

The following Notes provide teachers with a variety of activities linked to the novel, *Of Boys and Boats* written by Ian Trevaskis. Ian is available to visit your school to talk to students about the creation of this work and to conduct writing workshops. Contact Creative Net Speakers' Agency ([www.creativenetspeakers.com](http://www.creativenetspeakers.com)) if you would like your students to meet and work with Ian.

### **SYNOPSIS**

When 'Mad' Mick Metcalf enlists in the Great War in 1915 he leaves behind the two loves of his life – Edith Palmer and a half built sail boat. At war's end he returns home, physically and emotionally shattered and when his fiancé Edith dies from the Spanish Flu pandemic sweeping the world he retreats from the world to become a recluse, escaping to his memories in the photo album he keeps in his backyard shed.

In 1956 young Jack Spiller, caught up in the excitement of the forthcoming Melbourne Olympic Games, discovers Mick's unfinished sail boat in his shed. After Jack's dog Skip is hit by a car on the street outside his home Mick renders assistance and Jack realises the old man is not really as mad as rumour has it. Jack convinces Mick that he and his mates can finish building the boat. When Mick agrees, Jack sets to work, aided by his best mate, Percy Jackson, who has been crippled by polio, and Heinrich Schmidt, the 'New Australian' kid. When Jack spies Mick looking through the photo album little does he realise what the boat's significance has in the old man's life.

Jack's own life is not without its problems – his father has been hospitalised with tuberculosis and Jack is worried that his father will return to the heavy drinking that preceded his hospitalization. To add to Jack's woes, he and Percy are being harassed by the local thug, Bruiser Bailey. To compound Jack's despair, Heinrich, a recent arrival from war-torn Europe, threatens to spoil Jack's hopes of winning the heart of Anna De Fazio.

In between working on the boat, Jack and Percy escape the heat by taking Heinrich to the beach, where Jack teaches him the fundamentals of body surfing. They are accompanied by Anna and Jack begins to hope he may yet have a chance of winning her affections. Jack's relationship with Anna begins to blossom and they decide to visit a secluded bayside beach. On the way they are chased through the city streets by Bruiser and his mates and are forced to seek refuge in a derelict factory. At the beach Anna is stung by a jelly fish and Jack resorts to a highly unusual method of relieving her pain by pissing on her leg!

The turning point in the story comes when Bruiser and his gang steal the boat's plans and Mick's photo album. Jack feels obliged to tell Mick and is certain the old man will be furious. Instead, Mick suggests Jack and his mates undertake a diversionary tactic to retrieve the stolen plans and album. A dramatic rescue attempt follows during which Jack and Anna "bomb" Bruiser's riverside hideout with rocks. All goes according to plan with Heinrich taunting Bruiser who pursues him along the nearby railway

tracks. To Percy's dismay, Heinrich saves Bruiser from certain death when an approaching train threatens to run them down. In the meantime, Jack and Anna successfully retrieve the photo album, only to discover Bruiser has destroyed the plans and all hope of finishing the boat appear doomed to failure.

Jack and Anna are intrigued by the photographs in the album, especially those of a much younger Mick and a mysterious young woman. It is only when Anna asks Mick about the photographs that he begins to reveal the secrets of his past. As a reward for returning the album he offers to help them finish the boat.

The boat is finally finished and Jack, Percy, Heinrich and their families accompany Mick to the yacht club where Anna christens *Edith's Dream* and it is duly launched. As Mick, Jack, Percy and Heinrich sail around the bay, Bruiser attempts to sabotage their celebrations but is thwarted by Percy who attempts a daring counter-attack. Jack overcomes his fear of Bruiser to save Percy and dispose of Bruiser into the bay. As they sail back to the marina it becomes clear that by building the boat Jack and his mates have not only successfully achieved a remarkable task, but in the process they have helped Mick emerge from the fog in which he has been lost for so many years.

This is a heart-warming and touching story that explores the deepening relationships that develop between Jack and an embittered old man; while also touching on themes of bullying, loss and grief, ethnic intolerance and personal aspirations. A fast paced, dramatic and humorous story, *Of Boys and Boats* will take the reader back to a time of youthful innocence and hope, tempered by heartache and loss. A story that promises laugh-out-loud joy and a celebration of life itself.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ian Trevaskis spent 42 years as a primary school teacher before retiring in search of some peace and quiet. His first book, published in 1990 was the highly successful picture book, *Quincy*, and earned him a CBCA 'Notable Australian Book' award, prompting him to think there might be something in this writing business. Since then he has had a number of picture books published, including *Delilah's Dream* (2009) and *Edge of the World* (2012) and a couple of novels for older readers - *Hopscotch Medusa Stone*(2009) and *Hopscotch Golden Scarab*(2010). The first draft of his new novel was written while on a May Gibbs Creative Time Residential Fellowship in Adelaide.

Ian was born and raised in Geelong where *Of Boys and Boats* is set and where many of the adventures in this book formed part of his early life. He is an ex-surf lifesaver and is an active firefighter with the Tallangatta CFA. When he isn't writing he is somewhere in the mountains bushwalking or back country skiing.

## **THEMES for DISCUSSION**

- **FRIENDSHIPS**

Friendships are a significant theme in this book. Jack has grown up with Percy and they are the best of mates. Over the course of the story Jack befriends the 'New Australian', Heinrich and Mick and Anna become his best friends. What makes a 'best friend'? Who are your 'besties'? How and why have they become your best friends?

- **BULLYING**

Bruiser Bailey is obviously a bully. Conduct a classroom discussion around bullying, addressing the following questions: What exactly is 'bullying' and what are its forms? Why does a bully, bully? What are some effective strategies to avoid and/or deal with bullying? What should you do if you are bullied?

- **DREAMS and ASPIRATIONS**

Jack dreams of one day becoming a journalist. Anna has her heart set on a career in the visual arts. Mick's dreams of building a boat and sailing on the bay with Edith are shattered by the events of the First World War. What are your dreams and aspirations? Do you have a 'roadmap' that will help you achieve them? What if you don't realise your dreams?

- **POST-WAR IMMIGRATION**

After the Second World War thousands of immigrants fled Europe seeking a new life in Australia. Many of them found it difficult to adjust to life in their new home. Some, like Heinrich, were taunted and bullied, and were considered outsiders who should be sent back to where they came from. What are your thoughts about people migrating to Australia from other countries? Should there be certain restrictions on who can enter and settle in our country? What have immigrants contributed to our culture and lifestyle? How would you feel if you had been in Heinrich's shoes?

- **WORLD WAR ONE**

In 1914 an assassin stepped out of the crowd in Sarajevo and shot and killed Archduke Ferdinand of Austria thus setting in motion a world war that caused immeasurable death and suffering. Mick and Clive were 'players' in that war and although Mick survived, he was physically and mentally scarred for life. Would you have been as eager as Clive to enlist to go and fight in a war in another country? Does your town or shire have a war memorial? Do you have family or relatives who have been to war? If so, what are their thoughts? Is there a 'winner' in a war?

## RESEARCH

- **OLYMPIC GAMES**

Melbourne hosted the Olympic Games in 1956, and Sydney hosted them in 2000. The Olympic Torch Relay features in *Of Boys and Boats*. Research the route it took in Australia in 1956. Create a map showing the main towns it was run through and provide a 'thumbnail sketch' of each town to accompany your map.

- **THE WESTERN FRONT**

Mick and his brother Clive fought on the Western Front in WW1 where Clive was killed and Mick was blown up by a mine. Research some of significant battles that took place on the Western Front. Include a map of where these conflicts occurred.

- **'BANJO' PATERSON POETRY**

In "his grand quest to master the English language", Heinrich reads and memorises the poems of 'Banjo' Paterson. Research and write a one page biography about the life and times of this famous Aussie poet.

- **DISEASE**

Tuberculosis, poliomyelitis and the Spanish Flu were diseases that wreaked havoc back in 'the old days'. Choose one of these to research and present a report on your findings. Include in your report information about causes, symptoms and treatment.

## SOME SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- Choose a poem by 'Banjo' Paterson to memorise and, like Heinrich did in 1956, present a recitation, complete with appropriate theatrics, to your classmates. Include a brief introduction about the creation of the poem as part of your presentation.
- Jack is amazed when he sees the model boats Mick has created and is gob smacked when Mick presents him with one as a Christmas gift. Make your own model sail boat using recycled materials. Don't forget to paint the boat's name on the transom!
- Research and create a poster of common boating terms, eg. lanyard, gunwale, breast hooks. Include a brief accompanying explanation and illustration.
- Percy made an Olympic Torch using an old jam tin and a piece of broomstick. Using recycled items have a go at making your own Olympic Torch, or alternatively, create an A3 design for a new Olympic Torch.
- Back in the 1950s language and vocabulary was different than what it is today. List all the unfamiliar vocabulary used in the book and explain its meaning.
- When Jack and the others go to Bancoora Beach, Jack teaches Heinrich to body surf. Write a set of instructions, including illustrations, on 'How to Body Surf'.

- It's fun to create and draw maps! The events in *Of Boys and Boats* range between neighbourhood streets, the high school, Corio Bay, Queenscliff, the Barwon River and Bancoora Beach. Using the information in the story, create a detailed fictitious map of where the key events take place. Label each significant place and event, eg. Parkside Beach: Anna is stung by a jellyfish; Bancoora Beach: Heinrich learns to bodysurf.
- Australians love going to the beach in summer! Create and design a poster titled 'Safety in the Surf'. Include appropriate illustrations.
- Create a chart that outlines the unique qualities and characteristics of a best friend.

## ENGLISH CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

*Of Boys and Boats* provides secondary school teachers with a wide range of appropriate student responses and discussions directly linked to the Australian Curriculum: English, especially the Literature strand. Some suggested examples include:

### ***Analyse distinctive features in literary texts***

- ⇒ Discuss how the Author has portrayed the archetypal figure of Bruiser Bailey. Is this characterisation authentic? Give reasons by referring to examples in the text. (ACELA1783, ACELT1807, ACELT1633, ACELY1749)
- ⇒ The Author uses Jack Spiller's internal dialogue to show his inner feelings, frustrations and emotions. Discuss, using examples from the text. (ACELA1783, ACELT1547, ACELY1744)

### ***Compare and evaluate the form, language and content of literary texts***

- ⇒ Much of Mad Mick's story is presented in a series of flashbacks of his wartime experiences. How and why does the Author use this narrative structure? Can you provide other examples of books that employ a similar strategy? (ACELA1782, ACELY1739, ACELY1744)

### ***Evaluate the ways in which literary texts represent culture and identity***

- ⇒ How has the Author represented Australian culture in the 1950s? How did daily life in that era differ from daily life today? Compare and discuss. (ACELT1619, ACELT1628, ACELY1739, ACELT1639)

### ***Create analytical texts***

- ⇒ Write an essay, providing appropriate arguments and evidence, to support Mick's view that the conflict on the Western Front "was nothing but a bloody slaughter". (ACELT1623, ACELY1742, ACELT1642)

### ***Create imaginative texts***

- ⇒ Write a first person narrative from the point of view of Percy, Anna, or Bruiser, based on the events in Chapter 38: Commando Attack. (ACELT1625, ACELT1632, ACELY1746)

## Curriculum Links

There are many links to be made to the Australian Curriculum (AC), especially the English Learning Area. The table below demonstrates some of the possible connections between the above learning activities and the curriculum from Years 7-10, allowing for both extension and literacy support groups using the same text.

Differentiation is achieved by level of detail and evidence which is required by the students, allowing all students to work within their zone of proximal development.

Learning Activity	Year 7 AC Links	Year 8 AC Links	Year 9 AC Links	Year 10 AC Links
Themes for discussion	ACELT1610 ACELT1620	ACELT1623 ACELT1627 ACELT1547	ACELY1739 ACELY1742 ACELY1744	ACELT1639 ACLET1642

## Full descriptions of Australian Curriculum Links

Year Level	AC Link	Description
Year 7	ACELT1610	Identify and explore ideas and viewpoints about events, issues and characters represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts
	ACELT1620	Reflect on ideas and opinions about characters, settings and events in literary texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others and justifying a point of view
	ACELT1622	Recognise and analyse the ways that characterisation, events and settings are combined in narratives, and discuss the purposes and appeal of different approaches
	ACELT1625	Create literary texts that adapt stylistic features encountered in other texts, for example, narrative viewpoint, structure of stanzas, contrast and juxtaposition
	ACELA1782	Understand how language is used to evaluate texts and how evaluations about a text can be substantiated by reference to the text and other sources
	ACELA1783	Understand that the coherence of more complex texts relies on devices that signal text structure and guide readers, for example overviews, initial and concluding paragraphs and topic sentences, indexes or site maps or breadcrumb trails for online texts
	Year 8	ACELT1623
ACELT1627		Share, reflect on, clarify and evaluate opinions and arguments about aspects of literary texts
ACELT1628		Understand and explain how combinations of words and images in texts are used to represent particular groups in society, and how texts position readers in relation to those groups
ACELT1807		Recognise and explain differing viewpoints about the world, cultures, individual people and concerns represented in texts
ACELT1632		Create literary texts that draw upon text structures and language features of other texts for particular purposes and effects
ACELT1547		Recognise that vocabulary choices contribute to the specificity, abstraction and style of texts
Year 9	ACELY1739	Analyse how the construction and interpretation of texts, including media

		texts, can be influenced by cultural perspectives and other texts
	ACELY1742	Interpret, analyse and evaluate how different perspectives of issue, event, situation, individuals or groups are constructed to serve specific purposes in texts
	ACELY1744	Use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse texts, comparing and evaluating representations of an event, issue, situation or character in different texts
	ACELY1746	Create imaginative, informative and persuasive texts that present a point of view and advance or illustrate arguments, including texts that integrate visual, print and/or audio features
	ACELT1633	Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts
	ACDESH095 (History)	The places where Australians fought and the nature of warfare during World War I, including the Gallipoli campaign
	ACDESH097 (History)	The commemoration of World War I, including debates about the nature and significance of the Anzac legend
Year 10	ACELT1839	Compare and evaluate a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical, social and cultural contexts
	ACELT1642	Identify, explain and discuss how narrative viewpoint, structure, characterisation and devices including analogy and satire shape different interpretations and responses to a text
	ACELY1749	Analyse and evaluate how people, cultures, places, events, objects and concepts are represented in texts, including media texts, through language, structural and/or visual choices