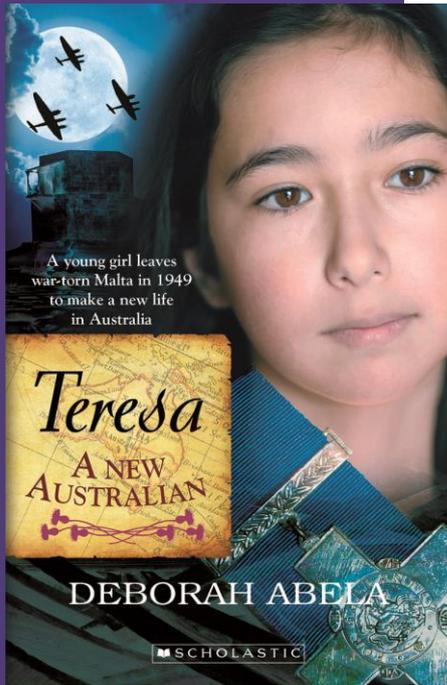


Teachers' Notes

Teresa A New Australian

Deborah Abela

Teachers' Notes by Rae Carlyle



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Introduction

Life on Malta during the Second World War is difficult for everyone. There is not enough food to eat, no one is safe from the Luftwaffe's bombing raids, and even those people whose houses are still standing, never know when they might be the next ones to die. But like the rest of the Maltese people Teresa and her family do not lose hope, and never give up. She might have to sleep on the floor of her best friend's house, while her father mans the guns that try to keep them all safe and her mother nurses the injured in the hospital, but she also knows just how important Malta is to the allied war effort, and is determined to do everything she can to help.

Malta fought hard during the war, and the Nazis never succeeded in taking it. But the place, and the people, were badly hurt. Once the fighting ended, the rebuilding began, but it was a slow struggle and Teresa's parents found it hard to see hope for a better life in their future. So when they heard that there was a scheme available to Maltese citizens, helping them emigrate to Australia, they applied straight away. Teresa is not sure that she wants to leave the only home that she has ever known, especially when she finds out that her best friend's family has had their application denied, and that her beloved Nanna will not be coming too. But her parents are determined, Teresa makes new friends on the voyage, and the closer the boat gets to Sydney, the more excited she is.

Sydney is different from anything she has ever experienced. The people speak English, but use words that she does not know. The apartment where they live is small and grimy, and her mother has to work as a cleaner and not a nurse. Worst of all, school is no longer a place filled with learning and happiness, but is a daily ordeal where the other children tease her about the food in her lunchbox, and bully her cruelly on the way home. Things finally come to a head and Teresa's parents and neighbour step in to protect her, but just as Teresa finally gets the chance to start enjoying her new life, things change once again.

With no family to help them in their new country, Teresa's parents send her to stay in a convent while they work long hours building a house for the family on a block of land her father has managed to buy outside Sydney. Scared and lonely, Teresa is overjoyed when she realises that her best friend from the voyage to Australia is already living at the convent. Between them, the two girls set out to do their best to improve life for all the children in the care of the nuns.

Teresa's life in postwar Australia is both challenging and inspiring. Faced by bigotry and cruelty she manages to respond with compassion and hope, and in return she finds compassionate allies in unexpected places. She will never stop missing the home of her birth, but in the end, she is starting to love both her new home and her new life as well.

About the Author

After completing a teaching degree, Deb was the producer/writer of a national kids' TV show before leaving to write over 20 novels, including *Max Remy*, *Jasper Zammit (Soccer Legend)* and the *Ghost Club* series. Her cranky novels, *Grimsdon* and *New City*, were inspired by her wish that we take better care of the planet but she added sea monsters, flying machines and girls who are good with swords. *Teresa* was inspired by her dad, who, with a million other refugees, sailed to Australia after the devastation of WW2. It is dedicated to her Nanna Teresa, who made the journey to offer her children a better, safer life.

Deborah Abela has a website with information about her books at www.deborahabela.com.

Activities

English

Teresa is set in several very different physical locations, as well as in a specific time. The setting of a novel is the background through which the characters move and act, and is an important part of understanding how and why the action of the plot unfolds as it does.

- 1) As a class discuss the setting of *Teresa, A New Australian* and how the physical and temporal location influences the reader's understanding of the story. Some points to consider are:
 - How does the novel start – what information can the reader get regarding when and where the action is taking place from the opening scene?
 - Why might the author have chosen to open the novel with this scene, and not a different one? What information does the reader get about the characters in the opening scene?
 - How does the reader's understanding of the life Teresa is leaving affect our comprehension of the challenges she faces when she arrives in Australia?
 - What are the challenges that Teresa has to overcome in each new place, and how do the different locations influence the nature of these challenges?
- 2) Individually, or in pairs, write down in bullet point form the facts that the reader learns about when and where the novel is set, and information about the main characters, from the opening chapter of the novel. As a class discuss and compare class members' lists, and categorise the different techniques that the author has used to inform the reader of different facts – for example, was information conveyed through dialogue between characters, through authorial description, or as part of the inner dialogue and thought processes of a character?

- 3) As a class discuss how the changes in physical location influence and complement the structure of the plot. In pairs or small groups analyse the plot structure in terms of setting, complication, and resolution. Consider in your analysis both the overall plot-structure, and in relation to the component scenes within the book. Draw a plot-structure timeline to display your analysis, and share it with the class. Remember to label the different points in the action clearly, and include information about *where*, *when*, *who* and *why* in your labels.

Unlike many of the other children at the convent, Teresa arrived in Australia already able to speak and read English. The English spoken in Australia though, was not exactly the same as the English she had learnt at school. While many of the new words she heard from Australians were offensive racial or ethnic slurs, there were also words such as *bloke* that were common Australian English vocabulary items.

- 4) Individually, identify as many non-offensive items of Australian slang in the book that were new to Teresa.
- As a class discuss what these words mean, whether they are still used today, and why Teresa would have been confused on first hearing them.
 - What common Australian English words used today might confuse a recent immigrant who has learnt British or American English in their country of origin?
 - In pairs make a small dictionary of Australian slang and colloquialisms that are used regularly in your classroom, and amongst you and your friends. Be sure to avoid offensive or derogatory phrases and language.

Civics, Citizenship, and Health

When Teresa first arrives in Sydney and starts at her new school, several of the people around her call her names. She also hears other new immigrants derided, and offensive and derogatory language used to describe them.

- 5) As a class discuss the way that the refugees and immigrants were treated by many of the Australians in the story. Some things to consider in your discussion are:
- Why did the local children and community look down on the new immigrants?
 - What criteria did the Australians use to judge the post-war refugees, and why?
 - How did it make Teresa feel to hear that sort of language being used about her, and about people like her?
 - What were the immigration criteria used by the Australian Officials in Malta when approving or disapproving applications?
 - What were the officials concerned would happen to any immigrants with darker skin, and why?
 - How and why is this sort of discrimination unfair – and how might catering to it end up reinforcing it?

- What would a fairer government policy have been, and what are some things that the government of the time could have done to limit discrimination rather than encouraging and reinforcing it?
- 6) When Teresa is confronted by the abusive drunken man, it is clear that he feels threatened by her presence, and the presence of people like her. As a class discuss how fear can affect people's behaviour and how they view the world. Some things to consider are:
- Why was the drunken man scared?
 - What was he scared of?
 - When Bill came to Teresa's defence, what did he say to the drunken man?
 - How much of what Bill said is applicable to refugees and new immigrants today?
 - Why does fear cause people to do and say things that they normally never would?
 - What are people who use racial and ethnic slurs today likely to be scared of?
 - How can we help people overcome their fears of difference, and accept others as vulnerable human beings rather than viewing them as threats?
 - What did Teresa feel like when she was confronted, and had to deal with unthinking hate and fear in another?
 - Why is it important to try and make sure that our actions never leave someone feeling the way Teresa did? What can we do and say to help people who have been victimised by bigotry?

History and Geography

Teresa and her family are from Malta, an island nation in the northern Mediterranean that was part of the British Empire at the time.

- 7) Individually, research the history and geography of Malta, focusing on the era when Teresa lived there. Use your research findings to create a presentation about Malta. You might want to make a poster, create a powerpoint presentation, or share your findings in another way. Some things to include in your report are:
- Where is Malta located? What countries is it near?
 - Why was Malta considered so important to the Allied forces during the Second World War?
 - What language(s) are spoken in Malta?
 - What are the main industries in Malta?
 - What is the population of Malta – and how densely populated is it?
 - How large is Malta?
 - What are some traditional Maltese foods?
 - Where does Malta get its food supplies from, and what can be grown there?
 - How many Maltese left Malta after WWII?
 - What is the climate of Malta like?

- In 1942 the nation of Malta was collectively awarded the George Cross for bravery. How is this award recognised in Malta today? (Hint: look for a picture of the Maltese flag.)

After the Second World War, even though the fighting had ended, much of Europe was still devastated, and hundreds of thousands of people had been left homeless and starving. Like Teresa and her family, many people thought that there was no hope for a better life if they stayed, and applied to emigrate to Australia.

- 8) Individually or in pairs, research European emigration to Australia in the years immediately after the Second World War. Choose one European nation to focus on in your research, and prepare a report on your findings to the class. Some things to consider in your report are:
- How had the nation you are researching been affected by the Second World War?
 - What were the conditions like for the everyday people in Europe immediately after the war?
 - How many people from your chosen country or area came to Australia in the decade after the Second World War?
 - Where did the immigrants settle when they arrived here?
 - What challenges did the new arrivals face both on their journey, and once they had arrived?
 - What provisions did the Australian government have to assist European postwar immigrants?
 - What communities in Australia today still show the influence of the large numbers of postwar immigrants, and in what way do they show this?
 - What skills, foods, and cultural practices did the immigrants bring with them?
 - What has this cultural diversity added to Australian society – how have we all benefited from the influence of new ideas, thoughts, and ways of doing things?

Creative Activities

- 9) Cook a traditional Maltese meal and eat it as a class. Be sure to research recipes for desserts as well as main dishes!
- 10) Design a medal for bravery that would look good on a national flag.
- 11) When Teresa left Malta she encountered a lot of different foods that she had never seen or heard of before. Go on a trip to your local grocery store or fruit market and buy a fruit, vegetable, or other food item that you have never eaten before. Eat your new food and then write a couple of paragraphs describing the experience of seeing, smelling, and tasting it for the first time.

- 12) On a map of the world, and using the information in the book, mark the path of Teresa's voyage from Malta to Sydney. Research the ports where she stopped, and put pictures of the ports on the map. Caption the pictures with Teresa's descriptions of the port.
- 13) Sydney in 1945 was very different from how it is today. In the library or online, research Sydney from 1945 to 1955, and create a then and now display of facts and pictures.
- 14) If you live in Sydney or nearby, go on an excursion to the immigration barracks that Teresa's father did not want the family to stay in.
- 15) The boat that Teresa came to Australia on was crowded, but it took much less time than in the days of sailing ships. Research online or in the library, and find out as much as you can about the ships that brought the European postwar immigrants to Australia. Find out as much as you can about them including what they looked like, how large they were, how they were powered, and how fast they travelled?
- 16) Paint a picture of what Sydney Harbour might have looked like to Teresa, and millions of other immigrants, as seen by them for the first time. You might want to paint it on a sunny day, or under a windswept overcast, or with rain and scudding clouds. Remember to think about when the various buildings and facilities around the harbour were built – it looked very different before the opera house was built! Research images of Sydney in different eras for inspiration.
- 17) Write a letter to a family member from the perspective of a recently arrived immigrant in Australia today. Describe your local area, the people, and the amenities from the point of view of someone who has never been there before. If you have lived there all your life it will take a lot more effort to think about what is interesting and worth writing about than if you have moved there more recently!
- 18) Teresa used to distract herself during bombing raids by reciting her times tables – and then when she arrived in Australia she was the best at times tables in her class. Have a class times-tables competition every morning for a week, and see if anyone can do as well at memorising them all as Teresa did.
- 19) Write a poem from the point of view of Teresa, or one of her friends and relatives, about the bombing raids on Malta. You might want to write from the point of view of someone in one of the bomb shelters waiting, or of someone caught out in the open watching the planes fly in.
- 20) Teresa's parents were building their new home themselves. Imagine you have bought a block of land and are going to be building a home on it. Draw a picture and a floor plan of the home you would like to build. Be sure to mark on the plan what all the rooms are, and where you would put doors and windows. Think about what sort of materials you would like to build with and how you could manage to put them together.

- 21) Write a piece detailing which scene in the novel was your favourite and why. Remember, it doesn't have to be your favourite *event*, but might instead be the scene that you found the most moving or emotionally powerful. Try to analyse what it is about the scene that appeals to you, and how the author has framed the action to draw the reader in.
- 22) Create a word search using names of characters and places from the novel.