

A Rose for the Anzac Boys

Jackie French



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Teaching notes written by Christine Sarandis

About the novel

The 'War to end all Wars', as seen through the eyes of three young women

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 New Zealander Midge Macpherson, at 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 forces at Gallipoli.

Desperate to do their bit and 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 carnage and scenes of courage she could never have imagined. And when the war is over, all three girls -- and their Anzac boys as well -- discover that even going 'home' can be both strange and wonderful.

Exhaustively researched but written with the lightest of touches, this is Jackie French at her very best.

Ages 12+

Author biography

Jackie French is a full-time, multi-award-winning writer who lives near Braidwood in the Araluen Valley, NSW. In 2000, *Hitler's Daughter* was awarded the CBC Younger Readers' Award. *To the Moon and Back* won the Eve Pownall Award in 2005. *Macbeth and Son* and *Josephine Wants to Dance* were both shortlisted for the 2007 CBC Awards, and her books *Pharaoh* and *The Shaggy Gully Times* have both been shortlisted in 2008. Released this month, *A Rose for the Anzac Boys* is her most recent work.

Note for teachers

Sensitivity may be required with some children as there are a number of scenes they might find disturbing. Predominantly, these include fairly graphic descriptions of war injuries.

Pre-reading activities

Discuss:

- what the students know about the Anzacs
- the many different roles of men and women in war
- what life must have been like at home for families whose relatives and friends were fighting or supporting the war effort
- the maps at the front of the book
- the Dedication and Acknowledgments and the author's reasons for writing "a difficult book...". (Refer to this again after completing the novel and compare the students' comments with their earlier opinions).

Central Characters

Midge, Tim and Dougie McPherson, Anne, Ethel, Aunt Lallie, Lachie, Harry, Pa

Themes

Themes in the novel include: war, loss, loneliness, hopelessness, resilience, determination, duty, comradeship, frustration, duty, death, desperation, and the capacity to rise above appallingly difficult conditions.

All of these themes can be researched and discussed either in relation to the novel specifically or in a broader sense. They are further addressed through the chapter question notes and in the activity section at the end.

Chapter questions & activities

Lachlan, Biscuit Creek, Anzac Day, 1975

- What noticeable impact had the war had on Lachie's Pa?
- How had Lachie's Grandad avoided participation in WW II?
- Discuss how Lachie felt about pushing his Pa up the hill to the war memorial. (Write about an incident in which you felt similar emotions to Lachie.)
- Why did Pa specifically want Lachie to push him?
- Why do you think Pa might have chosen a rose from the tangle that grew along the fence, rather than one from a florist?
- How did Lachie interpret Pa's changing facial expressions when they arrived at the memorial?
- Name all the wars mentioned in this chapter?
- Discuss the following quotes:

Pa used his deafness like a weapon. p. 3

When Pa did speak, he either said no more than was necessary or else he spoke lots, like he'd been saving it up in the cupboard in his mind. p. 4

Chapter 1

- Summarise in point form, what you have learnt from reading Midge's letter to her teacher, Miss Davies.
- Describe Midge's impression of the future for her family after the war?
- Discuss Midge's changing emotions as she anticipated and then read Aunt Lallie's letter. Interpret her feelings after reading it and how this impacts on her previous excitement at the thought of reading Tim's letter?
- How did reading Tim's letter affect Midge and why do you think he felt compelled to include such grim details?
- Apart from mentioning the stench of dead bodies, Tim doesn't reveal his feelings. Discuss.
- According to Tim, what made life worthwhile?
- After reading the letters, describe Midge's frustration at "not doing enough" to help the war effort and how these feelings impact on her painful memories of the past?

Suddenly, it was all too much. When you were young, you were helpless, Midge thought. She'd been helpless when her mother had died, leaving her a tiny baby; helpless when diphtheria took her father, not even allowed to visit him in case she was infected; helpless when her older brother brought her across the worlds to an aunt and uncle she'd never met. And helpless when her twin brother followed everyone else to the war. Tim and Dougie were doing something. And she was just a problem to be shoved away at school. Pp. 22-23

- How were Midge and her friends contributing to the war effort and why were they unable to implement their more useful ideas?

Chapter 2

- After Miss Hollingsworth's devastating news, describe Midge's mixed emotions as she tried to make sense of the possibility that her twin brother, Tim, is dead?
- Read the following quote and discuss:

Inside, Midge felt cold, as though the snow on Big Jim mountain had seeped into her heart... But she refused to feel sorrow. She just felt empty, as though not feeling sad had used up all of her emotion.

p. 29

- What allowed Midge to hold out hope that Tim's death has been incorrectly reported?
- Describe Anne's idea and its potential to provide the girls with a more meaningful way of assisting the war effort? Does the idea seem realistic and achievable, and if so, why?

Chapter 3

- What was the central issue at the heart of Midge's letter to her aunt?
- Outline the reasons Midge used to convince her uncle and guardian to provide the permission she needed to set up the canteen in Calais?
- Compare the letter Michael wrote to his father with the contents of Tim's earlier letter to Midge. What sort of picture is being painted of the war on the frontline?

Chapter 4

- Describe the tone of Midge's letter to her aunt from her new location in France?
- Write an account of the girls' new daily routine.
- Read the following quote and comment on the reasons behind the changes Midge noticed in Ethel since they had first discussed travelling to France and setting up the canteen:

Ever since they'd left school, it was as though [Ethel] had found a new source of energy. She was like a steam engine, Midge thought with a private grin, as another train clattered into the station. p. 46

- Why was Midge surprised to find a girl driving a Red Cross truck and what did she find unusual about her?
- What news did Slogger Jackson bring to the girls at the canteen and how did this change impact on their experience?
- How did Midge gather the strength needed to cope with the seemingly endless stream of wounded soldiers arriving at the station?
- Which simple piece of useful advice did Slogger give Midge as she tried to come to terms with her growing shock?
- Translate some of the French phrases in this chapter and discuss.
- Why did Midge decide against writing to Aunt Lallie about her experiences at the canteen?

Chapter 5

- Choose one of the letters in this chapter and discuss what it reveals about its writer, their relationship with the letter's recipient and their immediate life circumstances.
- How did Midge meet Gordon Marks? Describe their conversation and give reasons you believe they were able to discuss their personal lives prior to the war. In what way did their discussion differ from their current everyday experience?

Chapter 6

- In this chapter, what do the letters between Midge and Gordon reveal about their need for friendship at a very difficult time?
- Why did Anne tell Midge:

Every day we're here I bless the war. I'm probably the only person in the war who does. P. 81

And then,

Don't mind me. You know, for the first time in my life I feel free. In all the months that I've been here, no one has known who I am ... well, cared, anyhow. You've no idea what it's like to have always been the Honourable Anne, to always have people's eyes on one. To know one has to behave impeccably, not let the side down, don't you know... It's going to be terribly hard to go back to normal life after this.

P. 82

- Instead of meeting Gordon at the station as planned, describe how Midge's day unfolded?
- What were some of the practical things Midge had learnt since she arrived in France?
- How did Midge deal with the news that Gordon was dead and for what was it that she grieved?
- After he told her about Gordon, why did Midge feel the inadequacy of what she was able to give Harry and how did she attempt to rectify this?
- According to Harry, how did he cope with the devastation of wartime life?
- What comfort did Midge and Harry find in talking to one another?

Chapter 7

- What did you learn about Harry in this chapter that throws light on the opening section of the novel, involving Lachie?
- How did Midge cope with the dreadful things she saw each day and from whom had she learnt this coping mechanism?
- Under what circumstances did Midge become the new temporary driver of the Red Cross van and what freed her to take on this role?

Chapter 8

- In her letter to Midge, what glimmer of hope did Aunt Lallie provide in relation to Tim?
- Why did Midge jump at the chance to drive the ambulance while Slogger was receiving treatment for her hands?
- Which advice did Nancy give Midge on her first night at the chateau?

Chapter 9

- What kind of image did Midge paint of the chateau in her letter to Harry, and what were her feelings about leaving it and her job as a driver, given Slogger's imminent return?
- Describe the events that led to Anne's injuries and consider Midge's thought and feelings after the accident?
- Why was it ironic that Anne sustained facial injuries?

Chapter 10

- Writing to Midge from her home in England, what did Anne have to say about her new life and the repercussions of her injuries upon her future?
- Read the following quote in which Midge contemplates leaving her job as an ambulance driver and discuss:
-

Each ambulance journey might be a short trip into to hell. But it was also a slap in the face for the devil. The ambulances and their drivers brought a glimpse of hope and comfort into a world of mud and death.
How could she ever have thought war was glorious back in those impossibly far off days at school, ... p. 129

- Why did Midge offer to drive Colonel Mannix down to Number 15 Casualty Station and how did she quickly come to despise him?
- Why was Midge deeply angered by the men's discussions as she drove them to the Casualty Station?
- Which decision did Midge make after leaving the hotel dining room and what were the consequences?

Chapter 11

- What is the tone of Harry's letter to Midge and how is his growing admiration and affection for her revealed?
- Upon arriving at the Casualty Station, that was Midge's impression of the first tent she entered and what role did she assume soon after? Why do you think Midge allowed herself to get into this situation?
- Describe the circumstances in which the Colonel died as well as Mr Finacre's attitude towards an accidental death such as this?
- How might Midge have felt about the Colonel's death, given their earlier encounter?
- What revived Midge from her trance after the Colonel's death?
- Which term did Aunt Lallie use to describe life in the Casualty Station? Which words would you have used having read about the conditions there?
- How was Midge able to consider each of the men in casualty as individuals and what made this preferable?

Chapter 12

- Despite her lack of nursing qualifications, why was Midge able to remain at the Casualty Station for an extended period?

Chapter 13

- Given the extremely difficult conditions, how do you imagine Midge was able to write with warmth and humour to her friend, Ethel?
- For Midge, what became part of the daily routine at the Casualty Station?
- Why was Midge surprised by the joy she felt at finding Harry had arrived at the Casualty Station? (Consider the discipline needed and the exhaustion caused by caring for injured and dying men each day, as well as following quote, in your answer):

She hurried down the tent towards him... She was surprised at her feeling of joy. It was just pleasure at seeing a familiar face, she told herself. p. 168

- How did Harry and Aunt Lallie contribute to a memorable birthday for Midge?
- After the rocket blast, explain why the German soldier felt compelled to apologise to Midge as she moved amongst the patients to reassure them?

- In Colonel Finacre's letter to his son, what reasons did he give for his participation in the war and what advice did he provide to the boy the would never see? Do you believe that Mr Finacre had written the letter himself? Give reasons for your answer.
- As they stood beside Mr Finacre's grave, what did Harry hope to achieve or provide for Midge by returning the photograph she had previously given him?

Chapter 14

- Find some brief quotes from this chapter that indicate the devastation of war from different perspectives - from those who fought and those who cared.
- How was Midge able to comfort the dying soldier and what message did her want her to convey to others? Do you think this is a worthwhile message? Give reasons for your answer.

Chapter 15

- In her letter to Harry, explain why Midge said and felt the following: *"When this is over, I'm going to find it so hard talking to the other girls I know at school, or friends at home. It's as though Anne and Ethel and I — and you, of course — are part of a world the people at home can never share or understand."* p. 197 (Compare this quote with Harry's sentiments in his letter to Midge in Chapter 16 – p. 205)
- Why was Midge's day with Cecilia and Eliza *"just what she needed after her weeks in the wards."*?

Chapter 16

- How did Midge feel about returning to the canteen after her experiences at the Casualty Station? Explain your answer.
- What was Ethel's greatest skill, and the thing she thrived on?
- Describe how Midge must have felt when she received the news that Dougie was severely injured?
- How did Midge comfort Dougie as he relived the nightmare in which he was injured?

Chapter 17

- In her letter to Anne, which symptoms amongst the injured soldiers did Midge describe?
- Why did Midge think Dougie might find *"... it easier to accept help from someone who had been damaged too."*? p. 227
- As she boarded the ship bound for home, why wouldn't Midge allow herself to think of Tim, Ethel, Harry and Anne?

- How did Midge feel after reading Harry's devastatingly honest letter?
- When she finally learnt that Tim was dead, describe Midge's feelings and her emotional reaction?
- Expand on the following quote to give your interpretation of Midge's meaning: "*One gone, one crippled. One who had to carry on.*"
- Describe Midge's speculation regarding her own future and that of Dougie and Harry as well?

Chapter 18

- In her letter to Ethel from Glen Donal, explain why Midge said: "*I felt a bit useless, to tell the truth, despite the heroic baking.*"? p. 239
- Describe the cause of Aunt Lallie's death, how Midge learnt of it and what her dying message to Midge had been?
- According to Anne, why didn't her new husband, Gavin, "*mind about [her] face.*"? p. 242 Explain how this might be important to her.
- Explain why Midge began to question her commitment to Glen Donal and her reasons for imagining a future beyond her home?
- What provided the impetus for Midge to visualize a different life for herself?

Chapter 19

- In her letter to Ethel, how did Midge justify her decision to visit Harry in Australia?
- Describe how Harry may have felt when he first saw Midge at Moura?

Lachlan, Biscuit Creek, Anzac Day 2007

- In this final section of the novel, describe how Lachie's life circumstances and choices link him with his ancestors.
- Given his own experiences as a soldier in Afghanistan, explain why this would enable him to identify with and increase his understanding of his great-grandfather, Harry Harrison?
- How differently might Lachie perceive Anzac Day in 1975 and 2007?

Post reading

- Discuss the timeframe of the novel
- Study the author's notes at the end of the novel and choose one of the topics from that section to research and write about in greater detail.

- Discuss the author's decision to write this book despite it being very difficult. Give an opinion on whether you believe she is right in her belief that: "*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.*" Give reasons for your answer.
- Have a class discussion on the historical fiction genre and its merit in giving an authenticity and realness to people and events of the past.
- Compile a list of the roles women had during WW1, including all those who were supporting the war, directly or otherwise.
- Discuss the potential difference of perspective between the dairies written by those who fought or supported the war effort, and the more official recorded history.
- Consider the author's information about the women of the WW1 era, their intimate involvement in the war under extremely difficult circumstances, the loss of a generation of their men, and how all these conditions contributed toward their determination to fight for a better world for themselves after the war. Research one of the causes that these women fought for, such as the right to a better education, social reform or meaningful work beyond their homes, and describe how those actions impacted on the lives of the next generation of women.

Assignment suggestions and activities

- Research WW I and write a project which includes a timeline of the events, the location of the war, who took part, how it began and ended and the repercussions for those who had fought and those who lost their loved ones.
- Find out about the significance of the rose as a symbol of war.
- Research the practice of letter censoring during the war.
- Midge and her friends are sixteen at the time of the war. Compare the lives and concerns of sixteen-year-olds then with that of sixteen-year-olds today.
- In Chapter 3, the use of dog hair to make pyjamas for the soldiers is mentioned. Research other inventive ways that those supporting the war effort used to assist the soldiers.
- Write a diary entry from Midge's point of view from the first day the wounded arrived at their canteen in France. Describe what she saw and how she felt both practically and emotionally.
- Write a character study of Midge, Ethel, Annie or a character of your choice. Include information about how they change throughout the novel and the varied reasons and incidents that forge those changes.
- Research and write a description of the war injuries caused by gases in WW1.

- Draw a picture of the Duchess as described to Harry by Midge in Chapter 9.
- Surprisingly, during periods of extreme hardship, people often find strength within themselves beyond their imagination and the capacity to do things they have never done before. Research and write a case study about a person in history who has overcome adversity to achieve great things personally or for others.
- Find out about “nerve cases” and share your findings with the class.
- Include the following quote in a piece of creative writing:
“Her heart clenched. She had planned so long for this moment. There he was, not her imagined Harry, but the real one. Had she created a dream hero, from memory or roses?”
- During WW1, letter writing was the most common form of correspondence available. Consider the wartime conditions and great distances mail needed to travel and the other associated problems with message being delayed or being lost altogether. Now compare this with the many forms of correspondence available today and outline their advantages and disadvantages as well as giving a comparison with the practice of traditional letter writing.
- Death of a twin – how might this be different to the loss of another sibling? Find out about the emotional links between twins and how one might feel at the loss of their fraternal or identical twin.
- Find out the meaning of *Armistice* and explain when this situation may occur during a war.
- Draw a family tree that includes the Harrison and McPherson families.
- Find out if you have any family members who have been soldiers or supported a war. Share your findings with the class.
- Study the roles available to women in the armed forces today and compare them with those in WW1.
- Knit a pair of socks or a scarf and think of the women who were often knitting each day during the war, while battling a thousand other physical and emotional demands.
- Find out about some of the women’s committees on the home front and how they contributed to the war effort.
- Gather information about the makeshift hospitals set up near the battlefields and describe the conditions that the sick and those who cared for them had to endure.
- Women on the home front often made fruit cakes to send to the soldiers. Use your own recipe or the one below to make a fruit cake to share with your friends. Alternatively, you might like to try the recipe for Anzac or Soldier’s Biscuits from the Author’s Notes section of the book.

EASY BOILED FRUIT CAKE

Ingredients

2 cups mixed fruit
1 cup brown sugar
1/4 lb butter
1 teaspoon bicarb soda
1 cup water
1/2 cup plain flour
1 1/2 cups self raising flour
2 eggs

Method

Place the fruit, sugar, butter, soda and water in a saucepan. Bring to the boil and simmer for 1 minute only. Remove from the stove and allow to cool. Then add both lots of flour and beaten eggs. Mix altogether well with a wooden spoon. Bake in a moderate oven for 1 hour in a greased 8 inch square cake tin.

Other historical novels by the author

Soldier on the Hill

The Goat Who Sailed the World

The Dog Who Loved A Queen

Pharaoh

They Came On Viking Ships

Valley of Gold

Hitler's Daughter

A War for Gentlemen

Tom Appleby Convict Boy

Macbeth and Son

Walking the Boundaries

Somewhere Around the Corner

Additional fiction exploring the theme of war

Parvana and Parvana's Journey by Deborah Ellis

Battle Order 204 by Christobel Mattingly

When I was a Soldier by Valerie Zenatti

War and Peace, A Collection of Classic Poetry and Prose by Kate Agnew

Black Water by David Metzenthen

How I Live Now by Meg Rosoff

The *Tomorrow* series by John Marsden

Private Peaceful by Michael Morpurgo

Boys of Blood & Bone by David Metzenthen

Lofty's Mission by Krista Bell

Memorial by Gary Crew

A different sort of real: the diary of Charlotte McKenzie, Melbourne 1918-1919 by Kerry Greenwood, (My story - series)

Heroes of Tobruk by David Mulligan

Useful Internet resources

<http://www.anzacsite.gov.au/>

<http://www.anzacsite.gov.au/6teaching/links.html>

<http://www.anzacday.org.au/history/ww1/homefront/women.html>

<http://culture.gov.au/articles/anzac/>

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/war/resources.html>

<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/cmis/eval/curriculum/pathfinders/anzac/index.htm>

http://www.dva.gov.au/sa_nt/commemoration/memorials/womensmem.htm

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armistice>

<http://www.anzacday.org.au/history/ww1/ww1-00.html>

<http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/ww1.htm>

Reviews of the novel

<http://www.aussiereviews.com/article2520.html>

<http://www.boomerangbooks.com/content/book-reviews/childrens-book-reviews/a-rose-for-the-anzac-boys-by-jackie-french.shtml>