

# The Flying Angel

Author

**Vicki Bennett**

Illustrator

**Tull Suwannakit**



## Synopsis

*The Flying Angel* tells the story of a young girl who has wanted to be a nurse since she was small. While growing up she nurses her toys, and on leaving school she takes hold of her dream and trains to be a nurse. When the Second World War sweeps over the world, she is no exception, and on her 25th birthday she joins the Royal Australian Air-Force Nursing Services, and heads to the front lines in Papua New Guinea to care for injured soldiers. Every day, she is one of the women who board evacuation flights, and brave the dangers of the wartime sky to help rescue wounded troops. She cares for them on the dangerous and bumpy flight home, and does everything she can to make sure they survive. When her plane hits turbulence and is damaged, she gives her own oxygen cylinder to a soldier whose eyes have been damaged, making sure he will survive at the risk of her own life. One of many brave and selfless young women, the soldiers who she cares for see her as one of their own Flying Angels.

## About the Author

**Vicki Bennett** is a best-selling author, who has written over 20 books for both adults and young people. *The Flying Angel* is her seventh children's book and third book with Scholastic Press. Vicki is passionate about Australian history and has written, directed, and co-produced a documentary *Never Forget Australia*, which includes the story of *The Little Stowaway* (Scholastic Press 2018)

## About the Author/Illustrator

**Tull Suwannakit** is originally from Thailand and has written and illustrated over a dozen books in his native language. His books have won numerous awards in his home country and have been translated into Korean, Slovenian, Chinese and Danish. When Tull is not writing and illustrating his books, he runs art classes and workshops for children and adults at his art school in Melbourne, Malvern School of Art.

## Themes

Key Themes include: War; hope; vocational careers; bravery; courage; selflessness; survival; history.

## Writing Style

Written in the first person from the point of view of a young woman, the author has chosen to utilise the present tense throughout most of the story. The combination of tense and viewpoint creates an immediacy and closeness between the reader and the protagonist that bridges the years since WWII. Sentences are short and clear, and the narrative voice is matter-of-fact and direct. The emotive impact and import of the events within the story is dependent upon the reader's interpretation and the visual narrative rather than being explicitly described within the text. Well suited for reading aloud, the story shares a time and place in Australian history that had an important role in the development of our modern-day cultural identification as a nation, and highlights the often unacknowledged importance of the role that Australian women have played in wartime over the years.

## Illustration Style

Crafted using watercolour and graphite on watercolour papers, Suwannakit's artwork uses a soft sepia-toned palette reflective of our mental images of the era shown. Figures are realistic, and the landscape and surrounding scenery is detailed. Depth and perspective is created with subtle and delicate shading, and the soft hints of blues, greens, reds and indigo within the predominantly earth-toned images draw the viewers' eye to the focal characters on each page. The illustrations are a combination of full page spreads, half-page spreads, single vignettes, and multiple interrelated vignettes. Suwannakit has drawn inspiration from the Australian War Memorial's collection of photographs from the time, and the artwork faithfully reflects the reality of life at the time for people such as the characters within the story. The visual narrative directly parallels the text, and adds a layer of emotional understanding and depth to the story overall.

## TEACHER NOTES

- 1) Before reading the story, as a class look closely at the cover and title, and discuss what you can learn about the story from the artwork and title. Some things you might like to include in your discussion could be:
  - What does the picture on the cover show?
  - When do you think this book might take place, and why do you think this?
  - Who do you think this book might be about?
  - What do you think could happen in this story?
  - What is an angel, and why and how might one fly?
  - Who do you think the angel in the story might be?
  - How do you think the angel in the story might fly?
  - What flower do you think the woman on the cover is holding?
- 2) If you live close enough, visit the Australian War Memorial and look at all their WWII collections. If you live too far away, visit a cenotaph near your home. Look at all the names on the cenotaph and think about who they might have been and why their names are written there.
- 3) Visit the Australian War Memorial's website. Can you find photographs of people dressed like the characters in the story? Can you find photographs of events similar to the ones described? Choose a photograph from the digital collection that you appreciate, and using watercolours and pencil, create an artwork of your own based on this photo and inspired by the illustrations in the book.

- 4) What do you think could have happened to the injured soldiers like Alfred if the Flying Angel had not been there?
- 5) The girl in the story joins the RAAF nursing service at the outbreak of WWII - but not every woman who wanted to help was already a nurse. During WWII Australian women were not allowed to join the armed services as active-duty frontline fighters like men could, but women still played a very important part during the war and served in a wide variety of positions both as members of the armed services, and as civilians. What are some of the different roles that women played during WWII in Australia? In pairs, small groups, or as a class research the different roles that Australian women played, and why they were so important to the war effort overall.
- 6) The Flying Angel helps evacuate soldiers in Papua New Guinea. What other parts of the world did Australian troops fight in (and nurses and doctors help save them in) during WWII? On a map of the world mark all the different places where you know that Australians fought during WWII.
- 7) How do you think the Flying Angel felt when she read the letter from the soldier who she had saved? Why do you think she felt this way? How do you think the soldier felt when he wrote the letter to her?
- 8) Why were the nurses called Flying Angels? How do you think they felt about being called this?
- 9) On the cover of the story, the Flying Angel is holding a poppy, and on the back cover there are poppies scattered around a letter. What do poppies symbolise, and why do we wear them on Anzac day or Remembrance Day?
- 10) Make poppy badges or a poppy wreath from paper and pipe cleaners. You can wear your badges on Anzac day, or hang your wreath on your classroom wall or at the entrance to your school.
- 11) What did the aeroplanes look like that the Flying Angel would have flown in? Do you think they are very different from the aeroplanes we fly in today when we are going on holiday or travelling overseas? Online or in the library research WWII aeroplanes. Use your findings to create an illustrated poster featuring one of the planes that were used by Australians during WWII.
- 12) Create a diorama of a WWII scene like the ones that the Flying Angel might have seen. You might want to create a scene of nurses or soldiers relaxing when off duty, of people in an aeroplane being evacuated like in the story, or even of soldiers trekking through the dense jungle.
- 13) At the very start of the story, the little girl says that she wants to be brave just like her father was when he fought in the Great War (or First World War). Do you think that she succeeds? In what ways is she brave during the course of the story? What do you think that it means to be brave? Write a sentence explaining what being brave means to you, and draw or paint a picture to illustrate it.
- 14) How did reading the story make you feel? What do you think was the scariest part of the story? Which part of the story did you like the most? Draw or paint a picture to share your feelings about the story.
- 15) What do you think might have happened to the girl in the story after the war was over? Write a brief explanation of what you think she might have done with the rest of her life, and draw a picture to illustrate it.