The Dog on the Tuckerbox

Author: Corinne Fenton
Illustrator: Peter Gouldthorpe
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Outline:

The legend that was to become The Dog on the Tuckerbox was created in the 1850s with a poem written by an author using the pen name of “Bowyang Yorke”. The poem was later amended and titled “Nine Miles from Gundagai” and was promoted as being written by Jack Moses. Its popularity spread but really caught Australians’ imaginations when it was released as a song in 1937 by Jack O’Hagan.

The Dog on the Tuckerbox is the story of Australia’s early pioneers and their endeavours to open up land for white settlement. It is about the bullockies who transported supplies over makeshift trails – often encountering raised river levels or getting their wagons bogged in the muddy tracks. On these occasions, the bullocky (or teamster) would have to leave his wagon and load in search for help. The bullocky’s dog was left to guard the tuckerbox and his master’s belongings until the bullocky returned.

This is a story about a dog called Lady and her devotion and loyalty to her master, a bullocky or teamster who goes by the name of Bill. With Lady beside him, Bill and his team of strong, patient bullocks walk the rough tracks of an untamed bush between Sydney and Gundagai, delivering much needed supplies to the settlers. Sometimes Bill passes pioneers along the tracks or shares his camp with other teamsters or hawkers. But mostly it’s just Bill, his bullocks and Lady. When Bill’s team gets bogged in a muddy creek, Bill asks Lady to stay and guard his tuckerbox while he goes to get help.

Author/Illustrator Information:

Corinne Fenton has more than fifteen children’s books published, many of which have won awards. Corinne is the Victorian Coordinator of the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators.

Peter Gouldthorpe was born in Melbourne in 1954 and now lives in Tasmania. He is recognised as one of Australia’s most versatile and skilful illustrators, adept at capturing and evoking the deepest emotions through his art, notably in picture books for older readers. Peter also paints landscapes, portraits and commissioned work, and designs stage sets. Peter has received many awards and commendations for his beautiful work, including the Children’s Book Council Picture Book of the Year Award for First Light.
Corinne Fenton on writing *The Dog on the Tuckerbox*

Like generations of Australian children who have travelled the Hume Highway between Sydney and Melbourne, for me, one stopping place remains clear in my memory — the town of Gundagai, on the Murrumbidgee River, and in particular, 5 miles (8 kilometres) north to a place which has been immortalised, The Five Mile, where the statue of a dog sits on the tuckerbox.

I remember picnics by this roadside spot, family photographs taken with my parents and siblings, and much later, almost those same photographs with my husband and children. It was following one of these visits that I acquired a small booklet entitled “The True Story of Gundagai’s Dog on the Tuckerbox.”

I have always believed that this story needed to be published as a children’s picture book and at almost my first mention of it, Maryann Ballantyne, the publisher at Black Dog Books shared this belief. I made two trips to Gundagai and carried out research at the Gundagai Museum, Gundagai Library, Gabriel Gallery, Gundagai and worked with the Australian Bullock Driver’s League. And of course I spent countless hours observing, sitting with and talking to many dogs.

Peter Gouldthorpe on illustrating *The Dog on the Tuckerbox*

The medium that I used was Acrylic paint.

My task was to authenticate Corinne’s text as much as possible – she, having done an amazing amount of research, passed all of that on to me. As well as having to absorb all of that I had to research how things looked, what people of that period wore, etc. Through my illustrations I tried to show as much as possible the strength of attachment between Lady and Bill.

One problem I encountered was that Bullockies ALWAYS drive their teams from the left-hand side but I wanted to show the team always moving through the book left to right, i.e. so they are always travelling in the direction of the story. This meant Bill would always be obscured by the bullocks so I’ve often shown him on the incorrect side. Also I couldn’t ever find an image of a tuckerbox so between the one depicted in the sculpture and my imagination I created one.
Discussion Questions and Activities

• Before reading *The Dog on the Tuckerbox*, view the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:
  » The title of the book
  » The author
  » The illustrator
  » The publisher
  » The blurb.

• Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end?

• Before reading the text, show the class the illustrations (cover the text) and ask students to write down or call out what they think is happening in the story. After this, read the book aloud, then discuss the different interpretations of the book based on the illustrations alone versus reading the text and illustrations together.

• What are the themes in this novel? Identify and list the themes as a class or in small groups. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.

SOSE/HSIE

• Draw a map of Australia. Mark in the states, territories and capital cities as we know them today. Include a border, title, northing, key and scale on your map. Mark in the town of Gundagai.

• Shade in the map that shows what areas of Australia had been explored by white settlers by the 1850s when the poem was first written.

ENGLISH

• Based on the text and illustrations, where and when do you think this story is set? Provide evidence from the book to support your ideas.

• What is the purpose of this story? Why do you think the author has chosen to create this story based on existing poems and stories?

• Write a short story about what happened to Bullocky Bill after he left Lady on the tuckerbox. You could write one realistic version in keeping with the setting of the book and one fantastical version where your imagination can run wild!

• Can you imagine waiting for 3 months to have vital stores and supplies delivered? The bullocky, his team and his dog might be your only visitor. Imagine you are a pioneering settler and write an account of waiting for the stores and supplies to arrive. How does this compare to the way you and your family get supplies (such as food, clothes and medicine)?

• Find some verbs that the author uses to enhance her descriptions.

• Describe a place that you know well. Use some of the discussed techniques to bring your scene alive.

• Look at some of the poetry written by Australian poets to see what else you can find out about dogs, pioneers, bullocks, bullockies and wagons.

• The story of *The Dog on the Tuckerbox* is based on the poem *Bullocky Bill* by Edward Dyson (www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/dyson-edward/bullocky-bill-0099035), the story *The Dog on the Tuckerbox* by Bowyang Yorke and the story/song *Nine Miles from Gundagai* by Jack Moses (both available at www.janedogs.com/dog-on-the-tuckerbox/. NB this page contains some coarse language attributed to the Bowyang Yorke version of the story). As a class, read all these texts and discuss the similarities and differences between them. Track the evolution of the story through the different texts. Also discuss the differences in text types presented (poem/song/short story/picture book).

• Why do you think Lady stayed on the tuckerbox waiting for Bill?

• How can you tell what parts of the text are spoken by the characters? Find another book in your classroom or library and identify parts where the characters are speaking. How can you tell when one character has finished speaking and another starts?

• Ask the class who has a dog at home and if the dog is similar to Lady. Ask students to take turns standing in front of the class and telling a story about a dog they own or know. This activity can vary from an informal discussion to a prepared presentation with visual aids, depending on the level of the class.

• Research Corinne Fenton on the internet. A good starting place is www.corinnefenton.com or www.walkerbooks.com.au. What other books has she written? See if you can find these books in your School library.
• Research Peter Gouldthorpe on the internet. A good starting place is www.walkerbooks.com.au. What other books has he illustrated? See if you can find these books in your school library.

BOOK FEATURES AND FORMAT

• Is this a true story? Which parts of the book are fact and which are fiction?

• Do you think a picture book is an effective method of conveying factual information? Why or why not?

• Create a glossary for this book. Include words that contemporary readers might not understand, such as tuckerbox, greenhide, quagmire, billy, yoke.

CREATIVE ARTS

• Create a picture storybook using an existing poem from C. J. Dennis or Henry Lawson.

• Create a poster that advertises the stores and supplies that a bullocky would carry in the 1850s.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

• What is a bullocky? What service did bullockies provide in colonial times? Can you think of any similar occupations that exist today?

• What is a bullock?

• What are modern-day equivalents to the following?
  » Tuckerbox
  » Billy
  » Teamsters

• Search the internet for “the dog on the tuckerbox”. What information can you find about this story, the stories it is based on, the Dog on the Tuckerbox monument and the area it is set in?

• What types of dogs did the bullockies mostly have?

• What sort of nature and temperament would a bullocky’s dog need to have?

• Bullockies or teamsters were the truck drivers of today. What was it like for them?

• Do your parents or grandparents remember stopping at the roadside 5 miles from Gundagai to visit the statue of the Dog on the Tuckerbox? Have you stopped there?

• Why do you think the statue became so famous?

• What other important events have happened in and around Gundagai?

• Who built the statue and why?

• Who wrote the inscription that appears on the statue? What does it mean?

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