

Teachers' Notes by Julie Miller

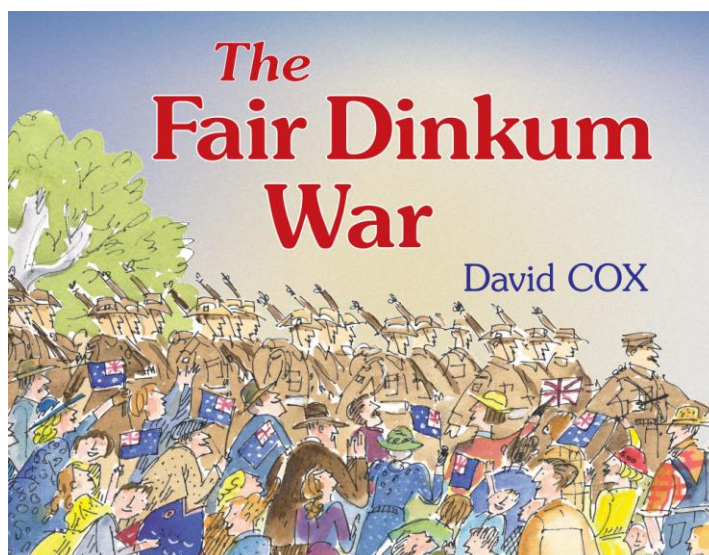
The Fair Dinkum War by David Cox

ISBN 9781743310625

Recommended for ages 6 – 11 years

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INTRODUCTION

"Men dug air-raid trenches in zigzag lines across our school grounds. They were not for play; this was fair dinkham war"

Following on from his *Road to Goonong*, which gave us an insight to life on the land during the depression years, David Cox's *The Fair Dinkum War* provides a ideal introduction for younger readers on how World War II impacted on everyday life for a primary school student in Queensland. David Cox comments: *"My family would remember events differently, but these are the impressions I had of the war of as a small boy."*

This is wonderful down-to-earth memoir, full of incidents and experiences from a small boy's viewpoint. From the beginning of the war with the American army rumbling past, to the digging of air raid trenches in the school grounds, the building of home air-raid shelters, blackouts, ration books and meeting American soldiers, these are authentic and unique Australian memories beautifully illustrated with warmth, humour and optimistic energy.

This book provides opportunities to introduce students to the text type of an autobiographical narrative, whilst also investigating elements of history, such as how we lived in the past, and recognising the significance of events in bringing about change to people and communities.

STORY SUMMARY

The author's memoir begins in his Year Two school year, also in the second year of World War II (1940). He has moved from the country to a "real school" in the city, and the war begins to touch his life with the sight of the American army rumbling past his school. Soon he hears grown-ups discussing the bombing of towns to the north: not much is said directly to children but they feel the fear of the adults. However serious the threat of war is, it doesn't stop them playing war games, drawing battle scenes, and shooting each other with *"pretend bullets and...pretend blood"*.

Soon his schoolyard has zigzag lines of air-raid trenches dug across it, and at home, air-raid shelters appear in backyards. At night black-out curtains are hung, and clothes, food and petrol are rationed.

The war effort has touched everyone—on Sundays at lunch his grandmother's house has many aunts and uncles and cousins in uniform. Although David's father is safe working in the country, *"Some kids' fathers would never come back."*

The war also brings the impact of different cultures, with the stationing nearby of American servicemen—"yanks"—and Javanese soldiers who delight the children with their kite-making.

Just when war seems to have gone on forever (through his school grades three to five) peace is declared, and the author's life changes once again. His city war experiences are over; life goes on with a move back to the country where his father manages a sheep station.

THEMES & CURRICULUM AREAS

There are several key ideas or themes which flow through this work:

- Effects of war on daily life,
- Family & community
- Loss and fear

War is the pervading theme of this story: it has an impact on every aspect of the author's life—the family, school, food, games, community members.

Values found in the text include:

- Bravery
- Resilience
- Hope

These themes could be considered in conjunction with the following school curriculum areas.

1. Study of history, society and environment
2. English language and literacy
3. Visual literacy
4. Learning technologies

The notes which follow are designed to be used largely in lower and middle primary classrooms, although some activities might be useful for upper primary. Teachers should be able to adapt them to suit the demands of their particular curriculum.

STUDY OF HISTORY, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

1. WORLD WAR II

Before reading, students will need to know some basic chronology and historical facts about the war. The story is set in Queensland and begins in the second year of World War II (1940), as the author begins Year Two, and continues through his school years to the end of war celebrations.

Discuss with students:

- What do they know about World War II?
- Does anybody know a relative/older person who remembers or fought in the war?
- What are their thoughts and feelings about war?
- How is war remembered in our community? (Anzac Day, Remembrance Day)

Activity:

Research the history of World War II in Queensland using:

<http://www.publicworks.qld.gov.au/sites/qldwwiplaces/Homefront/Pages/Childreninwartime.aspx>

The "*Children in wartime*" area of this site provides detailed information, maps and photographs on life for Queensland schoolchildren during the war.

(See also websites under 'Learning Technologies', below)

2. TIMELINE

The story is told in chronological order as the author draws on his memories of his life during World War II.

Activity:

Using a range of sources (online and print) ask students to research when the war started and finished, and important dates such as the bombing of Darwin. Record the class research on a timeline for class display. After reading the book, students complete their own timeline (Blackline Master 1) matching text from the book to dates of World War II.

Activity:

Students interview a relative or older person in their community about their memories of the war, including experiences of living in Australia at the time. Students then give an oral presentation of their interview to the class and describe how life has changed over time.

3. EFFECTS OF WAR ON DAILY LIFE

There were many changes and enforced regulations during the war that affected everybody.

Blackouts:

Why was it important that everyone had black curtains on their windows? No street lights were turned on at night. How would this have impacted people's lives at the time?

Rationing:

As food and clothing were scarce, ration books were used so *"nobody, however rich, could buy too much, and that seemed fair."* Do you agree? Would this have changed the meals families prepared? Some people have said that during the war they were better fed and healthier than any time in their lives. Why might this be so?

Petrol was also rationed so *"mothers, and grandmothers even, dressed up in their hats and gloves and rode to town on wobbly bicycles"*. How do you think people would have used their leisure time during the war? It is often said that people had to have resilience in war. What do you think that means?

4. FINDING SHELTER

Everyone feared that Australia might be bombed, particularly coastal towns and cities. Air-raid shelters were built in backyards. The book tells of air-raid trenches also being dug across school grounds. Why do you think children were told, *"They were not for play; this was fair dinkum war"*?

Activity:

Imagine you are an air warden. It is your duty to make sure that everyone in your area knows what to do during an air-raid to keep themselves safe. Make an instructional poster to post up around your town to help people prepare for an air-raid.

- a) A poster explaining what people should do when they hear an air-raid siren.
- b) A poster reminding people to follow the rules of the blackout.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Hold up the book and ask the class to consider the book cover. What does it lead you to expect? Who do you think the book is written for?

Look at the endpapers. Do they give us more information?

Look at the author notes by David Cox. He explains his feelings on the impact of the war on his community, and how the story comes from impressions he had of the war as a small boy. Why do you think he says, *"My family would remember events differently"*?

Activity:

After reading the book ask students to complete Blackline Master 2.

(These questions require the students to use comprehension strategies to identify literal information and make inferences from the text.)

LANGUAGE

The first person memoir is a form of writing that requires the author to tell his story in his own words. They provide a bird's eye view of someone's life.

The author has used words and groups of words to establish a sense of place and time. Discuss with students the following examples. How is this different or similar to their own lives?

"They studied the newspapers, listened to the radio..." (No television, computers)

"We collected toy soldiers made of lead and set them out for battle."

"Our milk and our bread came by horse and cart..."

"Mothers, and grandmothers even, dressed up in their hats and gloves..."

Humour is present both in the text and illustrations. Often in stressful situations people will use humour as a way of coping. David Cox comments in the author notes that *"a certain kind of humour emerged during the war"*. What do you think he means by this? In the book, ladies ride "wobbly bicycles" and soldiers "bounce on hired ponies". After climbing a fence to eat mulberries he visits the store of Mr. Fredlein who guesses where he has been eating mulberries!

Looking at illustrations:

What information do they tell us that the text doesn't? What else did you think was funny in the book?

Expressions of speech:

The phrase "Fair Dinkum" is not only used in the title but also twice in the text "*They were not for play; this was fair dinkum war*" and "*He was a real, fair dinkum genius*". *Fair dinkum* is an old Australian expression which, roughly translated, means 'genuine'. It was a common expression at the time of the war. Why do you think the author used this expression in both the title of the book and the story?

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the story is important as it reinforces the themes of hope and resilience to get through hard times.

Discussion:

"*When it is over, people said, there will be dancing in the streets. And they were right.*" How did people remain hopeful during the war when the outcome was uncertain?

The story ends with the family returning to the country, but "*some kids' fathers would never come back*". How did the war change people's lives?

VISUAL LITERACY

Encourage students to observe how the illustrations often add to or illuminate meaning, complementing and enriching the text. Line, colour, style and layout are techniques used which make up the "grammar" of the illustrations.

LINE

The illustrations are simply drawn and almost cartoon like, suggesting that they are a child's less serious view of the world. The freehand drawings provide a mood of positive energy and enthusiasm, and effectively capture the expressions and actions of the characters with humour and sensitivity.

COLOUR

The cover of the book is illustrated in bright primary colours of red, yellow and blue, creating a mood of excitement and energy. The page illustrations continue fine pen and watercolor wash that echoes the simplicity of life at that time. The final page of the story is an illustration of a family portrait that is in a sepia colour. Why has the author done this? Does the change in colour for this illustration add to the story?

CONSTRUCTION OF CHARACTERS

The body position of the characters and their gestures to show emotion extend the text by adding further details to support the story.

Discussion:

At the beginning of the story, look at how Miss Walker, the teacher, is shown walking. Her back is straight, her arm is thrust forward, she is taking a much larger step than the following children. We know Miss Walker is a walker all right! What other examples can you find in the illustrations which tell us more about the characters or events in the story?

LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

This book provides an excellent starting point for additional research and investigation on the life of children in both Australia and other countries during World War II. There are a number of excellent sites aimed particularly at the needs and interests of primary aged students.

Children in wartime Queensland

<http://www.publicworks.qld.gov.au/sites/qldwwiiplaces/Homefront/Pages/Childreninwartime.aspx>

State library of Victoria

Looking at war on the home front

<http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/explore-history/australia-wwii>

Australia at war

<http://www.ww2australia.gov.au/index.html>

This BBC site includes extensive information on life for children in wartime Britain

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/world_war2/growing_up_in_wartime/

This site is useful for a study of Anne Frank and her story:

<http://www.annefrank.org/en/Anne-Franks-History>

CONCLUSION

David Cox has created an entertaining and authentic memoir that conveys with gentle humour a child's view of living through World War II, along with the strength of a united community dealing with the trials and tribulations of war. It is a story that taps into the best kind of Australian spirit—that can-do, get-on-with-it attitude that readers/viewers of all ages can respond to and enjoy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RELATED TEXTS

Picture Books with a war theme

Do, Anh *The Happiest Refugee* Allen & Unwin, 2010.

Mc Ewan, Ian *Rose Blanche* Random House UK, 2004.

Crew, Gary *Memorial* Lothian books, 1999.

Hesse, Karen *the cats in Krasinski Square* Frances Lindon publishers, 2008.

French, Jackie *A Day to Remember* Harper Collins Sydney, 2012.

Jorgensen, Norman *In Flanders Fields* Fremantle Press 2012.

Thompson, Colin *The Staircase Cat* Hodder Headline 1998.

Josephine Poole, J & Barrett, A. *Anne Frank* Red Fox UK, 2007.

Books for older readers

Gleitzman, M *After* Penguin, 2012 (Fourth book in the series *Once, Then, Now*)

McRobbie, David *Vinnie's War* Allen & Unwin 2011.

McRobbie, David *To Brave the Seas* Allen & Unwin 2013.

French Jackie *Pennies for Hitler* Harper Collins 2012 (Companion to *Hitler's daughter*)

Kacer, Kathy *Hiding Edith* Allen & Unwin 2011

Kacer, Kathy *The Diary of Laura's Twin* Allen & Unwin 2009

Websites

<http://voicesinwartime.org/category/tag/wwii-childrens-books-and-picture-books>

Provides a list of picture books with a war theme

ABOUT THE WRITERS

DAVID COX

David Cox is one of Australia's most prolific book illustrators. He has been described as 'a master of body language'. Spontaneity and wit characterise his style of illustration.

He was born and brought up in outback Queensland. When he left school, he followed family tradition and went to work on sheep and cattle stations. He enjoyed that a lot—he particularly liked riding and schooling horses.

When he was 21, David decided went to England, and enrolled at St Martin's School of Art. While in his first year at the school, he was offered his first book illustration commission, which he completed under the art direction of Australian illustrator Sheila Hawkins.

David stayed in Europe for eight years, spending most of the time in London, but he also a considerable time in France. He worked at various jobs and was associated with Unity Theatre as a set finisher. His first story was published by Elizabethan magazine.

When he came back to Australia, he worked as an artist in the newspaper industry. He also wrote articles, book reviews and art reviews and designed theatre sets and costumes. In 1978, he was awarded the Walkeley Award for newspaper illustration.

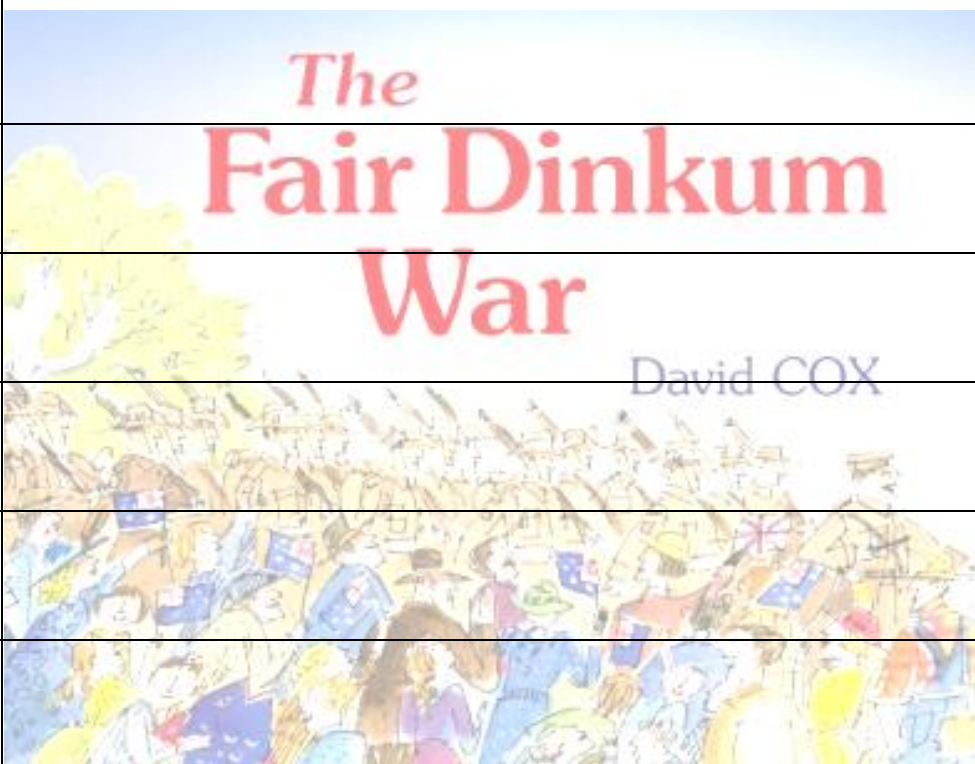
David's writing and drawing for children began in the 1960s, with a series of three books, published in the UK, about two children and their pony. He went on to write and illustrate several more books, some of which have won awards and citations in Australia and in the USA, including *Ayu and the Perfect Moon* and *The Drover's Dog*. He has illustrated many books written by other people

He is married to Betty Beath, a well-respected Australian composer. Together, they have written art song, operas for children and music theatre pieces for adult audiences

JULIE MILLER

A writer and teacher who has taught in state and private schools for over twenty years, Julie has written units of work for NSW Distance Education. She has recently studied visual literacy with USQ, and has previously written teacher notes for other Allen & Unwin publications, including *The Coat*.

Timeline – *The Fair Dinkham War*

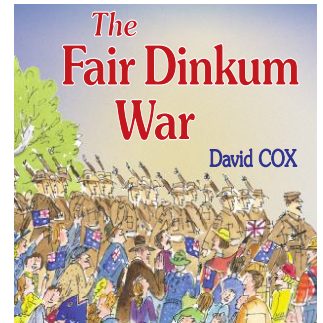
Year	Events
1939 War begins	
1940	
1941	
1942 Bombing of Darwin	
1943	
1945 War ends	

Can you match the following statements from the book to the corresponding year in World War II? Cut and paste your answers into the table above.

<i>"We were given little books of coupons, so when we brought food or clothes we paid with money and a certain number of coupons."</i>
<i>"When peace was declared, people went wild."</i>
<i>"Japanese planes had dropped bombs on our towns to the north!"</i>
<i>"In the second year of World War Two, my family moved from the country to the city..."</i>
<i>"I went through Grade Three, Grade Four, Grade Five and still the war went on."</i>
<i>"The American army had come to take part in the war!"</i>

Name: _____

THE FAIR DINKUM WAR
by
David Cox



1. My prediction before reading

2. Briefly recount the text

3. What type of connection have you made with the text?

4. Who is the intended audience for this book?

5. Why do you think the author wrote this book?

6. Do you think this story would have been different if it was told by an adult instead?
Yes/No Explain your answer:
