

Independent scholar

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Five ANZAC books for children: making sense of war

Abstract:

The five books reviewed are all aimed at a young audience and all present aspects of Anzac Day – named after the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, who landed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, in World War I – in styles ranging from picture to reference books. All five contain themes of bravery and attempt to make sense of the experience of war through exploring commonalities such as family and the gamut of human emotions. One of the vehicles is the use of characters from various generations whether family (*Lest we forget*) or contrasting old age and young child (*Anzac Day parade*). Others (*Le Quesnoy* and *A nice day for a war*) use maps and official documents which make for interesting reading for older readers or those who might be reading aloud to the very young.

Biographical note:

Dr Catherine Wallace MBS, DipBus Admin, LTCL, BEd, DipTchg, TColl Dip, is a Hamilton-based writer, author, editor and reviewer who consults for industry and runs a small business. She has been a senior lecturer at Massey University's Palmerston North campus in a Department of Communication and Journalism in addition to teaching on the MBA programme, being a teaching fellow with Massey University's Graduate School of Business and a research associate with the New Zealand Centre for Small and Medium Enterprises Research. Her qualifications are in education, business, music and information engineering.

Keywords:

Children's literature – Creative writing – Anzac – War – New Zealand

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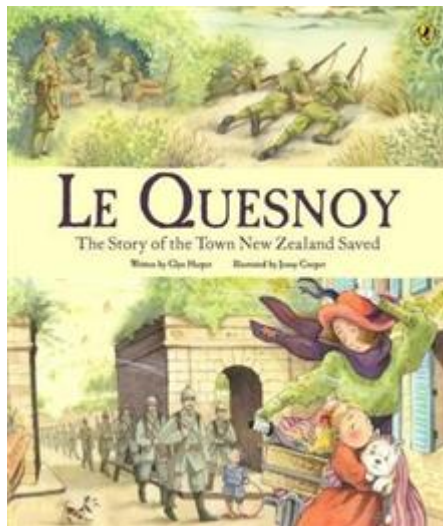
Le Quesnoy: The story of the town New Zealand saved

Glyn Harper (author), Jenny Cooper (illustrator)

Puffin Books published by Penguin, Auckland 2012

Pb 32pp NZ\$19.99

ISBN 978-0-14-350456-6



One of the most famous stories in New Zealand's military history is told from a young girl's point of view by Glyn Harper, Professor of War Studies at Massey University, in his seventh children's book.

Le Quesnoy is the story of how a group of New Zealand soldiers saved a small town surrounded by high walls and deep trenches in northern France that was occupied by the German army for four years. Because these men used a bit of 'kiwi ingenuity' they were able to take the town back without a single civilian life being lost.

The end covers have a map of the French town and there is a page with further information about town's liberation and ways it is commemorated. Jenny Cooper's watercolour illustrations support the text to produce an effective and engaging ANZAC picture book for young readers. Bravery and everyday life in war time are themes along with the element of surprise and the cunning invention.

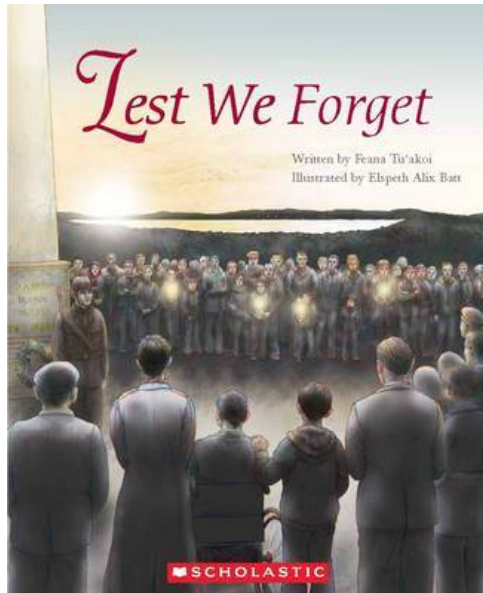
Lest we forget

Feana Tu'akoi (author), Elspeth Alix Batt (illustrator)

Scholastic, Auckland 2011

ISBN 978-1-77543-021-6

Hb 36pp NZ\$31.00



In contrast to the Le Quesnoy setting is the New Zealand family home and, later, small New Zealand home town Anzac Parade that is Tyson's reality. Tyson does not understand why anyone would want to go to the Anzac Parade to celebrate war. It isn't until he hears stories about the soldiers in his family that he decides perhaps he should go to the Dawn Parade after all.

This book gives a family point of view about the changing nature of war through the men of several generations who were heroes in the world wars but encountered protest with Vietnam. Tyson's point of view changes as he hears and reflects on the impact war has had on his family. Elspeth Batt's illustrations do much to conjure the atmosphere of the Anzac Day service and the varying emotions of those involved.

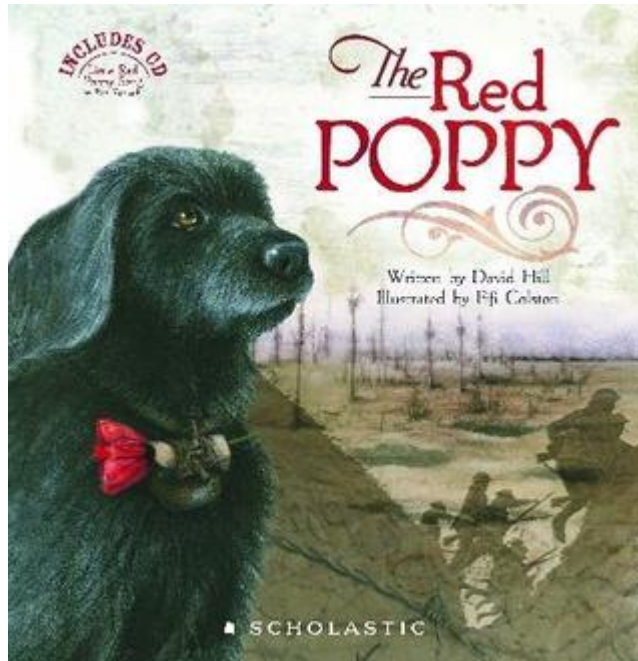
The Red Poppy

David Hill (author), Fifi Colston (illustrator)

Scholastic, Auckland 2013

ISBN 978-1-77543-070-4

Pb 40pp NZ\$21.00



The Red Poppy contrasts the Anzac Parade setting of the previous book by placing the reader right in the action of the trenches, a century earlier. The book includes a CD of the song 'Little Red Poppy' written by Canadian musician Rob Kennedy. There are some useful teacher notes online on the Scholastic Web site (at <http://www.scholastic.co.nz/Resources/Notes/The-Red-Poppy.pdf>) that provide a range of questions and follow up activities after reading the book.

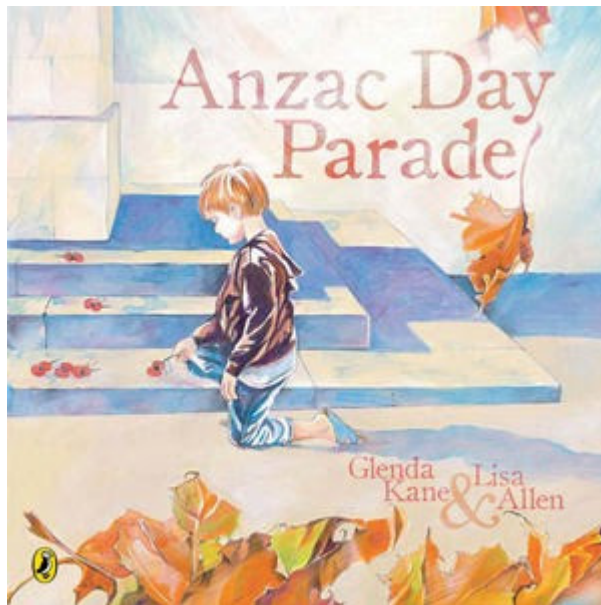
The story focusses on Jim McLeod, a scared young New Zealand soldier on the battlefield and his interaction with a German soldier who is also wounded while on the field of poppies. One of the strengths of David Hill's story is the human side of war and the way the enemy is portrayed through the soldiers' commonalities- pets, family, wound pain and language issues. Conflict with the enemy is neatly juxtaposed with internal conflict and Jim's sense of self. The men work together to save each other and despite the grim nature of the action, the book has a hopeful rather than inevitable tone. This is largely achieved through Jim's interaction with his fellow soldiers, the messenger dog Nipper and Karl the German soldier. In this way, the interpersonal interactions are what symbolise hope set against the anonymous hugeness that is the campaign on the Western Front.

Fifi Coulston's illustrations are very effective in conveying a range of emotions: anxiety, confusion, hurt, relief, humour and recognition and work very closely with David's text to create tension and release throughout the book. Much of the book is in

earthy grey and dark brown tones which make the few illustrations of blood and poppies in red clearly stand out.

Anzac Day Parade

Glenda Kane (author), Lisa Allen (illustrator)
Puffin Books published by Penguin, Auckland 2010
Pb 32pp NZ\$19.99
ISBN 978-0-14-350353-8



Unlike *The Red Poppy*, where the central character – Jim – gains an awareness of the nature of war and the real enemy, *Anzac Day Parade* has an innocent young boy asking a question that leads into the war veteran's story, largely told through the old soldier's private reflections. There is effective contrast between the young boy, the soldier and the veteran soldier that serve as focal points for the various perspectives in the rhyming prose. While the initial appearance of the book may seem suited to a younger audience, words such as 'bereft', 'battalion' and 'valiance' and the subject matter identify it as a more sophisticated picture book that warrants deeper reading and discussion.

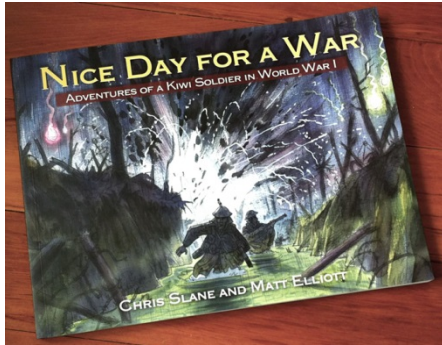
Nice Day For A War: Adventures of a Kiwi Soldier in World War I

Chris Slane (illustrator), Matt Elliott (author)

HarperCollinsPublishers, Auckland 2011

Pb 96pp NZ\$29.99

ISBN 978-1-86950-901-9



In the most extensive book of this collection (at 96 pages), Slane and Elliott use the landscape orientation to great effect with elements of picture book, graphic novel, comic book and history scrapbook to cover the story of Corporal Cyril Elliott in World War I. There is detail about many aspects of Elliot's war life including daily life on the front line and trench construction.

The book is packed with timelines, postcards, photographs, letters home, news reports, diaries, pages from pay books, mess menus etc that make a wonderful resource. The range of documents is really interesting and it was these rather than the graphic or comic illustrations that really held my attention. *Nice day for a War* is a superb book and has won multiple awards. It is the Winner of the NZ Post Children's Book of the Year Award 2012, Children's Non-Fiction Award 2012 and LIANZA Non Fiction Award – Elsie Locke Medal Winner 2012.