returned from war often don't speak about their experiences due to the pain of that remembrance. 'It's bad enough that we had to see it, day after day, year after year, without bringing it home for all you too. You and your questions —' (p 21) Flinty is desperate to find out how the war was for her brothers but when she hears from Nicholas it gives her insights into why her brothers and Sandy never talked about it.

Tens of thousands killed in a day. They had new weapons — machine guns and tanks and planes — but the commanders were still trying to fight the old way. I suppose it's pretty crook if being in a muddy trench with rats and the dead around you is the good bit, better than being ordered over the top to fight. (p 59)

Discussion Point: What impressions of the battlefield does this novel convey to you as a reader?

- Veterans' rights were not well looked after, subsequent to WWI. The novel shows how many returned soldiers were left virtually homeless and had to take to the road in order to survive.

Activity: Research this topic in relation to how the government 'provided' for returned soldiers with schemes such as Soldiers' Settlements and dole schemes.

- WWI deprived the country of both people and resources.

'It's not just the floodgates, Sis. The land's been starved of men for too long. The Browns' hayshed is leaning so far it'll go in the next big wind. All the best horses have gone. Most that are left are either too old or too young.' (p 269)

Discussion Point: WWI left a country decimated in many ways. Discuss.

Racism and Prejudice

- In post WWI Australia, Aboriginal people still suffered prejudice at the hands of white Australia despite the fact that many had worked and fought side by side with white Australians since their arrival on our shores.

Oh. Stockmen might accept Mrs Clancy out droving, but even those who had eaten her roast ducks around a campfire wouldn't ask a native — man, boy or woman — into their homes, to sit with their wives and family (p 279).

Jackie French writes in her Author's Note that Mrs Clancy is typical of what were known as 'The drovers' boys': 'an aboriginal wife who could not be acknowledged, but who would be a partner for life on the road and at home.'

Read about this practice 'Australian Folklore'

<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-folklore>

You can also listen to Ted Egan's popular 1981 song about this practice which is also often sung by John Williamson. Ted Egan sings 'The Drover's Boy'

www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZV2eoULEgw

The words were later made into a picture book illustrated by Robert Ingpen (Lothian, 1997). The song also inspired painter Bob Marchant to create a monumental series of 14 works in 1994.

Discussion Point: Discuss with students what such subterfuge must have meant for the drovers and their Aboriginal wives and offspring.

- War created prejudice against perceived 'enemies' as well. 'The Greens had been the Grünbergs till the war, but no one in the valley remarked on their sudden change of name when Germany became the enemy.' (p 19) 'Flinty remembered Mum talking about Mrs Grünberg's 'German apple cake' before the war. The cake had lost the German part of its name at the same time the Grünbergs became the Greens.' (p 197)

Discussion Point: How much did you know about such racial prejudice during the war? Read too about the internment of people during WWI.

- There are some references to Indigenous beliefs in the text, for example, Mrs Clancy's bush medicine which helps to cure Flinty and get her back on her feet.

Discussion Point: What have you read of such beliefs or skills? How would such knowledge challenge or confront those who are prejudiced?

Social Conditions

- Universal education hadn't been achieved in Australia by this time. Children were often forced to leave school and to work on the family farm as Flinty is, and later Joey and Kirsty are as well.

Discussion Point: What changed this economic and social situation? How did society change from Flinty's time to Nicholas's?

- Public Health was tenuously catered for as well. Flinty's parents die of illnesses which might have been prevented or treated today. Flinty nearly ends up crippled due to an ineffective doctor and a lack of understanding of back injuries and their treatment.

Activity: Read more about public health in this era. Read Kerry Greenwood's *A Different Sort of Real: the Diary of Charlotte Mackenzie Melbourne 1918-19* (Scholastic, 2001) about the influenza epidemic of the time as background reading and compare it to the situation described in this novel as well.

- Working Conditions were improving due to the growing recognition of workers' rights, through developments such as unionisation, but workers still struggled to own property or to bring up their families on their minimal wages.

Activity: What could the average worker expect to earn in 1919?

- Living conditions were frugal and set to suffer more with the great Depression at the end of the decade. Families were frugal — they mended clothes; they used up the family roast by making fritters or sandwiches or bubble and squeak.

Activity: Research some of the cost saving exercises and frugal cookery methods which were practised at that time.

Land Ownership and Animal Management

- Andy talks about how the land has been degraded during the war with little attention to management, and how rabbits and foxes have taken over on their farm.

Discussion Point: How important is land management? Do human beings credit themselves with too much, or too little influence over the land?

- The flood which Flinty narrowly averts from destroying half the valley is a natural disaster. Decades later the Snowy Mountains River Scheme harnessed the waters from this great River Eucumbene and many of the small holdings have since disappeared.

Discussion Point: Read more about the history of the Snowy River area and how it has changed since Flinty's time. 'It always changes, this land.' (p 97)

Discussion Point: Discuss this statement in terms of the current debate on climate change.

- Animals and their treatment is an important topic in this novel.

Well, he did that. He did something else as well. That boy rode his horse to death. Oh, he headed off the brumbies all right. The colt from Old Regret went back where he belonged. But I saw the mount break his heart trying to do what his rider wanted. He just went down, the young man tumbling after him. The boy was all right. (p 97)

Discussion Point: This quotation refers to the way *The Man from Snowy River* rode his colt. Read more about horse training and riding and discuss some of the concepts in relation to what happens in *The Girl from Snowy River*. For example, in desperation, Flinty has to push Snow King to his limits in order to warn the valley of the impending flood.

- This book is something of a tribute to the natural beauty and assets of this region. Descriptions are full of references to the local flora and fauna and in her Author's Note Jackie French refers to some of the native plants mentioned (pp 339-340).

Activity: To make this setting more vivid, students might like to investigate online some of these plants; to seek out images of them and read about some of their properties.

- This novel is a hymn of praise, in particular, to the beauty of the mountains, as the earlier novel was a tribute to the plains.

'I think you'll walk again,' she said quietly. 'And how do you know that?' 'Because you're here, up in the mountains. A man who won't ever walk again doesn't go to mountains. He stays on flat land, where he won't be tempted to climb up into the trees, up to the snow line. Every time you see an eagle you'll think, I can't fly, but maybe I can walk. And that's how it begins.' (p 62)

Discussion Point: Flinty's love for this country is one of the major themes in this book. Discuss.

Women's History and Rights

- Jackie French writes in her notes:

Women were among Australia's earliest settlers, farmers and explorers. Australia's first professional shearers were women from what is now Germany brought to teach men the craft. You will find few mentions of them though... Women's voices from our history mostly survive in their letters and diaries. Men's accounts were more likely to be published at the time. The Matilda Saga is written to try to change that perception.' (p 337)

Discussion Point: In what particular ways does the novel address this topic?

- This novel shows how much fell on women's shoulders while men were away at war. It was a time of great social change and of a growing recognition of women's right to education and recognition. Women also played an important role on the battlefield as nurses and assistants.

Activity: Research some of the changes during this period. What happened to women when the men returned home? Did they continue to assume the power they'd had during the war?

- Flinty not only runs the household but also manages the farm.

Discussion Point: What might you have done in Flinty's position? Would you have any of the skills necessary to survive in this situation?

- Flinty is frustrated that she has less power in this society. She and Kirsty are not expected to need education and are expected to marry and become glorified housekeepers.

Discussion Point: Flinty is expected to be able to cook, darn, clean, run a farm, and yet is not able to make decisions about her own life. What examples of women being treated as 'lesser' individuals did you discover in this book? How have things changed for women since Flinty's time?

- Did you know that women in Australia achieved the vote before many women in other countries?

Activity: Read about the activities of the Women's Temperance and Suffrage League. Discuss the history of the emancipation movement.

- Flinty writes as an old woman that 'The life I've lived in the past sixty years has been built on the achievements of those strong women of my youth.' (p 255)

Discussion Point: The women she knew as a girl were largely wives and housekeepers, and yet Flinty recognised superior qualities in them. Discuss the role of the wife and housekeeper today. How does society treat the woman who chooses to stay at home with her children?

KEY QUOTES

The following quotes relate to some of the **Themes** above. You might like to present any one of them (or two related quotes) to your students as a catalyst for further discussion, or as the subject of an essay outlining how the quote reflects a theme which is central to this novel:

<p>'The men who'd marched away weren't the only ones who'd suffered. She'd lost a brother at Bullecourt, Mum to heartbreak, Dad to the influenza brought back by the soldiers. Her older brother was off with cattle, fleeing his memories. The boy she loved had come back a man she hardly knew. I may not have lost my legs, she thought, but I've lost those I love forever.'</p> <p>(p 4)</p>	<p>'This is still the world of war, she thought, even here, despite the generous plenty of the Macks' kitchen and the full table. But outside there were wombat holes in fences left unrepaired while so many men were at the war, the plagues of rabbit, with none to shoot or trap them, and no horses since the army took them all. It was as though the families in the valley struggled to be free, to make their lives again. But the war wouldn't be left behind.'</p> <p>(pp 15-6)</p>
<p>'Mrs Clancy rode with her man, even if she had to be disguised as a drover's boy to do it. And there was Miss Matilda down at Drinkwater, running the biggest property in the district, and all the wives and daughters in the war who had also run farms with their men gone. Maybe the world is full of women who do things, she thought, but they're women men don't see, don't write about.'</p> <p>(p 260)</p>	<p>'What was life like in the future? In the past fifty years they'd had the Great War and the Boer Wars, as well as the battles on the North-West Frontier in India, where Dad had served. Queen Victoria had died and bicycles had been invented ... oh, and motorcars and wireless sets, though she hadn't seen either yet. Would as much happen in the next fifty years?'</p> <p>(p 42)</p>
<p>'If you didn't talk about something you didn't have to defend it. It just ... was ... like the mountains, like the snow. The Clancys' marriage was a partnership so solid it didn't need a house and wedding ring to make it real. Mrs Clancy's disguise meant the white man could pretend — even to themselves perhaps — that the person they rode with and respected was a 'boy' not a wife. At another time, or another place in town, or even their homes — they might think differently. Not here.'</p> <p>(p 95)</p>	<p>'It's not just that. It's ... it's the first thing I've ever done on my own. Not just carried on doing the things that have to be done. And it was fun,' she added honestly. 'Not having to put dinner on and make the bread, just being out there finding what was over the next ridge and the next, and the dew on my face when I woke up each morning.'</p> <p>(pp 122-3)</p>

<p>‘But sixty thousand Australian men had died in the five years of war, and more than twice that number would never quite recover from their wounds. How many young women would never marry now? She didn’t want to think about it. Didn’t want to think about marriage at all.’ (p 130)</p>	<p>‘Maybe they’ve healed me a bit then. Maybe you’ve healed me too, and the people here. I think, sometimes, when things are bad, you feel like you are the only person in the world. You shut out everything else because your pain is all that you can deal with. But then I met you. Suddenly I wasn’t unique anymore.’ (p 150)</p>
<p>‘I want you to write to your brother and tell him that life goes on, that there’s only one thing we can do for someone who’s died — even thousands of someones — and that is to keep on going. Life should be good — life should be very, very good — and the only duty we have to the dead is to make it good, for ourselves and other people.’ (pp 155-6)</p>	<p>‘It would be different if we could have had a proper funeral, not just a memorial service, given him a grave down in the valley in the churchyard, with his stockwhip and hat on the coffin just like they did when Granddad Mack died.’ (pp 157-8)</p>
<p>‘Sister Burrows met Flinty’s eyes. ‘We were all just there,’ she said quietly. ‘We did our best, and if it wasn’t good enough ...’ her mouth twisted in an almost smile ‘... if we were lucky we learned to forgive ourselves.’ (p 248)</p>	<p>‘But all at once she realised that the brother she’d known never had come back from the war. This man needed a new challenge, needed a place where memories wouldn’t bite him, needed to forge a life of his own.’ (p 273)</p>

CURRICULUM TOPICS

Language and Literacy

- ***Colloquialisms of the era give a tangible sense of the times.***

Activity: Make a list of all the uncommon words or expressions and try to guess their meaning from the context in which they appear. Then check their meanings in a dictionary. Which other expressions do you know which date from an earlier era and are not used now?

- ***This novel is a work of Historical Fiction or Faction*** — a genre which relies on the author weaving together fact and fiction seamlessly. In this novel the experiences of people after WWI are juxtaposed against the literary experiences expressed in ballads such as *The Man From Snowy River*. Jackie French draws on the location of the Snowy Mountains but creates an imaginary farm for the McAlpine family.

Discussion Point: How much did you recognise from the history you have read? What was similar and what was different to actual events or people? Talk about the writing of historical fiction with your students, with reference to some of the articles on writing such fiction in the **Bibliography** below.

- ***Narrative Structure*** — The novel follows a chronological structure 1919-26. However it does include ‘flashbacks’ to incidents in the past leading up to and during the war which are significant in the background or framing narrative. It also contains the future in the experiences of Nicholas in 1969.

Activity: Create a timeline of all the incidents referred to in the book.

- ***Narrative Perspective*** —The work is written in third person from Flinty’s perspective but also contains first person excerpts from her diary.

Discussion Point: What function do the diary entries play? How do they enhance or enrich the text? Do they provide information which otherwise couldn’t be conveyed to the reader?

- ***Use of Literary Devices such as Simile and Metaphor*** — ‘Most days the fog drifted down from the gullies higher up, like icing sugar sprinkled on a sponge cake. Other times a saucer of mist, looking as solid as white sauce on a dish of cauliflower, sat on the Rock between Rock Farm and the valley below.’(p 2)

Activity: Locate other examples of such literary language and discuss their meaning and effect.

- ***Literary References*** — The book obviously refers to *The Man from Snowy River* by A.B. (Banjo) Paterson and his other iconic poem *Clancy of the Overflow*. ‘You don’t understand,’ he said earnestly. ‘This is a special round-up. Back in ’15 Miss Matilda bought this stallion, Repentance. Its sire was Lament, out of Old Regret ...’ ‘It’s that

poem, isn't it?' she said tiredly. 'The one Dad used to read to us?' Joey gave a cautious grin. 'But the man from Snowy River let the pony have his head. And he swung his stockwhip round and gave a cheer ...' 'And he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down its bed,' chanted Kirsty. 'While the others stood and watched in very fear.' (p 47) It also references Henry Lawson's *Our Andy's Gone With Cattle*: 'Andy had sounded like that the day he'd left them to go droving too, his eyes shadowed as though they still saw the mud of France and not the twisted shapes of snow gums.'(p 3) Jackie French explains in her Author's Note (pp 321-33) that she has referred to many poems in this book, including lesser known busy poetry and poets.

Discussion Point: What function do the literary quotations play?

Activity: Students may wish to study a unit on busy poetry and visit websites for information. e.g. 'Bush Ballads' *Australian Poetry Library*
www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poems-poetic-form/bush-ballads

- ***The Literary Trope of the Time Slip or a Ghost visiting another time, is used in this novel symbolically to explore wider issues*** — Flinty writes: 'I'd be a ghost, she thought, away from my real place like Nicholas was away from his own time.' (p 272) She is speaking here of how she'd feel if she moved away from the Snowy Mountains. But Nicholas himself is a reminder that war repeats itself and that future soldiers are going to experience the same things which her brothers and friend Sandy did.

Discussion Point: Discuss with students the role of the 'ghost' in this novel.

- ***The Cover of a book is an ideogram for the contents and a marketing tool as well.***

Activity: Create a new cover for the work drawing on either theme or incident to create the image. Use techniques such as collage. Write a blurb for the back cover of the book as well.

SOSE

- ***Whose History?*** —There are as many versions of history as the **Themes** above would suggest. In the **Bibliography** below there are websites tracing Australian history from Indigenous and women's perspectives as well as from the Eurocentric views which often feature in such historical overviews. How different is the ordinary soldier's view of a battle to that of his commanding officer for example? Read first person accounts and diaries as an introduction to this subject.

Activity: Choose an incident referred to in the novel and then write a diary entry as if the story is being told by Joey or Andy and not Flinty.

- ***Social Class*** —Initially Australia was a country inhabited by Aboriginal people, then convicts, officers, explorers, surveyors, and later free settlers, and new immigrants. Divisions between these various groups arose based on wealth, power, race and

religion. Many became socially 'upwardly mobile' in this new colony (as evinced by Miss Matilda) where the past could be erased or at least forgotten. Flinty's family are impoverished having survived the shortages of wartime, and living on infertile land without men to support them. Later, though, Flinty makes money as a writer and presumably lives quite a comfortable life; her brother Joey goes to university and her brother Andy becomes a foreman on Drinkwater Station.

Discussion Point: Does this novel present Australia as an upwardly mobile society?

- **Values** — This novel (like others in the series), is about 'character' and the qualities necessary to live a meaningful or value-laden existence. Discuss quotes in relation to such values, for example Flinty's ride in the brumby muster teaches her the value of caring for her horse, of not trying its strength too much. Or refer to the kindness of the O'Hallorans: 'But Flinty suspected that the man and woman in front of her would employ any deserving man in need even if they only had a halfpenny in their pockets.' (p 77)

Activity: Create a table and list some of the values demonstrated in any of the scenes or events in this book with a corresponding quote to illustrate it.

- **Individual/Community** — This novel (and series) constantly records the interplay between individual action and community responsibility. Flinty is resourceful and independent but before and after her accident it is only through the efforts of her neighbours that she really manages to keep the household together, a fact which Sister Burrows notices too.

Discussion Point: Invite students to consider how the characters in this novel play/or decline to play a role in their community.

FURTHER POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This novel is about a broken family and how Flinty, by force of will and hard work, keeps it together.

Discussion Point: Invite students to discuss the notion of family. Can a family without a parental figure still operate as a family? How does Flinty keep her family together?

2. Flinty doesn't want to leave her home, and yet Andy is all too happy to accept a job elsewhere. Joey is destined for university and Kirsty for a wealthy city life.

Discussion Point: How can the members of one family have such different attitudes to life? What does this say about the arguments between 'nature or nurture' being most influential in a person's make-up?

3. This novel describes the experiences of rural WWI veterans.

Discussion Point: How might experiences have differed in the city?

4. When Flinty learns from Sister Burrows that Sandy had won war medals she realises that many war veterans came home not with a sense of pride but with a deep sense of guilt or self-loathing.

Discussion Point: How does Flinty's accident change things for Sandy?

5. 'When the newspaper arrives from down south it brings a hint of the winds of change flying through the country by 1920: 'But it still spoke to them of the world 'down there': short skirts and a campaign to make women's wages in the public service four-fifths of men's for the same job, instead of less than half; Australian Bert Hinkler flying non-stop from London to Turin trying to be the first to fly the almost impossible distance from London to Australia. 'Imagine a plane flying over us,' said Kirsty dreamily. 'He'd never get it over the mountains,' said Flinty.' (pp 225-6)

Discussion Point: Have students read this passage and then discuss the changes mentioned. Research the further changes which occurred in post WWI Australia.

6. World War One and the recruitment drives for soldiers are illustrated by the story of how two brothers enlisted along with their neighbour Sandy Mack. Read about the enlistment of soldiers in WWI.

Discussion Point: Watch Peter Weir's classic film *Gallipoli* and discuss with students what it demonstrated about the relationship between Britain and Australia; between the foot soldiers and the commanders.

7. Flinty's family is decimated by WWI, as so many were. She loses a brother, her parents, and her brother's youth. She loses her youth as well.

Discussion Point: How did Australia cope with such losses? How did ordinary people bear up under the weight of so many losses without adequate social support?

8. Romance in this novel is tested. Sister Burrows has lost Rick Mack, the man she loved and she plans no further liaisons. Flinty is unsure of Sandy's feelings.

Discussion Point: What sort of challenges did war present to young lovers?

9. In *A Waltz for Matilda* many hardships were said to have contributed to later improvements in lifestyle and to organisations which championed progress. For example, 'the drought gave us Australia' (p 423).

Discussion Point: Could you say the same about the influence of floods on Australia?

10. What was the major idea that this novel conveyed to you as a reader?

NOTES ON THE TEXT

At the back of the book, there are extensive notes (pp 321-345) by the author Jackie French on many of the historical and cultural issues referred to in this text. This should be an invaluable resource to teachers in using the book, in conjunction with these notes, in the classroom.

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