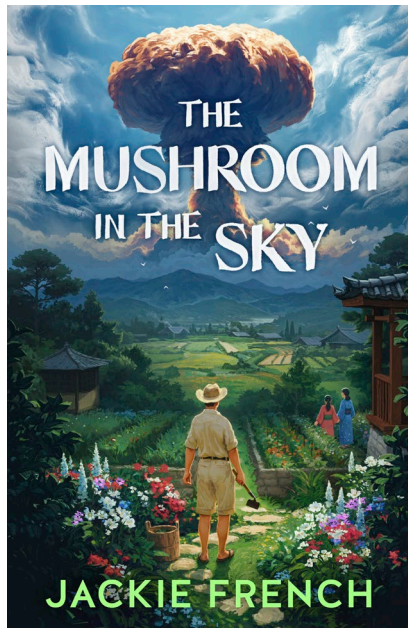


Classroom Resources



ISBN:
9781460766057

NOTES BY:
Sue Warren and Jemma Myers

PUBLICATION DATE:
July 2025

The Mushroom in the Sky

Jackie French

BOOK SUMMARY

1942

Japan has bombed Sydney Harbour. Sixteen-year-old Ossie lies about his age to protect his country, even though it means abandoning his only family, a one-eyed dog named Lucky.

Kind-hearted Mrs Plum is already looking after forty-six dogs belonging to soldiers who've gone to war. She can't possibly care for another. But just when she's becoming desperate to find a way to feed them, help arrives: thirteen-year-old Kat Murphy volunteers to care for Lucky and persuades the girls at school to help, too.

As Kat and Lucky grow closer, Kat realises he can still see Ossie, the master he loves. And somehow, Kat and Ossie catch glimpses into each other's lives, too. This extraordinary connection helps Ossie survive when he is taken as a prisoner of war to Japan. There, he witnesses a strange mushroom cloud rise above Nagasaki – the result of a bomb that will take, save and change lives, and forever leave the question: was it worth it?

Taken from eyewitness Japanese accounts of that extraordinary but often misunderstood time, this is a story of quiet heroism and endurance in the face of an unimaginable horror that continues to resound to this day.

KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- AC9HH7S06
- AC9E7LE01
- AC9E7LE05

THEMES

- Belonging
- Grief/ Loss
- WWII
- Resilience

Recommended Reading Ages: 12+

Resources Created For: Lower Secondary

These resources may be downloaded for use and study within schools
but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.



Classroom Resources

Before Reading

1. The cover art provides many clues about the narrative's setting, both time and place, and the historical focus. Try to show the cover without the title initially. Encourage students to contribute ideas about this and draw out points such as:
 - a) Atomic bomb – some will know about Hiroshima and Nagasaki
 - b) Which war do students think is the setting for the novel?
 - c) Japan – architecture, landscape and costumes
 - d) City or rural location
 - e) Is the figure in the foreground Japanese? Are there any clues about who he might be?
2. Revealing the title will confirm much of this discussion.
 - a) What was the 'mushroom' in the sky?
 - b) What do they know about the atomic bombs that the USA dropped on the Japanese cities?
 - c) Have any students seen documentaries or read books about these events and/or their aftereffects?
e.g. *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr and *My Hiroshima* by Junko Morimoto
3. What were the after-effects of the bombings?
 - a) What were the immediate consequences of the bombing, e.g. destruction, death, injury?
 - b) Are students aware of the particular and prolonged effects of atomic bombs?
4. The narrative, as well as the author in her notes, makes reference to the Cinesound Movietone newsreels. These were part of any cinema outing up to the 1970s. [The National Film and Sound Archive](#) holds many examples including those from war years. Watch selected appropriate examples to inform students' understanding of the events of the book.

During Reading

1. Write brief chapter summaries as you read, keep them short and include only key plot/character development points.
 - Include important quotes that reflect these key points.
 - The author is adept at using the 'show, don't tell' literary technique to convey a sense of place and time. Note examples from throughout the novel that show this, e.g. transport, occupations, clothing, daily life, food, attitudes/behaviour.

Classroom Resources

2. Although the shortages in Australia were not as severe as those in the UK or Europe, rationing for food and clothing was in place from 1942 and lasted, for some items, until 1950. Do some research on the rationing experienced by Australians. The [Australian War Memorial](#) is a great place to start.
 - a) What items/goods/foodstuffs were rationed? Be as specific as possible.
 - b) What amounts of different types of food were allowed per person?
 - c) What about clothing?
 - d) How did rationing in Australia compare to that experienced in other countries?
 - e) Look up some 'austerity' recipes, make some to try out. [The 1940s Experiment](#) has a good collection of these.
 - f) There were many foodstuffs unavailable during the war years. Challenge the class to go without a certain favourite item for a period of time e.g. a week or the duration of the study of the book.
3. Kat knows that prisoners of war have a hard time but why are her Aunt and Mrs Plum more concerned than she is for Ossie (p. 90)? Research the cruel treatment of PoWs in places such as Changi, the Thai-Burma Railway or the Kokoda Track.

Language and narrative techniques

1. Introduce or revise the term 'euphemism'. 'Kat grabbed the first excuse that came to her. "Aunt Flo is visiting early this month. I... I'd better get home. I didn't bring anything."' (p. 174).
 - a) Are students familiar with this euphemism, and do they know what it refers to?
 - b) When and why do we use euphemisms in conversations? Have students compile a list of others they know e.g. 'passed away' instead of died.
 - c) Euphemisms are often specific to particular times and places, and can be in an integral part of the vernacular or slang.
 - (i) What euphemisms can students find in *The Mushroom in the Sky* which they are unfamiliar with? Find out what they mean.
 - (ii) Why do some euphemisms fall out of use?
 - (iii) What are some euphemisms that people use today that the Kat and Ossie would find confusing?
2. The narrative is told from the alternating perspectives of Kat and Ossie. Through reading these two narratives, readers come to understand the gaps between what those at home in Australia, and those fighting the war knew about what was happening.
 - a) Why do governments sometimes choose not to fully reveal what is happening during war time?
 - b) Do students think it is right for governments to censor what people know about events like war?
 - c) Kat knows more about what is happening thanks to her access to government documents through her uncle. How does this affect her perspective on what's happening to Australia?
3. The author uses the device of 'second sight', with Lucky as a conduit, as a means for Kat and Ossie to 'see' each other.
 - a) Why do students think Jackie French has used this device to allow the two main characters to communicate with each other?
 - b) What insight into events is the reader given through the use of second sight that they don't get through the use of the dual narrative?

These resources may be downloaded for use and study within schools
but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Classroom Resources

After Reading

1. What have students learnt about WWII in general, and the use of atomic weapons in Japan in particular, through reading *The Mushroom in the Sky*?
 - a) What questions do they have after reading the novel?
 - b) Is there anything they've learnt about that they think more people should know about?
 - (i) How might they share this information with their family, school or community?
2. The author points out that there have been many untruths, misrepresentations and hidden history around the entire episode of the atomic bombs and the surrender of Japan. Assign students to pairs or small groups to research this part of WWII. Ensure the students cross-reference to check veracity as far as possible.
 - a) Look at the research and creation of the bombs, known as the Manhattan Project, as well as the decision to drop the bombs, and their after-effects.
 - b) Try and answer any outstanding questions from the previous activity.
3. During WWII Japanese soldiers were expected to conform to a code of honour based on that practised by Samurai during the feudal period. This code meant that surrender or capture were seen as worse than death. The importance of honour and fighting to the end was also reflected in much of the Japanese population, and can still be seen in many aspects of Japanese culture today.
 - a) How do you think the military was able to convince/brainwash the Japanese people into thinking this way?
 - b) What dangers are posed by this mental control of an entire population?
 - c) How can people resist?
 - d) How is resistance seen in the novel? For example, in chapter 11, Hiroki-san helps Ossie and his mates despite the danger to himself.
4. 'The whole idea of war was insane, millions fighting, millions dying, and all for the wreckage that would be left.' (p. 121) In June 1945, the Japanese government initiated the '100 Million Glorious Dead' campaign, which essentially called on everyone in Japan – men, women and children – to commit themselves to fighting to the death for their country. This was one of the factors taken into account when the Allied forces were deciding whether to end the war with Japan by invasion or by using atomic weapons. There was a great fear that an invasion of Japan would result in enormous loss of life, both for the Japanese and Allied soldiers.
 - a) Given the devastating and ongoing effects of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, do students think the Allied forces saved lives? Or were more lives lost than may have been if the war had gone on?
 - b) As well as the enormous loss of human life, what other effects do students think should be taken into account when assessing the wisdom, or otherwise, of dropping the bombs on Japan?
5. 'Nothing could excuse what he'd seen in those days at Nagasaki. He had healed. Most of those he'd met would die or be in pain their entire lives. Innocent children, babies, old men and women wiped out in minutes. Two entire cities. There was no defending that.' (p. 214)
 - a) To what extent do students agree with Ossie's opinion of the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan?

These resources may be downloaded for use and study within schools
but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.



Classroom Resources

6. Much of Japan's involvement in WWII, particularly negative aspects such as its role as an aggressor, the conditions of its PoW camps and the '100 Million Glorious Dead' campaign are not taught in Japanese schools.
 - a) Why might a country attempt to "rewrite" history in this way?
 - b) What are some of the dangers of not understanding all of your country's involvement with an event like WWII?
 - c) Are there any significant events or parts of Australia's history that people are not currently, or have not in the past, been taught about?
 - (i) How have we as a country attempted to address these omissions?
 - (ii) Do students think this has been adequately done, or are there things we could do better/learn more about?
7. Choose one incident from the narrative involving either Kat or Ossie, in connection with Lucky: for example Ossie trying to persuade Mrs Plum to take Lucky.
 - a) Write a diary entry or write a Small Moment piece from the perspective of either Kat or Ossie. Then write the same scene from Lucky's perspective. Try to evoke all of the five senses in order to 'show don't tell' your readers what you want to share.
8. In pairs, ask students to choose either the farm or the PoW camp and create a map.
 - a) Take turns to give your partner the next instruction, using description from the text to inform you.
 - b) Compare all the finished maps in a gallery walk.
9. Compose a series of letters between a dog and its master away in the war. This could be one mentioned in the book or purely from the imagination.
 - a) Ask students to include details of their lives, including food, school, news and family and friends, based on what they know about the period from the novel and their research.

About the Author

Jackie French AM is an award-winning writer, wombat negotiator, the 2014–2015 Australian Children's Laureate and the 2015 Senior Australian of the Year. In 2016, Jackie became a Member of the Order of Australia for her contribution to children's literature and her advocacy for youth literacy. She is regarded as one of Australia's most popular children's authors and writes across all genres – from picture books, history, fantasy, ecology and sci-fi, to her much-loved historical fiction for a variety of age groups. 'A book can change a child's life. A book can change the world' was the primary philosophy behind Jackie's two-year term as Laureate.

jackiefrench.com

facebook.com/authorjackiefrench

These resources may be downloaded for use and study within schools
but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.