

## ASO Teacher's Notes for *Ships in the Field* by Susanne Gervay

*Ships in the Field*

by Susanne Gervay

Illustrated by Anna Pignataro

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### Synopsis

*Ships in the Field* is both personal and universal. Anna Pignataro and Susanne Gervay translated their families' personal experiences of migration into *Ships in the Field* translating it into the universal refugee immigrant experience of war, loss, migration, hope and home.

The story focus is on a second-generation girl who carries the inherited fragility of her parents' refugee and war trauma as she seeks to find a happy home life. There are wonderful moments of humour, love, courage and a positive sense of the future.

The little girl holds onto her 'Brownie' – a stuffed toy dog that represents her emotional alto-ego and companion. Her Brownie is a 'real friend' who shares her life as she becomes involved in the healing of her parents' and her own trauma as they create a new future.

When Brownie and the little girl find a homeless dog, the family's reaction symbolises rebirth and healing in a new land. Anna's parents left their dog behind. Susanne's parents found a homeless dog in Australia. Now there is another dog, a new life.

### Back Cover of *Ships in the Field*

'Everyone has the right to a nationality'  
Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Jeder hat das Recht auf eine Staatsangehörigkeit. German

Svako ima pravo na državljanstvo. Bosnian

Minden személynek joga van valamely állampolgársághoz. Hungarian

Setiap orang berhak atas sesuatu kewarga-negaraan. Indonesian

Sing saha bae boga hak dina nangtukeun kawarga-nagaraanana. Sudanese

Her ferdin bir uyrukluk hakkı vardır. Turkish

### Excerpt from *Ships in the Field*

*Papa drives into the forest because*

*He loves rivers and trees.*

*Papa grew up in a village in the old country,*

*before it was broken.*

*Ma grew up in a city in the old country,*

*before it was broken.*

Anna's Pignataro's double page muted water colours containing these words reveal a journey through a landscape of inclusion with basilicas, medieval cities, wooden cottages, farm houses, disparate trees as they search for an unbroken future.

#### Author Inspiration

*Ships in the Field* is deeply embedded in the struggles of Susanne's family's wartime, human rights violations and the refugee experience. Her parents carrying their little son, left all they knew to escape across 'no-man's land' minefields in the dead of night for freedom. Her mother's Hungarian world was no longer the same with its operas, balls, visiting the health spa on Lake Balaton; her father's world at the university as a Professor of Engineering; her mother's world of running a household with servants and afternoon teas on Margarita Island on the Danube had ended. Her father's world was taken too. His land stolen. His white horse disappeared. His way of life gone.

The Austrian refugee camp was crowded, difficult, but it was from here that Australia selected them to go to Australia as bonded migrants on a battered WW11 warship. Her parents didn't know what Australia was, but they knew they could rebuild their lives offering their children a future. Like other refugees they worked long hours – her father in the Holden car factory; her mother in the clothing factory. Life in Sydney began in one room with the family sleeping on mattresses on the floor. But there was a belief in their new country and the future.

*Ships in the Field* contains Susanne's family's stories. Her father made hats from the serviettes at dinnertime for the family's amusement. Her mother cooked chicken soup every night. Her father worked in a factory and mother sewed dresses both in a factory and at home. Their trips into the country were happy family time and a celebration of being safe and here. Her father did see the 'ships in the field.'

Susanne was deeply moved for herself and her parents and all those who make the journey to find home, when Governor Marie Bashir awarded her an Order of Australia in 2011. She is always moved giving an Australia Day address in her role as an Australia Day Ambassador.

Susanne's conversation with ABC radio Richard Fidler is a small part of the journey – [www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2010/11/15/3066754.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2010/11/15/3066754.htm)

Website: [www.sgervay.com](http://www.sgervay.com)

#### Illustrator Inspiration

Anna Pignataro was waiting for a story that touched her. When she read *Ships in the Field* she responded immediately to Paul Collins the publisher of Ford Street. 'It's my story' she said. Her parents were Italian migrants who had to leave their beloved dog in Italy as they found home in Australia. Her water colour washes with the soft lines and palette capture the character, love, family as they struggle with the past to seek a future. Her daughter became the natural model for the girl in *Ships in the Field*.

Anna put aside all other projects to dedicate the next 6 months to *Ships in the Field* – which was a deeply personal and important journey for Anna.

### Study Notes

#### Education Applicability – The Australian National Curriculum

Each year level from Foundation to Year 10 in the Australian National Curriculum includes key inquiry questions that provide a framework for developing students' historical knowledge, understanding and skills.

English to 'help students engage imaginatively with literature to expand the scope of their experience', and

History to 'stimulate knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the past and the forces that shape societies, including Australian society'.

*Ships in the Field* stimulates students to enquire and discuss family and community history. It emotionally and intellectually engages readers in the story of refugees, immigrants, war, belonging and finding home. It has relevance to newly arrived immigrants, indigenous and the many cultures that make up Australia and other countries. It assists inquiry 'into the past so that it develops their (students) curiosity and imagination'.

*Ships in the Field* promotes skills used in the process of historical inquiry through the use of sources. The key inquiry questions provide a framework for developing students' historical knowledge, understanding and skills.

The multiple layers of meaning in the text and illustrations in *Ships in the Field* give it wide application from year 1 to year 10 and beyond.

### Issues

Refugees  
Family  
War  
Diversity in Australia  
Inclusion  
Immigration  
Cultural differences

### Classroom discussion and activities

1. Do you like the girl and her parents? Explain why. Discuss the characters in *Ships in the Field*. Would you like them to be your friends? Why?
2. Why is the girl 'frightened of war'? What is war? Why does war happen? Why is the family happy to live in a country without war? What problems do they face?
3. What do you feel about each of the three dogs?
4. In what way is the girl and her parents similar to people you know? In what way are they different?
5. Why is the girl upset that people laugh at her father's accent? What does she do? What would you do?
6. Anna Pignataro's illustrations are emotional and complex. Studying, enjoying, emotionally engaging in the illustrations opens discussion. For example:
  - What are the multiple meanings in the double page spread of the ship?

- Why is the small war torn dog on some of the pages?
  - What are funny scenes. Why are they funny? How do they make you feel?
  - In what way is *Ships in the Field* a universal story?
  - Do you think the cover reveals the meaning of *Ships in the Field*?
7. Find out more about:
- Australia Day- <http://www.australiaday.com.au>
  - Immigration Museum Victoria <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/>
  - Australian War Memorial - <http://www.awm.gov.au/>
  - Harmony Day [www.harmony.gov.au/harmony-day/](http://www.harmony.gov.au/harmony-day/)
8. Log onto Susanne Gervay’s website – [www.sgervay.com](http://www.sgervay.com) and you can blog or twitter her and tell her what you think about *Ships in the Field*.

### Teaching Notes based on the Australian National Curriculum

#### The Australian National Curriculum:

**English** to ‘help students engage imaginatively with literature to expand the scope of their experience’, and

**History** to ‘stimulate knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the past and the forces that shape societies, including Australian society ‘.

*Ships in the Field* stimulates students to enquire and discussion about family and community history. Newly arrived immigrant students and children of immigrant families will relate closely to this story. For other students it will ‘assist their inquiry into the past so that it develops their curiosity and imagination’.

*Ships in the Field* promotes skills used in the process of historical inquiry through the use of sources. The key inquiry questions provide a framework for developing students’ historical knowledge, understanding and skills.

#### The Australian Curriculum - English Scope and Sequence

The English curriculum is built around the three interrelated strands of Language, Literature and Literacy.

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
<b>Literature</b>					
<b>Sub Strand - Literature and context</b>					
	Discuss how depictions of characters in print, sound and images reflect the contexts in which they were created	Discuss texts in which characters, events and settings are portrayed in different ways, and speculate on the authors’ reasons		Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details or information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts	Make connections between students’ own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts
<b>Literature</b>					
<b>Sub Strand - Responding to literature</b>					
Discuss characters and events in a range of literary texts and share personal responses to these		Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts, and share responses with others			Identify and explain how choices in language, for example modality, emphasis, repetition and metaphor, influence personal

texts, making connections with students' own experiences					response to different texts
<b>Literacy</b>					
<b>Sub Strand - Interacting with others</b>					
Engage in conversations and discussions, using active listening behaviours, showing interest, and contributing ideas, information and questions	Listen for specific purposes and information, including instructions, and extend students' own and others' ideas in discussions	Listen to and contribute to conversations and discussions to share information and ideas and negotiate in collaborative situations	Interpret ideas and information in spoken texts and listen for key points in order to carry out tasks and use information to share and extend ideas and information	Clarify understanding of content as it unfolds in formal and informal situations, connecting ideas to students' own experience and present and justify a point of view	Participate in and contribute to discussions, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing and supporting arguments, sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions

### **The Australian Curriculum – History**

Susanne Gervay's presentation based on her book, *Ships in the Field* helps students to address the following areas of the History Curriculum.

#### **Foundation–Year 2**

##### **Curriculum focus: Awareness of family history and community heritage**

‘Students develop inter-cultural understanding as they learn to understand themselves in relation to others. This involves students valuing their own cultures and beliefs and those of others, and engaging with people of diverse cultures in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections and cultivate respect between people.’

‘Through experimentation, practice and play, children in these years use their interest in people and how things work to make sense of their world.’

‘This history curriculum enables students in Foundation to Year 2 to learn about their own social context of family, friends and school, and the significance of the past. They engage with the remains of the past; develop a concept of time as present, past and future, and through role play use their imagination to speculate about the lives of others in the past.’

#### **Years 3–6**

‘Students draw on their growing experience of family, school and the wider community to develop their understanding of the world and their relationship to others past and present. In these years, students begin to better understand and appreciate different points of view and to develop an awareness of justice and fair play. This history curriculum seeks to target the distinct nature of learners in Years 3–6 by including content about the diversity of Australian society. In this way, students develop an understanding of the heritage of their community and of their ability to contribute to it. They become aware of similarities and differences between people and become more aware of diversity in the wider community as well as the concept of change over time.’

The curriculum provides opportunities for the content to be taught using specific local contexts. The history content involves two strands: *Historical Knowledge and Understanding* and *Historical Skills*. These strands are interrelated and should be taught in an integrated way; they may be integrated across learning areas and in ways that are appropriate to specific local contexts.

## Inquiry questions

Each year level from Foundation to Year 10 includes key inquiry questions that provide a framework for developing students' historical knowledge, understanding and skills.

### The Australian Curriculum - History Scope and Sequence

Foundation - Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Teaching Activities	
<p><b>Curriculum focus:</b>  <b>Awareness of family history and community heritage</b>            This history curriculum enables students to learn about their own social context of family, friends and school, and the significance of the past. They engage with the remains of the past; develop a concept of time as present, past and future .....</p>	<p><b>Curriculum focus:</b>  <b>Local/national history and use of a range of sources</b>            Students draw on their growing experience of family, school and the wider community to develop their understanding of the world and their relationship to others past and present. In this way, students develop an understanding of the heritage of their community and of their ability to contribute to it. They become aware of similarities and differences between people and become more aware of diversity in the wider community as well as the concept of change over time.</p>	<p>A framework for developing students' historical knowledge, understanding and skills is provided by inquiry questions through the use and interpretation of sources. Susanne, the daughter of post WW 2 immigrants, is a valuable source of stories that illustrate change and diversity in Australia through post World War 2 immigration.</p>				
<p><b>Year 1: Historical Knowledge and Understanding Present and Past Family Life</b>            How the present, past and future are signified by terms indicating time such as 'a long time ago',</p>	<p><b>Year 2: Historical Knowledge and Understanding The Past in the Present</b>            The history of a significant person, building, site or part of the natural environment in the local</p>	<p><b>Historical Knowledge and Understanding Community &amp; Remembrance</b>            The role that people of diverse backgrounds have played in the development and character of the local</p>		<p><b>Historical Knowledge and Understanding The Australian Colonies</b>            The reasons people migrated to Australia from Europe and Asia, and the experiences and contributions of</p>	<p><b>Historical Knowledge and Understanding Australia as a Nation</b>            Stories of groups of people who migrated to Australia and the reasons they migrated, such as World War II and Australian</p>	<p><i>Ships in the Field</i> assists students to understand change in Australian society through the twentieth century.             Students might use <b>role play</b> to speculate about</p>

<p>'then and now', 'now and then', 'old and new', 'tomorrow', as well as by dates and changes that may have personal significance, such as birthdays, celebrations and seasons. Differences and similarities between students' daily lives and life during their parents' and grand-parents' childhoods, including family traditions, leisure time and communications .</p>	<p>community and what it reveals about the past</p>	<p>community</p>		<p>a particular migrant group within a colony.</p>	<p>migration programs since the war.</p>	<p>the lives of others in the past.</p>
<p><b>Key inquiry questions</b> 1. What is my history and how do I know? 2. What stories do other people tell about the past? 3. How can stories of the past be told and shared?</p>	<p><b>Key inquiry questions:</b> 1. What aspects of the past can you see today? What do they tell us? 2. What remains of the past is important to the local community? Why?</p>	<p><b>Key inquiry question:</b> How has our community changed? What features have been lost and what features have been retained?</p>		<p><b>Key inquiry question:</b> What were the significant events and who were the significant people that shaped Australian colonies?</p>	<p><b>Key inquiry questions:</b> How did Australian society change throughout the twentieth century? Who were the people who came to Australia? Why did they come?</p>	<p>Students might discuss other students' families, digital media, and a visit to a museums.</p>

*Ships in the Field* by **Susanne Gervay** and **Anna Pignataro** provides teachers with a text which effectively links many of the Australian National Curriculum Learning Areas of English and History: 'The study of English involves the development of understanding and knowledge for informed and effective participation not only in English but also in other learning areas. When knowledge, skills and comprehension from English are meaningfully applied to other learning areas, learning becomes more relevant and understanding deepens.'

'Strong connections exist between English and History, and literacy is essential to historical understanding. Through the study of history, students learn how to read texts with critical discernment and how to create their own texts that present the results of historical understanding clearly and logically. In their studies, they encounter representations of the past that demonstrate the power of language and symbol, and they learn to extend the range of their own expression. These skills are developed across a range of textual genres and formats, including art, photography, film, music, fiction and multimedia.'

Students reading the book can:

Explore a range of sources about the past

Explore a point of view

Develop a narrative about the past

Use a range of communication forms (oral, graphic, written, role play) and digital technologies to present their narrative.

Activities:

- Interviews
- decide who is telling the story, and whether to write about personal experiences or retell a story about an immigrant family
- develop mind maps for the story/stories
- write and review the opening paragraph for the story, or joint text construction
- elaborate the ideas in the personal or joint story/stories
- produce their own text, a group or class story.
- reread their own text and edit for meaning by adding, deleting or moving words or word groups to improve content and structure.
- use a range of software including word processing programs to construct, edit and publish written text, and select, edit and place visual, print and audio elements

Susanne's other books that relate to the Study of the themes in *Ships in the Field*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Years</b>
<i>Daisy Sunshine</i>	Australian National Museum	year to 5
<i>Always Jack</i>	HarperCollins	year 4 to 7
<i>Butterflies</i>	HarperCollins	year 9 to 12
<i>That's Why I Wrote This Song</i>	HarperCollins	year 9 to 12