

## These notes are for:

- All Ages
- Primary/Secondary

## Key Learning Areas:

- English
- HSIE/SOSE
- Art

## Example of:

- Picture Book
- Fictional Text

## Experience of:

- Anti-War
- Conflict Resolution
- Humour

## Values addressed:

- Care & Compassion
- Understanding, Tolerance & Inclusion
- Responsibility

## Themes:

- War
- Problem-Solving
- Peace

\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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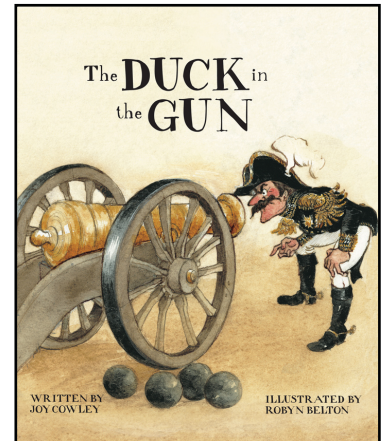
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## The Duck in the Gun - Overview

### The Duck in the Gun

By: Joy Cowley/Robyn Belton  
ISBN: 9781921150838  
ARRP: \$15.95  
NZRRP: \$17.99  
No. of Pages: 40  
March 2009



## Outline:

The General and his men are about to fire on a town they are at war with. But the Gunner has bad news for the General – they can't load the gun as there is a duck nesting inside it! Determined to not let a single duck stop an army, the General visits the Prime Minister of the town he is preparing to fight to resolve the situation. Can one duck put an end to the war?

A special 25th anniversary edition to celebrate this classic satirical – and still highly relevant – anti-war picture book.

## Author Information:

**Joy Cowley** is one of New Zealand's most celebrated authors. In 1992, she was awarded an OBE for services to children's literature; and the following year she was granted an honorary doctorate from Massey University. She was also awarded a DCNZM (A Damehood in the old honour system). In 2002, the Joy Cowley Award was established in her honour.

**Robyn Belton** is one of New Zealand's best known children's book illustrators. Her second collaboration with Joy Cowley, *The Duck in the Gun* (1985), won her the Russell Clark Award in 1985. In addition to her work as a professional illustrator, Belton has taught and run workshops throughout New Zealand for both children and adults. She has spoken and published widely on the subject of illustration, and has had her work exhibited in New Zealand, Italy and Japan. Robyn Belton was the 2006 winner of the prestigious award for children's literature, the Margaret Mahy Medal.

## How to use these notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly. Recommended websites within these notes may not have content that is age appropriate. Please use at your own discretion.

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## Joy Cowley on writing *The Duck in the Gun*:

"This was my Vietnam war protest. I had a young cousin who served two terms with NZ infantry. He wrote letters, describing jungle warfare, descriptions so horrible, I thought he was making them up. When I realised they were true, I felt utterly helpless. Then I decided that anti-war messages needed to go to children. About this time, a small NZ publishing company Price Milburn advertised a competition for a children's picture book. I sent them *The Duck in the Gun*. The story won the competition."

## Robyn Belton on writing *The Duck in the Gun*:

"I loved illustrating this story. Right from the start I was drawn into its humour and its compassion. Joy's brief to her illustrator was to set the story somewhere in Europe in the 19th Century. I interpreted this place as 'Ruritania', a mythical site for 19th Century comic opera. As you can imagine I had many field days gathering images. In the pictures I have added a dog which is not in Joy's text at all. The dog functions as a 'mirror', amplifying the gestures and expressions of the girl. *The Duck in the Gun* meant a lot to both Joy and myself as it was Joy's first anti-war book. That this story has a pacifist sentiment makes it as relevant today as when it was first written."

## Classroom activities for *The Duck in the Gun*:

### Before Reading the Text:

- Look at the front cover of *The Duck in the Gun*. What does the cover tell you about the book? Discuss the following questions:
  - What do you think this book is about?
  - Who is the author?
  - Who is the illustrator?
  - Based on what he is wearing, who do you think the man on the front cover might be?
- Look at the back cover of *The Duck in the Gun*. Discuss the following questions:
  - What is a blurb?
  - Why is a blurb important?
  - What does this blurb tell you about the book?
 There is an image, similar to a "coat of arms", on the back cover. What is the motto that is written here? Find the translation for the word "Ubique".

- Find the definitions of these words that occur throughout the story. What do these words mean to you? Try to use each word in a different sentence. Try to create a paragraph that uses all of these words.



words to EXPLORE

Gunner	waddling
General	marched
dilly	fair
shabby	Prime Minister
spyglass	snapped

### Activities/Questions:

- What values are identified in *The Duck in the Gun*? Think about words such as freedom, responsibility, caring etc.
- Where do you think this book is set and when? It isn't mentioned throughout the story however, Robyn Belton in her illustrator note at the back of book mentions her inspiration for the setting. Why do you think that a particular city or town has not been identified? How would this story change if it was adapted to a modern day setting? Discuss.
- Find the page which depicts the white flag. What is the significance of a white flag? What does this mean? Research on the internet or in your library when white flags have been used in history and by whom.
- What is an enemy? What is the opposite of an enemy? When are the General and Prime Minister enemies? What are the events that lead to them being friends? Discuss.
- Look for symbols throughout the book that relate to the topics of peace and war. Create two columns and label each column with the headings peace and war to list these symbols. Can you think of any others that are not included in the book?
- Create a word bank on the topic of peace. Think of words that relate to this topic e.g. reconciliation, love, kindness. Create a poster displaying a list of ten words.
- Integrate this book into your classroom activities for the International Day of Peace. Create a display of books that relate to the topic of peace. Think of symbols that relate to peace and decorate the classroom. Find songs and poems about peace that you can listen to.
 

International Day of Peace  
 21st September, 2009
- The story of *The Duck in the Gun* shows a peaceful resolution to a problem. Rather than using violence or aggression the characters discuss their problems. How might the following topics help to resolve problems peacefully: sharing, rules, talking, teamwork? In groups discuss each of these and the situations in which you think they would be effective. Select other books from your school library to read aloud. Try to choose books that have a problem or conflict that is resolved. Has the problem been resolved effectively in these books? Why/why not?

## Activities/Questions cont... :

- What does 'peace' mean to you? Do you have a favourite place that makes you feel at peace, or a person that makes you feel peaceful? Draw a place, person (this can be imaginary or real) that makes you feel this way.
- Create a timeline/list of events as they occur in the book. List the different problems that arise and how the General and Prime Minister hope to solve them.
- Create a display in the library of books that relate to the topic of war. Create a list of websites to display in the library that are on the topic of peace.
- Create an author profile for Joy Cowley. Use the information presented at the back of *The Duck in the Gun*. Visit Joy Cowley's website: [www.joycowley.com](http://www.joycowley.com)
- *The Duck in the Gun* was chosen as one of ten children's books selected for the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Research the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and its history.  
[www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp](http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp)  
In the 2008 'Peace Declaration' listed on this website "Mayors for Peace" is mentioned. Who are the "Mayors for Peace"?  
[www.mayorsforpeace.org](http://www.mayorsforpeace.org)  
Visit the above website to work out which are the affiliated cities with Mayors for Peace in Australia. Create a map of Australia showing these cities.

## Secondary School Questions:

- Joy Cowley has mentioned that *The Duck in the Gun* was written as a reaction to the Vietnam War. Research Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. Do you think it is important/not important to communicate to children anti-war messages? Discuss.
- Discuss the theme belonging in relation to the presence of the duck being in the gun. Think about situations that are improved by things that don't belong.
- *The Duck in the Gun* uses humour to convey a serious message. How is humour used effectively to do this? Can you think of other instances where humour is used in this way? Find political satire cartoons in your local newspaper. Discuss how humour is used in these.
- Find the page that has the sign with the words 'laughing duck'. What do you think the significance of this image is? Discuss the irony behind this sign.

## After Reading the Text:

- Write a review for *The Duck in the Gun*. Make sure that you touch on the important topics and themes that this picture book addresses.

## Cross-Curricular Activities:

### ART

Cover design is an important element of any book. At the end of the story there is a page that has an image of the previous *The Duck in the Gun* cover. Why do you think the cover has been changed? Which cover do you prefer? Design and illustrate your own cover for *The Duck in the Gun*. What do you think are the important elements that need to be included on the cover?

### HSIE/SOSE

Choose an element that you have found in *The Duck in the Gun* to research e.g.

canons  
military uniforms  
ducks  
military medals  
army bands

Create a poster or one-page fact sheet to present your information. Make sure you include pictures.

### MUSIC

Research and listen to songs that have anti-war messages. In particular focus on music from the Vietnam War era. How is music an effective method of expressing a point of view? Answer the following questions when you listen to the songs:

What are the phrases that stand out?  
What is the mood of the song?  
What are some interesting words used in the lyrics?

### LOTE/LANGUAGES

*The Duck in the Gun* has been translated into Japanese. Using language dictionaries or the internet, try to translate the title into as many different languages as possible.

# Word Bank

List words that you can associate with the following headings. These can be personal or general.

# Peace

# War

## FREE! RESOURCES

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