



## Jackie French

Short-listed for 2008 CBCA Book of the Year: Older Readers

### JACKIE TALKS TO BOOK CLUB...

#### What is *A Rose for the Anzac Boys* about?

It is 1915. War is being fought on a horrific scale in the trenches of France but it might as well be a world away from sixteen-year-old Midge Macpherson who is at a school in England learning to be a young lady. But the war is coming closer: Midge's brothers are in the army and her twin, Tim, is listed as 'missing' in the devastating defeat of the ANZAC force at Gallipoli.

Desperate to do their bit—and to avoid the boredom of school and the restrictions of society—Midge and her friends Ethel and Anne start a canteen in France, caring for the endless flow of wounded soldiers returning from the front. Midge, recruited by the over-stretched ambulance service, is thrust into scenes of carnage and courage she could never have imagined.

#### You have said that this was a very difficult book to write. Why was it so hard?

This book is the first one where I have thought, I don't know if I should keep writing this and I don't know if anyone should read it.

This is a grim book. It is based on letters and diaries that make even grimmer reading. Much of the time, reading and writing, I was in tears, hearing the voices of so long ago. Finally, I kept writing.

We need to know the past to understand today. We need to hear those voices, no matter how terrible their stories—perhaps especially when the stories are so hard to bear.

#### How do you feel about war?

War is perhaps humanity's craziest invention. But it is also in war—in any adversity—that humans sometimes show their greatest courage, loyalty and love. It is important, I think, to understand the difference between glorifying war and celebrating the triumphs of the human spirit.

And I do believe there are many times when you need to fight. I don't think any war has ever achieved what it was started for. But I can think of many wars where it was necessary to join a fight that someone else began, to defend a country or a cause, to protect people that others were persecuting, to establish law so there could be peace.

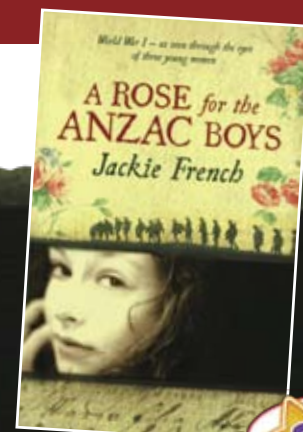


Jackie French's writing career spans 17 years, 48 wombats, 132 books, 23 languages and over 50 awards in Australia and overseas!

Jackie and her husband Bryan live in the Araluen Valley in New South Wales. They built their own stone house, nestled amongst four hectares of rambling gardens and bush. Jackie is an enthusiastic gardener: she grows around 800 fruit trees, many kinds of bush tucker and hundreds of herbs.

#### Jackie's advice to younger writers:

*No matter how good your writing style, you must write about something you're passionate about, whether it's hamburgers or history. Each book should be a small part of your heart and soul, plus about two litres of life's blood!*



Cover artwork adapted from the original by Gayna Murphy, courtesy Penguin Books.