



## Ned Kelly's Jerilderie Letter

Edited by Carole Wilkinson, illustrated by Dean Jones

True Tales series, black dog books

### Teacher Notes prepared by Carole Wilkinson

Readership: Upper primary, junior to mid secondary)

Genre: This is a real letter written by Ned Kelly, edited for a young audience by Carole Wilkinson

#### SYNOPSIS

Ned Kelly was hanged at the age of 26 for murder. He was a horse and cattle thief. And yet more than 120 years after his death he has become something of an Australian hero.

Ned didn't like the law. He wanted his own version of the law to rule in Victoria. He was sure that if people understood why he had turned to crime, they would support him. So he used the written word to make his story known.

Although Ned could read and write, he asked Joe Byrne to write a letter while he dictated. It became known as the Jerilderie

Letter. In the letter, Ned defended his actions, insulted the police and threatened anyone who tried to stand in his way.

Ned had a way with words and a vicious sense of humour. All his anger came pouring out — about his unfair jail sentences and the injustices his family had faced, especially the jailing of his mother. His hatred of the police was transformed into a torrent of sarcasm and insult.

When Ned had finished, Joe Byrne had written 56 pages.

Joe had neat handwriting, but he wasn't good at punctuation. The original letter is difficult to understand. It is a raving, rambling rant.

In this version of the Jerilderie Letter, Carole Wilkinson has put in some punctuation and tinkered with the spelling and grammar. She has put the events in chronological order and taken out some of the repetition and the asides where Ned strayed from the subject. Her aim was to make Ned's words clear without losing his wonderful turn of phrase, his unique style or his wicked sense of humour.

In *Ned Kelly's Jerilderie Letter*, we get a glimpse of the man beneath the armour — a man loyal to his family, but brutal to those who crossed him.

We don't have to guess what drove Ned to commit his crimes. We know. We can read it in his own words.

#### AUTHOR INSPIRATION

The Jerilderie Letter has been published before, but never in such a clear and readable way. Carole was motivated to make his words clear to anyone who wanted to read them—in this she was helping facilitate what Ned always wanted—that his words be read by the people.

#### EDITORIAL COMMENT

Ned Kelly's Jerilderie Letter is unique in that it's an edited version of The Jerilderie Letter, so the challenges of 'the writer' were very different to if they'd been writing fiction. Most of the book comprises the letter itself, but it also contains: an introduction, a few pages on what happened in Ned's life before he wrote the Jerilderie Letter, and another section on what happened to him after he wrote the letter, a cast of characters—so readers know who they are meeting in the letter—a map so they can follow





the wanderings of the Kelly Gang, a glossary, a timeline and a list of further resources. All of these different text types were necessary in order to contextualise the letter, both in the story of Ned's life, and in the era in which he lived.

#### QUESTIONS

1. Was Ned right to kill the police who were after him?
2. What if Ned's wish had come true and his letter had been published in the newspapers. Would you have been convinced that he was a good man?
3. If you had been alive at the time of Ned Kelly would you have signed the petition to save his life? What reasons do you have for your decision?
4. What is the difference between an outlaw and a terrorist?
5. Ned had a cheeky, tongue-in-cheek sense of humour. Can you find some examples of this in the Letter?
6. Penalties for young people who broke the law were much more severe in the 1800s than they are today. Do you think harsh punishment was an effective way to stop young people breaking the law?
7. Ned thought he was justified in breaking the law. Do you think that there are circumstances when it is okay to break the law?
8. At the end of the Letter, Ned threatens to kill any policemen who don't surrender to him. He also announces that all his enemies have to give money to charity and leave Victoria. Do you think he really believed these people would abide by his demands?
9. If you were a friend of Ned's, what arguments would you use to try and persuade him not to attack the police?
10. Ned is really proposing his own version of the law. What would happen if everyone was able to write their own laws?

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carole Wilkinson is an award-winning author of books for children. She has a longstanding fascination with dragons and is interested in the history of everything. Carole is a meticulous researcher who finds it difficult to stop researching and begin writing. She once searched for weeks to find out whether there were daffodils in Han Dynasty China. Carole is married, has a daughter, and lives in inner-city Melbourne.

#### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Dean Jones is an up-and-coming illustrator. Ned Kelly's *Jerilderie Letter* is his first book. He works digitally to create his illustrations—all of the artwork was computer-generated. But he would take photographs of to assist him in his work. For example, on page 50, he photographed a friend lying down to help him draw Kennedy.

Dean researched extensively to get the right feel for the illustrations. He found out what clothes people wore back then, how their hair was cut, how they trimmed their beards. His illustrations are very edgy and stylized.