

THE FITZOSBORNES AT WAR

MICHELLE COOPER



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

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INTRODUCTION

Sophie FitzOsborne and the royal family of Montmaray escaped their remote island home when the Nazis attacked. But now that war has come to England and the rest of the world as well, nowhere is safe.

In this final volume of the award-winning Montmaray Journals trilogy, Sophie fills her diary with tales of a life in wartime. Stories of blackouts and the Blitz. Dancing in nightclubs with soldiers on leave. And desperately waiting for news of her brother Toby, last seen flying over enemy territory.

But even as bombs rain down on London, hope springs up in surprising places, and love blooms. And when the Allies begin to drive their way across Europe, the FitzOsbornes take heart. Maybe, just maybe, there will be a way to liberate Montmaray – to go home again at last.

PLOT SUMMARY

The Second World War begins with the FitzOsbornes determined to do all they can to defeat the Nazis. Sophie's beloved brother, Toby, distinguishes himself as a fighter pilot during the Battle of Britain. Her cousin, Veronica, joins the Foreign Office, helps foil a Nazi attempt to kidnap the Duke of Windsor, and gets involved with a British diplomat in Madrid who is secretly helping the French Resistance and trying to expose 'neutral' Spain as an active ally of Nazi Germany. Sophie's little sister, Henry, having been expelled from her exclusive boarding school, joins the Boat's Crew Wrens. Their wealthy Aunt Charlotte, reduced to living in the gatehouse with her maid after her country house is requisitioned for use as a military hospital, busies herself with the Women's Voluntary Service. Family friends Daniel and Rupert are doing top-secret work for the military, Jimmy joins a bomb disposal company, and even glamorous Julia sets aside her life as a socialite to drive ambulances through Blitz-battered London.

Sophie, stuck in a desk job at the Ministry of Food, initially questions her own usefulness, but she is soon caught up in the Colonel's schemes, which include trying to uncover a spy at the American Embassy. Sophie also has to deal with blackouts, bombing raids, rationing and increasingly stringent rules governing every aspect of wartime life. With Daniel's Viennese cousins in an internment camp for 'enemy aliens', the Mosleys imprisoned indefinitely without trial, newspapers censored and 'unpatriotic speech' made illegal, Sophie begins to wonder whether living in a

democracy in wartime is all that different to life under a Fascist dictator – especially when she discovers that the government is intent on hiding the truth about a friend's mysterious death.

Furthermore, old prejudices persist. Kick Kennedy faces opposition from both Catholics and Protestants when she announces her engagement to the heir of the Duke of Devonshire. Widowed Julia is distraught when she imagines the scandal her unplanned pregnancy could cause. Veronica's commitment to her Jewish boyfriend horrifies Aunt Charlotte, although Veronica herself is ambivalent about traditional marriage and motherhood. Meanwhile, Sophie's romantic dreams about her cousin Simon abruptly become reality – but is this really what she wants, or needs? Is quiet, dependable Rupert a better choice for her?

Will the FitzOsbornes survive this devastating war? Will there ever be a way to liberate Montmaray – to go home again at last? Sometimes heart-stopping, sometimes heart-breaking, Sophie's story will, as always, capture readers' hearts.

THEMES

Truth

'This isn't about discovering the truth. It's about winning the war.' (p. 335)

Sophie's belief in the value of truth is tested when she discovers multiple instances of British authorities concealing the truth. Examples taken from real life include the censorship of news about the Blitz (p. 172 and p. 268), the Battle of Barking Creek cover-up (p. 212) and the Allied response to the Katyn massacre (pp. 334–335), while fictional examples include the RAF's attempt to suppress the facts about Anthony's death (pp. 226–231).

Question: Why did the authorities conceal the truth about each of these events? Did they make the right decisions, given the circumstances?

Sophie also struggles with the notion of truth in her personal life. For example, she wonders about 'the dubious morality of lying to someone for their own good' (p. 416) and concludes that 'everyone's version of the truth is different' (p. 490).

Question: Is truth subjective?

Activity: Identify one example of Sophie choosing to lie or conceal the truth, and discuss whether she made the right decision.

Injustice and Hypocrisy

'It's a bit hypocritical to attack the Nazis for occupying France and Belgium and all those other countries, when Britain's been occupying India for decades, and whenever Indians say they want self-government, they get thrown into prison or shot dead.' (p. 269)

Sophie is troubled when she observes the British authorities behaving in ways that seem unfair and undemocratic. Examples from real life include the internment of German Jewish refugees (p. 36 and p. 85) and the imprisonment without trial of Oswald and Diana Mosley (pp. 114–115 and p. 267).

Question: Why did the British government imprison German refugees and British Fascists during the war? Was the government justified in taking these actions? Why or why not?

Veronica also reveals that Winston Churchill is bribing the Spanish dictatorship to keep Spain out of the war: 'Yet another example of this government's moral flexibility, I suppose – paying one lot of murderous Fascists, in order to help us defeat a slightly different lot of murderous Fascists.' (p. 252) Furthermore, Churchill, a long-time opponent of Communism, finds himself in an uneasy alliance with Stalin, the Communist dictator of the Soviet Union (p. 251).

Question: Do these wartime alliances between ideological enemies have any modern-day parallels?

Women in Society

'Aunt Charlotte is never going to let us train for anything, let alone apply for jobs ... She doesn't even approve of girls attending school. She thinks it hinders their marriage prospects.' (p. 8)

Before the war, women in Britain had limited access to secondary and tertiary education, faced strong opposition if they tried to enter many professional careers, and were forced to resign from government jobs if they got married. However, wartime conscription of men into the armed forces led to a nationwide labour shortage, so attitudes towards women working outside the home began to change. During the war, British women worked in munitions factories, drove ambulances, ran canteens, nursed wounded servicemen, grew food on farms, operated anti-aircraft guns, test-piloted new aeroplanes, plotted movements of ship convoys and decrypted enemy messages. From 1941, young single women were conscripted into the armed forces if they weren't already doing vital war work. Although the contribution of women to the war effort was invaluable, some men resented the presence of women in the workforce, and women continued to be paid less for equal work (for example, see Veronica's experiences in the Foreign Office, p. 54, pp. 96–97 and p. 187, and Daphne's experiences in an aircraft factory, p. 131).

Question: Discuss the arguments for and against female conscription during wartime. What job would you have chosen to do during the war? How has women's participation in the workforce changed since the war?

Social Class and Privilege

'You think a mere world war will have any effect on the British class system? You really do have your head in the clouds.' (p. 236)

Many aspects of the rigid class system of pre-war Britain remained in place throughout the war. In the novel, Toby, an RAF officer, is threatened with a court-martial for playing cards with 'other ranks' at his aerodrome (p. 173) and a rich marquess avoids arrest because he is a peer of the realm (p. 228). However, the war also led to people from different social classes living and working together for the first time. Daniel, a Socialist, suggests that rationing and other wartime restrictions will result in permanent changes in attitudes for the most privileged members of society (pp. 235–236).

Question: In what ways does Sophie's privileged position in British society make life in wartime easier for her?

'Billy says Socialism is inevitable now.' (p. 401)

In the novel's epilogue, Sophie mentions some of the reforms implemented by Britain's post-war Labour government, such as the nationalisation of the railways and coal mines (p. 487).

Question: What social and political changes occurred in Britain in the late 1940s and the 1950s? What were the consequences for rich, titled families?

Love and Sexuality

'I realised [sex] was both overwhelming and nowhere near as significant as people made out ... I wasn't sure love had much to do with it at all.' (pp. 298–299)

Sophie, Veronica and Julia struggle to reconcile society's rules for aristocratic young ladies with their own turbulent emotions and experiences. Veronica questions the value of marriage (pp. 205–206), Julia is distraught about an unplanned pregnancy (pp. 194–197) and Sophie ponders the mysteries of love and sex (pp. 103–105, pp. 155–156, pp. 239–241 and pp. 298–299). Sophie is also annoyed by the different rules for men and women when she considers her friend Kick Kennedy (p. 402).

Question: What do you think about the decision Julia makes regarding her unplanned pregnancy?

What decision would you make in the same circumstances? Are there different 'rules' for girls and boys regarding sexual behaviour now?

Meanwhile, Toby is aware that he will be dismissed from the air force if the truth about his sexuality is revealed (p. 174), and he is under pressure to marry and produce an heir (p. 195).

Question: Are gay men and lesbians currently allowed to serve in the military forces in Australia/the United Kingdom/the United States? What arguments are given for and against permitting gay men and lesbians to serve in the military? How are circumstances different for gay men now, regarding marriage and children?

Death and Grief

'Sorrow has made me so self-centred and stupid.' (p. 313)

The war forces Sophie to confront the reality of sudden, violent death. Her reactions to the deaths (or presumed deaths) of loved ones include: disbelief (pp. 183–185, p. 272 and p. 347); guilt (p. 244 and p. 350); despair (p. 244); and anger (p. 349).

Question: Do Sophie's reactions correspond to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance)? How do Sophie, Veronica, Henry, Rupert and Simon react to Toby's disappearance, and how do their responses reveal aspects of their characters?

Sophie and Rupert also discuss the possibility of life after death (pp. 252–253).

Question: How do the major religions of the world explain the concept of death? Discuss Rupert's statement that 'we make up a lot of stories about eternal life, because we're so terrified of death.'

Toby, an RAF fighter pilot, watches several of his friends and colleagues die in combat. He responds to the likelihood of his own death with resignation (p. 206) and, later, an apparent belief that he is invincible (p. 258).

Question: Do you think Toby's reactions are typical of servicemen during wartime? What is Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, and which characters in the novel exhibit symptoms of this disorder?

Heroism, Courage, Sacrifice and Endurance

'You think I give a damn about being heroic? I don't even know good from evil any more.' (p. 165)

Toby faces constant danger as a fighter pilot, but he is reluctant to call himself a hero (pp. 163–165), partly because he knows other men who have unhesitatingly sacrificed their lives to save others (p. 207). Other examples of heroism and self-sacrifice include the work of the Resistance in France and Belgium during the Nazi occupation (p. 338 and pp. 421–423) and the efforts of firefighters, ambulance drivers and bomb disposal units during the Blitz.

Question: What defines a 'hero'? Is Toby a hero?

Sophie, Veronica and the other inhabitants of London live through months of bombing raids during the Blitz.

Question: Does Sophie demonstrate courage during the war? What strategies did people use to help them endure the suffering caused by the Blitz?

Attitudes to Disability

'He seemed to be taking a sadistic delight in my embarrassment, but why wouldn't he? In his position, I'd be tempted to go on the attack, too – better than constantly having to defend oneself against revulsion and pity.' (p. 203)

Sophie is shocked when she first meets a badly injured pilot (pp. 202–205), but her attitudes about people with physical disabilities evolve (p. 409). Toby's injuries and long rehabilitation also lead to

changes in his own character, with Julia suggesting he is 'far more perceptive and considerate than he might have been otherwise' (p 416).

Question: How does Toby change as a result of his experiences in the war? Are community attitudes to people with physical disabilities different now?

Activity: Research the life and wartime experiences of Douglas Bader, who had both legs amputated at the age of twenty-one, then went on to lead a fighter squadron during WWII.

Regeneration

'What had taken minutes to destroy would take years, perhaps decades, to rebuild.' (p. 479)

In the novel's epilogue, Sophie discusses the challenges of rebuilding their lives after the destruction and trauma of the war years.

Question: How do Sophie, Veronica, Toby and Simon respond to the end of the war?

Activity: Select one of the above themes and write an essay exploring how the theme is explored in the novel.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

The FitzOsbornes at War is a work of fiction. It takes the form of a diary written from Sophie's perspective in the first person.

It includes letters written by Rupert (pp.24–26), Henry (pp.141–143 and pp. 343–344), Veronica (pp.145–146), Toby (pp.140–141, pp. 157–158 and p. 166) and the Colonel (p. 335), as well as other correspondence, such as Montmaray's declaration of war on Germany (p. 17) and an official telegram announcing Henry's death (p. 346). There is also a recount by Toby of his wartime experiences, transcribed by Sophie (pp. 418–435).

Question: How do Rupert, Henry, Veronica and Toby's letters reveal aspects of their characters?

Activity: Write a wartime diary entry in the voice of Rupert, Henry, Veronica or Toby.

The novel also incorporates quotations from primary sources, including advertising slogans and posters (p. 69 and p. 258), government pamphlets (pp. 123–124), newspapers and magazines (p. 58, p. 64 and p. 236) and political speeches and broadcasts (p. 2, p. 99, p. 106, p. 107, p. 108, pp. 121–122 and p. 162).

Question: Why are Winston Churchill's wartime speeches famous? Choose one of his wartime speeches and analyse its rhetorical style and structure in relation to its audience and purpose.

Sophie regards reading as being 'as necessary as breathing, sleeping and eating' (p. 102) and she often refers to works of literature in her diary. These include the novels *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (p. 37), *Ariel* by André Maurois (p. 182 and p. 270) and *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen (p. 357). There are also quotations from the following poems:

Ode on Melancholy by John Keats (p. 61)

Ode on a Grecian Urn by John Keats (p. 225)

Jubilate Agno by Christopher Smart (p. 314)

Toby also misquotes from Tennyson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (p. 257).

Question: How do the literary references and quotations add to the narrative?

Activity: Choose one quotation and discuss its meaning, in the context of the novel.

HISTORY

Sophie's diary entries describe how everyday life changes in England during the war. These changes include:

- blackout regulations (p. 10, pp. 27–28 and p. 42)
- evacuation of city children to the country and overseas (pp. 10–12, p. 124 and p. 179)
- carrying gas masks (p. 34)
- food rationing (p. 64, p. 83, p. 233 and p. 260)
- petrol rationing (p. 78)
- clothes rationing (p. 261)
- requisitioning of private property (pp. 117–119 and p. 365)
- salvage schemes (p. 138 and p. 160)
- sleeping in air raid shelters (pp. 167–170)
- removing art from galleries and museums (p. 180)
- banning weather forecasts (p. 261)

Activity: Research one of the wartime changes listed above.

Question: Which wartime restriction would you have found most difficult to endure?

Although most the main characters are fictional, the novel also includes many historical characters. Political figures mentioned include:

- Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Britain
- Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Britain
- Clement Attlee, Prime Minister of Britain
- Lord Woolton, Minister of Food
- Samuel Hoare, British Ambassador to Spain
- The Duke of Windsor, formerly King Edward VIII
- Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists
- Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States
- Joseph Kennedy, US Ambassador to Britain
- Francisco Franco, Caudillo of Fascist Spain
- Joseph Stalin, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
- Adolf Hitler, Führer of Nazi Germany
- General Charles de Gaulle, Leader of the Free French government in exile
- General Sikorski, Prime Minister of the Polish government in exile
- King Leopold of the Belgians

Other real-life characters include:

- Kathleen 'Kick' Kennedy, American Red Cross worker and daughter of the US Ambassador
- John F. Kennedy, US naval officer and later, President of the United States
- Billy Hartington, British army officer and heir to the Duke of Devonshire
- Unity Mitford, British Fascist
- Tyler Kent and Anna Wolkoff, imprisoned for breaching the Official Secrets Act
- Douglas Bader, Richard Hillary and John 'Cat's Eyes' Cunningham, RAF fighter pilots

Activity: Choose one of the above characters and write a profile of him or her, including a description of the character's activities during the war.

Although the Kingdom of Montmaray is fictional, most of the world events mentioned in the novel actually occurred. These include:

<i>Date of Event</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Page Reference</i>
23rd August, 1939	Signing of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact	p. 4
	Invasion of Poland by Germany	p. 43
	Invasion of Finland by the Soviet Union	p. 97
	Invasion of Norway by Germany	p. 99, pp. 106–107
	Invasion of Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands by Germany	p. 115
	Surrender of Belgium	p. 115
	Italy's declaration of war on the Allied Nations	p. 124
	Surrender of France	p. 125
	Evacuation of Allied forces from Dunkirk	pp. 119–120
	Invasion of Channel Islands by Germany	p. 137
	Destruction of French Navy by British forces	p. 138
	Nazi plot to kidnap the Duke and Duchess of Windsor	pp. 150–151
	Battle of Britain	pp. 157–158
	Hitler's meeting with Franco at Hendaye	pp. 186–187
	Beginning of the London Blitz	pp. 167–170
	Razing of Coventry	p. 188
	Bombing of Pearl Harbor	p. 259
	Invasion of China, Burma, Malaya, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines by Japan	p. 260
	Baedeker Blitz	p. 265
	Dieppe raid	p. 307
	Surrender of Axis troops in North Africa	p. 309
	Katyn massacre	pp. 334–335
	Death of General Sikorski	p. 338
	D-Day landings in Normandy	p. 445
	V-1 'doodlebug' attacks on London	p. 446
	Liberation of France	p. 448
	'July Plot' assassination attempt against Hitler	p. 457
	V-2 rocket raids on London	pp. 483–484
	Liberation of the Nazi concentration camps	p. 488
	Nuremberg Trials	pp. 488–489

Activity: Add the correct date(s) to each wartime event. Choose one event and describe its importance with regards to the outcome of the war.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle Cooper is the author of *The Rage of Sheep* and The Montmaray Journals trilogy. The first Montmaray book, *A Brief History of Montmaray*, won a NSW Premier's Literary Award and was listed in the American Library Association's 2010 Best Books for Young Adults. Its sequel, *The FitzOsbornes in Exile*, was shortlisted for the NSW and WA Premier's Literary Awards, named a Children's Book Council Notable Book and listed in Kirkus Best Teen Books of 2011 and the American Library Association's 2012 Best Fiction for Young Adults. Michelle lives in Sydney and is currently working on her next book for teenagers. Visit www.michellecooper-writer.com for more information.

FURTHER READING

A list of books used by the author when researching *The FitzOsbornes at War* can be found in the Author Notes (pp. 495–497). Further information about the historical background to the novel can be found at the author's website: www.michellecooper-writer.com/warhistorical.html

Websites

Timelines

http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW2/WW2_timeline.htm

<http://worldatwar.net/timeline/other/diplomacy39-45.html>

Churchill's Wartime Speeches

<http://winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/speeches-of-winston-churchill>

The Battle of Britain

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/battle_of_britain

<http://www.battleofbritain1940.net/contents-index.html>

The Blitz

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/blitz_01.shtml

<http://www.historiccoventry.co.uk/blitz/blitz.php>

<http://www.exetermemories.co.uk/EM/exeterblitz.html>

http://www.exetermemories.co.uk/EM/story/story_94.php

Life in England during WWII

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/homefront/life/>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/christmas_underfire_01.shtml

<http://food.iwm.org.uk/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/>

Women at War

<http://www.wartimememories.co.uk/women.html>

<http://www.seayourhistory.org.uk/content/view/136/224/>

RAF Pilots Injured in Combat

http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/archibald_mcindoe_and_the_guinea.htm

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/weekend/page/0,,1945108,00.html>

Escape Lines in Belgium and France

<http://wwii-netherlands-escape-lines.com/escape-and-evasion-topics/>

<http://www.ww2escapelines.co.uk/escapelines/comete/>

Invasion and Liberation of the Channel Islands

<http://jersey.com/english/discoverjersey/occupationtoliberation/theoccupationofjersey/>