

THE LAST LIGHT HORSE

DIANNE WOLFER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRIAN SIMMONDS
ISBN (HB): 9781760991302
YEAR LEVEL: Y4–9

ABOUT THE BOOK

During the First World War, 136,000 Australian horses were sent to fight. Just one came home.

From the high country of Victoria to the desert sands of Egypt, from the waters off Gallipoli to the battlefields of France, this is the extraordinary story of Sandy, the only returning warhorse.

The Last Light Horse is a work of historical fiction, and is a companion title for *Lighthouse Girl*, *Light Horse Boy* and *In the Lamplight*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dianne Wolfer is an acclaimed author of books for teenagers and young readers spanning multiple genres. Her book *Lighthouse Girl* served as inspiration for Perth International Arts Festival's *The Giants*, featured in events commemorating the centenary of the departure of the First Australian Imperial Force from Albany and has recently been adapted for the stage by Black Swan State Theatre Company of WA. One of Dianne's picture books, *Photographs in the Mud* (set along the Kokoda Track), is used as an international peace reference and has been published in Japanese; it is also a recommended resource for the National History Curriculum. Her young adult title *Choices* has been translated into Polish.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

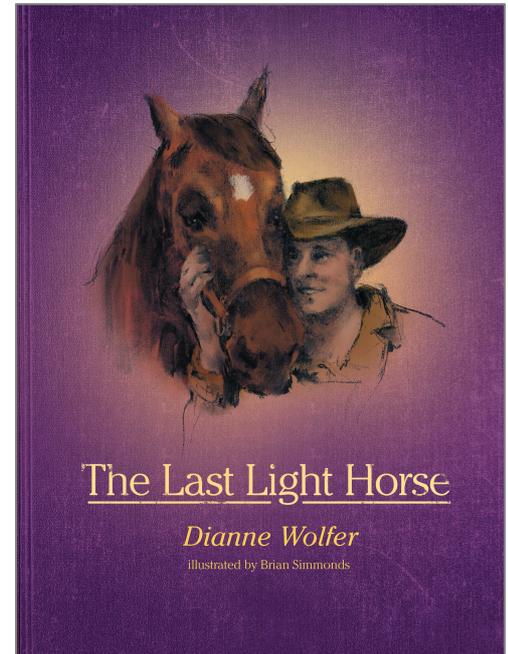
Brian Simmonds was born in Subiaco and worked for many years as a lithographer in the printing industry while studying art in the evenings. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art from Curtin University and worked for the *Sunday Times*, *New Idea* and an advertising agency before he became a professional artist in 1990. He has exhibited his work many times and won numerous prizes for drawing, oil painting and mixed media works. His work can be found in many private and public collections in Australia.

THEMES

- WWI
- The Anzacs
- War correspondence
- Animal relationships
- Horse care
- Resilience
- Honour
- Early 20th-century Australia
- Geography
- Ship voyages

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y4–9 HASS Inquiry and skills



Y4–9 History
Y4–9 Geography
Y4–9 English
Y4–9 Visual Arts
General capabilities: Ethical Understanding

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: diannewolfer.com
- Illustrator's website: briansimmonds.com.au/index.html
- Publisher's website: fremantlepress.com.au
- Australian War Memorial: awm.gov.au
- awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/horses/sandy
- The Australian Light Horse Association: lighthorse.org.au

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Before reading:

1. Based on the title and cover, predict what you think this story will be about.
2. What is a Waler?
3. Create a mind map showing what you already know about the use of horses and other animals during wartime. What questions do you have that you hope might be answered in the story?

After reading:

1. Sandy provides comfort to many soldiers throughout the story. Are there any animals that bring you comfort? Why do you think many people find animals, particularly horses, so comforting?
2. Why were horses used by the military during WWI? What duties did they perform? Do you think horses are still used by the armed services today?
3. Who is your favourite character in this story and why?
4. What is the meaning of the title *The Last Light Horse*?
5. What message/s do you think the creators would like readers to take from this story?
6. Have you read any other books by Dianne Wolfer? How does this book compare?
7. On page 64 Archie says, 'I can smell Australia!' What does Australia smell like to you?

HASS

1. What are primary and secondary sources? Give examples of both from this story.
2. When war is declared, Francis is eager to sign up and donates his best horse to help the army. Why do you think Francis was so eager to help? Do you think Australians would be as eager to help today?
3. Create and label a map showing Sandy's journey throughout the story, from Tallangatta to Maribyrnong.
4. What does the conversation between Francis and his brother on page 10, and the songs mentioned on page 18, suggest about Australia's relationship with Britain at this time?
5. What is the significance of the reversed boots (riderless horse) described on page 38? Do you know any other traditions related to military funerals? Do you know any funeral traditions important to your culture?
6. Page 50 reads, '... a third wartime Christmas passed.' Why do you think Christmas was used as a marker of time during the war?
7. Why do you think it is important for children to learn about WWI and the Anzacs?
8. List five resources you have access to today that Francis did not have in his hometown of Tallangatta.
9. Charles Bean was Australia's official war correspondent during WWI. His job was to report on Australia's participation in the war for publication in the newspaper. What purpose/s do you think these reports served?
10. What are some differences Sandy notices when he travels overseas? Have you ever been overseas? What was the same and what was different about the country/countries you visited?
11. Visit Dianne Wolfer's website to discover more about how the Light series of books was researched and created: diannewolfer.com

ENGLISH

1. This story is historical fiction, meaning it combines real and imagined people, places and events. Can you think of any other stories that would fit in the historical fiction genre?
2. Writing historical fiction often involves a lot of research to make sure the story is accurate to the time period in which it is set. For example, it wouldn't have been accurate if the characters in *The Last Light Horse* used mobile phones or travelled by electric scooter. Make a list of ways an author of historical fiction could learn about a time period.
3. Write five things from the story that are fact (true) and five that are fiction (made up).
4. Write a summary of each chapter, using 25 words or less per chapter. To fit the word limit, you will need to include only the main events and details.
5. In a picture book, the text (words) and illustrations work together to tell the story. List three things you discover in this story from the illustrations and three things you discover from the text.
6. Why do you think the author chose to tell this story as a picture book instead of a novel or short story?
7. This story is told from the third person point of view, and the reader gets insight into Sandy's thoughts and feelings. Do you think focusing on the experience of a horse, instead of a person, makes the events of the story less upsetting for young readers?
8. This book contains lots of specific vocabulary about horses, such as foal, groom, gait and brumby. Create your own glossary of horse vocabulary used in the story.
9. This book contains lots of specific vocabulary about war, such as Major, battalion, posting and cordite. Create your own glossary of war vocabulary used in the story.
10. Moths are a recurring element in this story, featuring on pages 4, 30 and 66. Why do you think an author would weave a recurring element through a story? Can you think of another story that has a recurring element?
11. When Sandy is put down, the author has used a metaphor to express that Sandy has died. What metaphor is used? Why do you think the author used this metaphor?
12. Plot the events of the story on a story mountain.
13. Describe the setting of the Orvieto below deck. What would you see, hear, smell and feel?
14. Use one of the settings from the story (aboard the ship, Port Melbourne, etc.) to inspire an original short story of your own. You do not have to include the same characters or themes as *The Last Light Horse*. Remember, a short story should include an orientation to set up the story, one or more complications the character/s must overcome, and a satisfying resolution.
15. Write a postcard from a character in the story to a loved one back home. Let them know where you are and what's happening. Use language that fits with the time.
16. Each chapter starts with a quote, which quote do you like the best? Explain your choice, then write a poem inspired by the quote. Your poem can be written in any form you like, such as haiku, acrostic or free verse.
17. Rewrite an event from the story as a newspaper article. Use language that fits with the time and conventions of newspaper articles.

THE ARTS

1. The illustrations for this story are collage, a type of mixed media. Write a definition for both terms, checking in a dictionary or online if you're not sure.
2. Make a list of all the items used to create the illustrations. For example, photographs, charcoal sketches, etc.
3. Why do you think the illustrator chose to create collage, rather than just drawing images? Do you think this was a good choice for this type of story? Why/why not?
4. Choose three adjectives to describe the charcoal sketches. Why do you think Brian Simmonds chose this style of illustration for this story?
5. Over a week, collect items that can be used to create a collage about your life. You could collect receipts, timetables, leaves, packaging, etc. When you have enough items, create your artwork.
6. At the end of the epilogue, there is a list of photo credits. Why is this included?
7. In small groups, write and perform a short scene showing Sandy and Archie's return to Port Melbourne (p. 64) aboard the Booral. You should include the events from the story, as well as adding your own characters and dialogue (speech).

ETHICAL UNDERSTANDING

1. List the character traits you feel these characters showed in the story:
 - a. Sandy
 - b. Francis
 - c. Major General Bridges
 - d. Charles Bean
 - e. Captain Leslie Whitfield
 - f. Archie
2. Do you think it's fair for authors to base characters on real people? What things do you think need to be considered before including a real person in a fiction story?
3. Do you think it's fair to use animals in the armed services? Explain your reasons for or against animals serving.
4. Why do you think it was important to Major General Bridges that Sandy be repatriated home to Australia?
5. On her website, author Dianne Wolfer says she is interested in exploring war in her stories as it 'brings out the best and worst in people.' What do you think this quote means? Do you agree or disagree?