



# The War that Saved My Life

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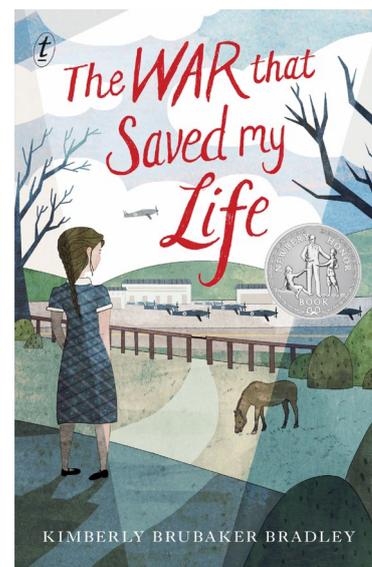
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## TEXT’S TEACHING NOTES FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

- ▶ Text’s teaching notes are designed for teachers to explore the novel in line with the *Australian Curriculum: English*.
- ▶ Questions are divided into stages: from pre-reading to post-reading and include suggested tasks for assessment.
- ▶ An ACARA coding system connects each task to the *Australian Curriculum: English*. It includes links to strands, modes, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.
- ▶ Refer to the legend below and the accompanying [Australian Curriculum: English Scope and Sequence reference chart](#) to decipher these codes.
- ▶ Students can record their responses in writing through reading journals, online discussions or verbally in classroom discussions.

<b>Strands</b>	<b>LA</b> – Language <b>LT</b> – Literature <b>LY</b> – Literacy
<b>Modes</b>	<b>W</b> – Writing <b>L</b> – Listening <b>R</b> – Reading <b>S</b> – Speaking
<b>General capabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Literacy</li> <li> Intercultural understanding</li> <li> Personal and social capability</li> <li> Information and communication technology</li> <li> Critical and creative thinking</li> <li> Numeracy</li> <li> Ethical behaviour</li> </ul>
<b>Cross-curriculum priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Sustainability</li> <li> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures</li> <li> Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia</li> </ul>

## SYNOPSIS

Raised in the confines of a small flat in the working-class laneways of London at the start of World War 2, nine-year-old Ada Smith only knows the cruelty of an uncaring mother, the boundaries of a world recounted by her younger brother, Jamie, and the frightening, damp smell of a closet under the sink. Crippled from birth, labelled a monster by her own mother, Ada’s only hope for freedom comes in the form of the evacuation of children into country villages as the country is threatened by war. While other children fear the separation from family and a familiar landscape, Ada’s world opens up. Placed with a reluctant, but caring, single woman, in a small Kent village, Ada and her brother discover what it means to be loved and cared for. As the threat of war grows closer, so too does the threat that they will have to leave their new home behind and return to the miserable conditions, and their uncaring mother, in London. The story explores the impact of war on ordinary people’s lives, the impact of fear and the importance of trust.



## BEFORE READING

1. Recreate World War 2 England in your classroom. As a class, set up the room to reflect conditions in WW2 England. Build a bomb shelter in the corner and make a list of all the things you would need to take in there in case of an air raid, create a ration book. Make a shopping list for meals based on the sort of food that would have been available. To show students what it was like living during World War 2, you could show them the documentary by UK Channel 4, 'The 1940s House'—<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jOxdUF6vcw>. (ACELT1613) R LT
2. What was life like for children in the 1940s? Create a research project and look at different aspects of life for children, especially working-class children: play, living conditions, experience of war, education. What was life like for children in this era when they had a disability? (ACELT1613) R LT
3. You are a member of the volunteer groups who encouraged parents to evacuate their children. Present an argument for evacuation. You could write this as a speech or as a letter to send to parents in the area. (ACELT1714) W LY

## WHILE READING

1. Describe the parameters of Ada's life in London at the start of the novel. What does she see? Who does she interact with every day? (ACELT1619) R LT
2. Why doesn't Ada challenge the way she lives? (ACELT1619) R LT
3. Life is very different for Ada's younger brother, Jamie. Other than Ada's foot, do you think this is the case? (ACELT1619) R LT
4. What is the effect of the line 'This story I'm telling starts out four years ago, at the beginning of the summer of 1939. England stood on the edge of another Great War then, the war we're in the middle of now.' (p.3) (ACELT1622) R LT
5. What did Ada want from her mother? Make a list of what she wants. Find examples from the novel to support your beliefs. (ACELT1619) R LT
6. What are some of the basic actions that we take for granted that were challenging for Ada. For example, flushing the toilet (p.29). How does she overcome these? (ACELT1613) R LT
7. Ada is shocked by what she sees in the mirror (p.30). Jamie says 'It doesn't matter.' Ada's says to herself 'But it did.' Is she correct? Why? (ACELT1621) R LT
8. Find an example of a metaphor on one of the following p.31, p.34, p.43. Why do you think that metaphor is used? (ACELA1542) R LT
9. What does the description of Susan's house on p.34 and p.35 tell us about how she lived before Jamie and Ada arrived? (ACELT1621) R LT

10. What does the reader learn about Susan from the following passage "She was not a nice person, but she cleaned up the floor. She was not a nice person, but she bandaged my foot in a whole piece of cloth, and gave us two of her own clean shirts to wear." p.41 Why does Ada says that Susan is 'not a nice person'? (ACELT1767) R LT
11. Touch plays an important part in Ada's story. Find examples where Ada refers to touch and explain why it is significant. (Consider p.48, p.46) (ACELT1620) R LT
12. Susan is very careful not to criticise Ada's and Jamie's mother despite some of the shocking revelations about their life in London. Why do you think she does this? (ACELT1620) R LT
13. Animals play an important part in Jamie and Ada's recovery. Consider how Butter and Bovril help them get through their challenges. (ACELT1620) R LT
14. After seeing the poster slogan 'Your courage, your cheerfulness, your resolution, will bring us victory' (p.83), Ada suggests it is wrong and Susan agree that it should read 'Our courage, Our cheerfulness, Our resolution, will bring us victory.' How does the substitution of 'our' for 'your' change the meaning in this slogan? (ACELA1525) R LT

## AFTER READING

### CHARACTER

1. Why do you think Ada rejects anything that is good or beautiful when she lives with Susan? (ACELT1622) R LT
2. Susan, and later Ada, notes that Ada's brain is a long way from her foot (p.42, p.277). What evidence is there to suggest that Ada is not 'simple', but actually very clever? (ACELT1622) R LT
3. Explain what Jamie means when he says 'At home I know the words for things.' P.82 (ACELT1622) R LT
4. Consider why Jamie and Ada find it difficult to read other people's emotions. Find examples where they misread people (p.80) (ACELT1619) R LT
5. Explore what Susan and Ada have in common. Create a table or diagram that shows their unique points and their common features. (ACELT1619) R LT
6. Jamie does not always understand what is happening around him. For example, he doesn't understand that Ada is treated badly by their mother. What other examples are there in the novel of his not understanding? (ACELT1619) R LT
7. Why do you think Ada's mother comes to collect them? (ACELT1622) R LT
8. What does the green Christmas dress represent for Ada? (ACELT1622) R LT



## STYLE AND STRUCTURE

- Why it is important to tell the story in first person? (ACELT1610) R LT
- Consider the following lines from p.173 'So I can stay. Solcanstaysolcanstatsolcanstay.' And "ooh no. Ohnoohnoohnoohno.' What is the effect of writing the phrases this way? (ACELT1767) R LT
- Sometimes language changes over time and because of location. The novel contains some words that you may not be familiar with. Find the meaning of the following words from the novel and use them in your own sentences. For example: loos—meaning toilets. The loos were a long way from the classroom. Word list: walloped (p.11), curdle (p.28), nicked (p.13), cajoled (p.32), verge (p.96), Mam (p.1 and various), jibber-jabber (p.21). (ACELA1528) R LA
- Identify the turning points for Ada in the novel. Is there a specific moment when her life changes? (ACELT1622) R LT

## THEMES

### War and Conflict

- How does war change peoples' lives in the novel? (ACELT1626) R LT
- There are different 'wars' that occur in the novel. There is the war with Hitler, but what other wars are taking place? (ACELT1627) R LT
- While the war appeared to creep up on them, the impact, when it came, was dramatic. Consider how people's view of war changed throughout the novel. (ACELT1626) R LT
- In dealing with her internal conflicts, Ada creates external conflicts. Find examples of times when Ada causes conflict because of her fears and beliefs. (ACELT1627) R LT
- While wars eventually end, they often leave behind scars. What 'scars' are left on Ada as a result of her experience of conflict? (ACELT1627) R LT

### Identity and Belonging

- While Susan gave Jamie and Ada birthdays, the discovery of their birth certificates in the London flat changes how Ada feel about herself. Why do you think this is the case? (ACELT1627) R LT
- What indications are there that Ada sees Susan's house as home by the end of the novel? (ACELT1619) R LT
- What indication are there that Ada is starting to feel a sense of value in herself and who she is? Consider the moment she learns to write her name (p.178) (ACELT1627) R LT
- Ada experiences some horrific moments in her life and some positive. Make a list of both and explain how they might have shaped her personality. (ACELT1627) R LT

- Why is the discovery of what happened to Ada's father and the birth certificates so important to her? (ACELT1627) R LT

### Trust and fear

- People from their home in London treated Ada differently when they met her in the street in the Kent village, despite being told she wasn't 'simple'. Why do you think they avoided her? (ACELT1627) R LT
- 'I wanted Mam to be like Susan. I didn't really trust Susan not to be like Mam.' p.184. Why does Ada say this? What does it tell us about her trust of people? (ACELT1627) R LT
- What does Ada learn about lies? (consider p.135) (ACELT1619) R LT
- While most people fear the coming of the war, what is it that Ada fears the most? (ACELT1627) R LT
- Initially the village is seen as a safe place for the children. Is it realistic that they could be safe for ever? (ACELT1627) R LT

## RESPONDING

- 'There are all kinds of Wars'. What 'wars' must Ada face in the novel? (ACELT1627) R W LT
- Ada triumphs because of her own will, she doesn't need others. Do you agree? (ACELT1627) R W LT
- Susan needs the children as much as they need here. Explain the importance of the relationship between them using evidence from the novel. (ACELT1627) R W LT
- While some things can be fixed, others must be face and accepted. What are the things that Ada must learn to accept in the novel? (ACELT1635) R W LT
- Put yourself in the shoes of another character and recount events from their point of view. Consider the airmen that come for Christmas dinner, Stephen White who stays with the Colonel, Margaret who goes to boarding school, Mr Grimes who cares for the horses and helps Ada, or perhaps Mam, who is back in London. (ACELT1618) R W LT
- We should not allow our identity to be shaped by the views of other people. Do you agree? Support your point of view with evidence from the novel. (ACELT1635) R W LT
- During the war, the government produced posters to promote patriotism and the war effort. A number of these can be found on the following link: <http://www.iwm.org.uk/learning/resources/second-world-war-posters>. Create your own war poster. Think about what war effort you want to promote, such as rationing food, and how to best convince people to support it. (ACELA1548) W LA
- Ada wrote to her mother after Susan's letters went unanswered. Write the letter that she sent. (ACELT1618) R W LT