



# TEACHERS' RESOURCES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary and lower secondary  
(ages 9–12)

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## THEMES

- War
- Courage
- Loyalty
- Friendship
- Sacrifice
- Responsibility

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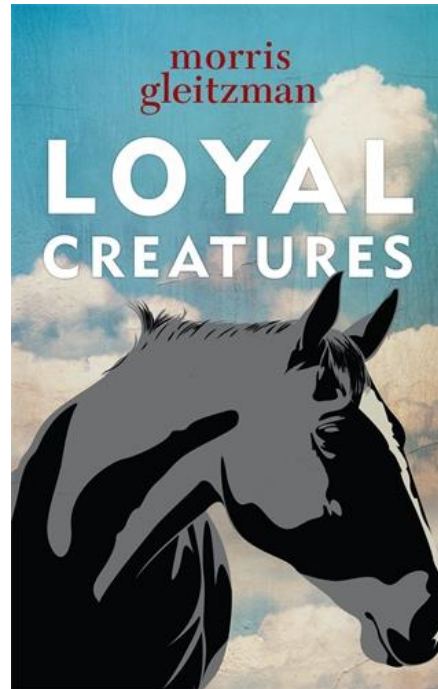
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## Loyal Creatures Morris Gleitzman

## PLOT SUMMARY

In the author's note at the back of the book, the reason for the existence of this poignant novel is explained in Morris' own words.

Commissioned by his friend Michael Morpugo, the author of *War Horse*, Morris Gleitzman was invited to write a twenty minute performance piece to accompany the National Theatre of London's production of the spectacular stage show based on this book. *War Horse* the stage show was being brought to Australia and they wanted a short piece that explored the role of the Australian horses in World War One.

As Gleitzman created the character of Frank Ballantyne, he wanted to get to know him a little more and tell more of his story. Frank, and all of the other endearing characters in this book, are creatures born of Gleitzman's imagination, but the events, emotions and experiences they faced are based in a historical context and would have been shared by many of the young Australian's troopers and their horses that were sent across the ocean to fight. Of the tens of thousands of horses that were sent over, only one came home.

This is the story of what happened to these horses and the men who loved them dearly. It is a testament to the way animals were vital to the survival of humans in warfare.

If it is possible for students to see a live, or recorded, performance of the script Gleitzman wrote, it is highly recommended that they do. There are key differences between the events Frank recalls in the twenty minute monologue, and those we read about in the text, but the raw emotion is captured so beautifully, that is an experience students would engage with.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Morris Gleitzman grew up in England and came to Australia when he was sixteen. After university he worked for ten years as a screenwriter. Then he had a wonderful experience. He wrote a novel for young people. Now, after 38 books, he's one of Australia's most popular children's authors.

## INSCRIPTION

*They suffered wounds, thirst, hunger and weariness almost beyond endurance but never failed.*

*They did not come home.*

Inscription on a memorial in Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens to the Australian horses in World War One.

### Questions

- Discuss with students how this makes them feel. Invite them to share what they know about the Light Horsemen of WWI. Consider why this inscription exists, what does this allude to? Students then need to draw either a symbol that would appear on this inscription with an explanation of what it means, or the sculpture that might accompany this sign. They will revisit this at the end of the text study and consider what they might do to change this.
- Who do they predict are the 'loyal creatures' the title refers to? Have them write a chorus for a song that is a tribute to these loyal creatures. What other words would they use to describe those sent away to war, and those who didn't return? Think about the perspective the song might be written from; the troopers, the horses, the infantry, the survivors, the children or grandchildren of the Light Horsemen who returned. It might borrow from the imagery Frank uses to describe Daisy, or it might offer an entirely different perspective. Remind students only one horse returned to Australia.

## SETTING

This story follows the journey of Frank Ballantyne from the rural districts of NSW to the desert plains of Egypt and Palestine. It follows Frank and Daisy through the streets of Sydney in a farewell parade,

to the ship that rocked and rolled across the ocean for weeks to deposit them in Egypt. It follows their confrontations with the enemy in the trenches and finally their relief as the war ends. But as Frank soon realises, this proves to be far more dangerous for Daisy than the battlefields had been.

### Activity

Have students identify the various settings of the story as they read. Represent each one with a large visual and then attach relevant events, quotes, descriptions and emotions to each one. This could be done at the start of the unit if students have read individually, throughout the study of the text, or once the text has been read entirely, divide students into groups representing each place. The various places would include the Cudgegong District in NSW, the main street of Sydney, the ship, the desert of Egypt and Beersheba in Palestine.

## THE GLORY OF WAR

*Nineteen fourteen. War. Did I want to go? Course I did. Who wouldn't want to hoof off to distant exotic places, give a pack of mongrel bullies what for and have the sort of experiences you just didn't get in the Cudgegong district. (p1)*

Frank is fifteen and bursting to leave the life he has in search of travel and adventure. In the early part of last century, the only way most people were able to leave their birthplace and see the world was when the government paid for you to go. Sure you might have to train, work a bit and fight the enemy, but the promise of the girl of your dreams finally being proud of you was enough to send many running for the queues. The glory of war burned brightly in many of the imaginations of young men and women all over the country; the truth was yet to be told.

### Activity

Source some call-to-action posters from those times that were instrumental in appealing to the courage and loyalty of young Australians. How did they glorify war? What did they promise? How did they make war seem appealing? Find as many examples of Frank's language in the text that demonstrates his desire to fight for his country. How did the symbol of the white feather affect this process?

## KEY EVENTS

As students read the text, invite them to record one or two key events from each chapter. They need to record these in dot points only. At the conclusion of the text, they may choose fifteen events only to make a list. This is an example.



1. Frank asks his Dad if he can go off to war. The answer is no.
2. A white feather arrives and they decide to sign up.
3. They are accepted in to the Light Horse but Jimmy hurts his leg and is rejected and his Dad is given four hours compassionate leave.
4. The boat trip to Egypt is horrendous.
5. Frank is co-opted to the Water Deployment section of the military operation.
6. Frank's dad is sent to the Dardanelles. It is the last time they see each other.
7. They embark on their first assignment. Frank is told to hold the horses.
8. He rescues a soldier, then realises it is a Turk. He can't kill him.
9. Frank assaults the officer that orders the firing squad on the soldiers who were caught in the sandstorm.
10. Otton and Frank are sent to work on the pipeline for the next 18 months.
11. Frank saves the Beersheba wells.
12. Otton is killed on the battlefield.
13. Frank goes back and buries the Turk soldiers he killed.
14. Joan's parcel arrives. She asks Frank to stop writing.
15. Frank tries everything he can to prevent Daisy being shot and divided up to make money for the military. He takes Daisy out to the desert and says his final goodbye. He shoots her.

### Activities

- Divide the students into two teams and then split that team in half, facing each other with a ten metre gap in the middle. On the floor in the middle of each team is a tub with all of these events listed and cut into strips. The student runs to the middle, takes one slip out and runs to face the other half of their team. They have to mime the event they have selected and once the student at the front of the line guesses correctly, it is then their turn to run to the tub, collect a strip and face the other half of the team and repeat. They keep going until their team members have guessed all of the key events. When complete, the students must work as a team to order the events as they occur in the text. The first team to finish wins. This engages students kinaesthetically to recognise and remember the plot and attribute movement or symbolism to the narrative.
- Another activity that revisits the narrative structure of the novel is using plasticine to symbolise one key event. Each student in the room is given one event that occurs in the plot. They organise themselves into the correct order. Then in that order they must mould the dough into a symbol that accurately represents the event. E.g.: Can't kill the Turk = bayonet/ Dad deciding to go to war = white feather etc. This becomes a gallery for students to move around the desks and associate each part of the narrative with an image or symbol.

## CHARACTERS

There are a list of questions included that can be used by students to analyse the development of characters in the text. However, it is far more beneficial for students to ask questions. Create a set of dice with each face of the die displaying one of the following words; Why, Explain, How, Discuss, Justify, What if. These are beginnings of 'fat questions.' Students must roll the dice six times and use the word they get to form a question about their character. You could divide the characters equally among the students and use the questions to compile a class list of questions. Or put students in groups of six and have each student write questions specific to their character and then answer all of the questions created for the other five characters.

### Frank Ballantyne

*A coward's a bloke with an inability to kill anyone cause he was brought up wrong. Whereas you're just a choosy individual who's saving his first kill for a special occasion. (p79)*

Frank is just fifteen years old. His mum has passed away, he has a crush on the girl that works in the local pharmacy, and his Dad refuses to let him to go to war. It is not because he is too young, but because of a promise Ted made to his wife before she died. And this holds fast, until the feather arrives. In a heartbeat the two of them have said 'ooroo to the neighbours' and headed off to sign up.

Frank is a boy doing the work of a man with the courage of a kid willing to do anything to get the attention of a girl. Soon enough is enduring a horrid boat trip across the ocean to win the approval of Joan Prescott who was 'dead-set gorgeous'. Despite everything, war suits Frank, not because he is brave and canny and fight like the best of them, but because he can use the skill he was born to do; find water. He perceives this as a weakness, a cop-out, after all it isn't the hand to hand combat he imagined. And surely finding water isn't enough to win the girl of his dreams. He is right about Joan's affection, but his strategic



protection of the wells of Beersheba earns him a medal and ensures the survival of many of his fellow soldiers.

Frank is stupidly brave. He risks his own life when he perceives an injustice is being done. He doesn't do this in a heroic way, merely as a reflex. Just like when he saw the farmer aiming at the helpless dog, he throws himself in the way, giving no thought to consequences. And just as his dad was proud of Frank then, he would also have been proud when he tried to stand up for 'the deserters' who faced the firing line. It comes as no surprise then when faced with the unthinkable, the cruel death of his beloved Daisy, that Frank takes every risk he can to do what is right. Despite the harm he causes himself, it is exactly what Daisy deserves, and Frank has the courage to do the hardest thing of all, give his horse a humane end to her life.

### Discussion

- What is the first example in the text that Frank has a keen sense of justice? Explain the significance of his dad's response to this.
- What are Frank's reasons for going to war? Do you think these were typical of many boys his age during this time?
- Why does Frank offer to give Daisy to his Dad? What does this reveal about their relationship?
- Johnson and Otton are two vastly different people. Why is Frank drawn to Otton as a mate rather than Johnson?
- Find five defining moments for Frank in the text. Organise them in the order from most significant to least and write a sentence justifying each choice.
- He earns the medal he is hoping for, but it is hollow. Why?
- The parcel Frank receives from Joan marks a particularly difficult time in his life. How does he get through this and what does this say about him as a person?
- List each of the possibilities Frank explores to save Daisy's life. What does his tenacity in this situation say about him? What does his final choice reveal about his character? In your opinion, does he make the right decision?

### Daisy

*Daisy was beautiful with her white face and feet, but she was a bit of a crook shape.* (p20)

*And at night, when we kipped together for warmth, both of us were always grateful for what that warmth told us. That we each had someone we cared about left in the world.* (p119)

*I could see in her big gentle eyes she trusted me to do the right thing.* (p152)

One of the truly beautiful elements of this novel is the development of the character of Daisy. She is described to us fleetingly, through her owner's eyes and experiences.

Daisy is a waler, a particular horse bred for the difficult conditions that horses in rural NSW faced. They are not handsome like the thoroughbred, instead they are magnificent at lasting long distances without water, tolerating very hot conditions and having the stamina to survive without rest. Daisy is fickle; she is known for being very difficult to handle for anyone else, but absolutely loyal to Frank. They are a pair. When Frank tries to give Ted Daisy after Jimmy is rejected, Ted won't take her. It is not only because he knows that no one can manage her like Frank can, it is because he knows what will happen to Frank if he is left over there without a horse.

Daisy saves Frank's life over and over again. Withstanding ferocious sandstorms, leaping over trenches peppering bullets, stopping just shy of an enormous cavern despite the lack of visibility, Daisy is an amazing soldier. As an animal, she cannot speak for herself, but this doesn't impact on how well we get to know her. Frank understands her, confides her, loves her, and it is through his interaction with his best friend that readers come to understand the sacrifice Daisy is willing to make. She warns Frank of danger, comforts him in grief and even expresses his displeasure at those who upset Frank. She does everything that is asked of her. And that is why it is so desperately heartbreaking when she knows the end is near. Frank loves her too much to hand her over to the authorities; he can't accept that this loyal creature will take her last breath filled with fear, killed with cruelty and insensitivity. He gives her the gracious, dignified death she deserves. It is her final display of courage that enables Frank to do what he must.

### Questions

- What is the first indication that Frank and Daisy are best mates?
- Find as many quotes as you can to describe her personality. What does Frank admire about Daisy?
- How does the story of her daughter play throughout the novel? What does this add to the character of Daisy? And also of Frank? How is this image used toward the end of the text?
- This story is not just about Frank's journey, but also about Daisy's. Do you agree? What are the most difficult parts of the journey for Daisy?
- How does the title of the text relate to Daisy?





- Can you find a symbol that expresses that love Frank has for his horse? Explain your choice.

### Activities

- List all of the times Daisy risks herself to save Frank's life.
- Research what a 'waler' is and how they were used in combat in World War One.
- Consider both sides of the argument for the way the military deals with excess horses at the end of the war. Make a list of how they would justify their actions and oppose this with a list of why the horses should have been sent home.
- There was one horse sent back to Australia out of the tens of thousands that were shipped over for the combat. Find out what you can about this horse.

### Ted Ballantyne

*What he did was save Jimmy's life. (p30)*

*I knew Dad had never told me anything except the truth my whole life. But there was something in his voice that made me wonder if this was the first time. (p32)*

Ted Ballantyne is a man typical of his time. He is hard working, respected for his particular skill and known for doing rather than saying. His response to Frank's request to go to war is not surprisingly met with a whack around the head with a canvas bucket. His only son is fifteen and he had promised his wife that there is no way Frank is going off to war until he is eighteen.

For Frank that is an eternity, for Ted signing up to defend the nation comes much sooner than he had predicted. And it is all because of a white feather. After seeing another two coffins arrive home, carrying the bodies of his friends, the arrival of the pretty box is too much to bear. A promise is one thing, but being called a coward by the rest of the town, well that is something else entirely. His reliable horse Jimmy passes all the tests, but at the last minute is not allowed on the ship. Distracted for just a moment by the image of his deceased wife in the crowded Sydney parade, Ted lets Jimmy slip on flowers and the tendon in his leg is damaged. Jimmy is declared unfit. Instead of arguing with the vet who makes the call, Frank watches as Ted asks for compassionate leave, takes all of his army pay and arranges for Jimmy to be sent to a breeder he knows.

This initial sacrifice is a testament to the sense of justice and compassion he has. It is the first sacrifice, but not the most significant. Ted's refusal to take Daisy is the catalyst for the tragic events to

follow. Warned by the officer who assesses Jimmy that many of the Light Horsemen will be sent to fight without their horses, Ted makes the decision to protect his son. He is right. Sent with many others to the Dardanelles, along with so many other Australian soldiers, he does not return. He could have let Frank find a new horse in Egypt, he could have volunteered to show them where the water was and revealed his valuable skill, but he doesn't. He lets Frank do all of this instead. It is his final gift to his son, and it is all because of a white feather.

### Questions

- How significant is the arrival of the white feather? What does it say about Ted that he immediately chooses to leave?
- What is the significance of the job he has become an expert at, and subsequently taught his son?
- Why is Ted proud of Frank, despite the fact he costs them a fair bit of pay?
- What do you learn about his relationship with his wife from the novel?
- What is his legacy?
- What advice would he have given Frank when faced with the impossible choice of having to kill Daisy himself?

### Activities

- How do the rest of the town view Ted Ballantyne. Find evidence from the text to support this.
- Explore how the theme sacrifice is pertinent to Ted.
- List ten adjectives that are particular to Ted.

### Joan Prescott

*At school she had more freckles and knee scabs than the rest of us put together. And more skill at gumnut poker and more patience at training beetles. (p5)*

Described as being prettier than any girl on a soap packet, Joan Prescott is the girl of Frank's dreams. She is the daughter of the local chemist who has gone off to the frontline to defend the nation. Her mother still runs the pharmacy and keeps a very close eye on the people Joan associates with. Frank is not someone she would consider an appropriate suitor for her daughter.

Joan and Frank are good friends; she came to Frank's Mum's funeral and they obviously spend time together at school playing 'gumnut poker' and 'training beetles'. Frank thinks that heading off to war to collect a chest full of medals will win the



affections of Joan. He writes to her furiously from the front and despite not hearing anything from her for months, and then years, he continues to pine for her. He imagines their life together when he returns, with Daisy, Daisy's daughter and Joan. But then her parcel arrives and his dreams of this future are crushed. Not only does Joan reveal that she is engaged, but she also apologises for the parcel her mother sent to Frank's Dad.

Mrs Prescott and her friends sent Ted the white feather, they thought they were doing the right thing, but as the men stop returning, they begin to realise that it was foolish and cost these men their lives. When his imagined future with Joan dissipates, Frank turns to Daisy as his only friend and companion. This exacerbates just how tragic it is for Frank to have to end his beloved horse's life.

### Questions

- List all of the descriptions of Joan in the text. Find an example of a soap packet that would have existed in 1914. What kind of image of a female is presented in this advertisement? How does this help explain Frank's description of Joan as 'dead-set gorgeous'?
- What indications are there that Joan's parents don't approve of Frank?
- Why does Joan send him a cough lozenge when he first leaves?
- Do you think Frank has an idea that the dreaded letter is coming? What warning signs are there that they will not end up together?
- What compels Joan to finally write to Frank?
- How does her parcel affect the meaning associated with his medal?

### Otton

*I wished Otton could have been there to see it. He was a cheery bugger most of the time, and he'd have enjoyed our good fortune. (p119)*

Otton is another of the soldiers that travels on the ship to Egypt with Frank and his Dad. He used to sing songs to the other men to help pass the time. He is gentle, intelligent and has a way with words that gets him into, and out of, lots of trouble. The first incident is on the ship when Johnson takes great offence at his flippant remark that he going to join the Turks. Frank steps in and saves him from Johnson's fury. Not long after Otton intervenes to offer Frank's assistance to search for water. It turns out to be an action that saves his life.

The two mates are co-opted to the water deployment and when the authorities realise just how valuable Frank's skill for finding water is, he becomes a protected species. Together Otton and

Frank find themselves facing a court martial, negotiating an early release, digging the pipeline, facing a sandstorm and fighting in the trenches. Otton has a gift for language; it is an indication of his intelligence and also his sense of humour. He is a great friend to Frank and always has his back.

When Frank makes into the town of Beersheba and secures the wells, his victory is short-lived. He realises Otton has been killed. His mate who tried to stop him from challenging the soldier issuing the orders for the firing squad, his mate who made him laugh, worked by his side, and eventually bargained their penalty down so they got back on the frontline. And it was here that Otton lost his life. Frank buries his friend in the Palestinian soil. He scratches his name onto the stock of his rifle and attaches his hat as a marker of his final resting place. The emptiness hits Frank with a thud.

### Questions

- Describe the first meeting between Otton and Frank. How does this reveal their similarities and their differences?
- Why does the author create a character that uses words to get himself out of trouble?
- What are the key events in the friendship of Otton and Frank? How do these events connect them? Are any of their reactions to the behaviour of each other surprising? Why do they forgive each other for getting the other person in trouble?
- Why is friendship in war so important?
- Write the backstory for Otton. Did he come on his own? What made him want to sign up? Who does he write letters to back home? How old is he and what is his family situation?

### Activities

- Find each of the fancy words Otton uses. Guess at the meaning of each one and then find a dictionary definition for each of these words.
- Often soldiers wrote to the family of their deceased mates. Write the letter that Frank might have written to Otton's family explaining the kind of friendship they had and their experiences.

### Johnson

*The bloke's name was Johnson. Angry eyes, black moustache. Looked like the sort of bloke who'd flatten the umpire with his bat if he was given out. (p27)*

*Couple of Taffy's needed a talking to,' said Johnson. 'About who they call a coward. (p79)*



Johnson is a complete contrast to Otton in both personality and in combat. He is a fiery, vindictive man, desperate to inflict justice on the enemy. He wears fury like a coat of armour and inspires fear in those he works alongside. His hobby is to create bayonets with razor sharp teeth, designed to inflict immense pain into whoever is on the receiving end.

Johnson's likely to be just as scared as all of the other men in his unit, but rather than succumb to this fear, he tries to bury it and replace it with a sense of vengeance. He is a man you want on your side and as Frank finds out, he will do anything to protect his mates. He punches the infantryman who questions Frank's courage, and despite his own desire and willingness to kill anyone he gets his hands on, he understands and respects Frank's decision to take the Turk as prisoner rather than end his life.

Johnson is full of bravado, quick to anger and react. But he is still a man who loves his horse and has to face the terrible decision of handing it over to the authorities to dispose of as they wish, or giving his noble friend a humane death. As Frank and Johnson dig graves, side by side, in the desert to bury their honourable servants and companions, he feels the injustice and loss just as keenly as any other soldier. He too is just a loyal creature.

### Questions

- What is your first impression of Johnson? How does his reaction toward Otton initiate the friendship between Frank and Otton?
- What event surprises you the most about Johnson?
- How do you explain his fury and anger toward the enemy?
- Consider what might have happened to Johnson to lead him to sign up for the military. Write the story that led him to get on the ship and seek adventure and glory in the war. Who might he write letters to back home?

### Activities

- Select five adjectives to describe Johnson and provide an example from the text for each one.
- Consider his final action with his own horse. Describe the emotional journey he might have been on to make that decision.

### General activities

- Students are allocated groups and a particular character to represent. They write five questions to ask each of the other characters and select one student to go on the 'hot seat' to represent their own character. It is worthwhile to

consider some of the questions other groups will ask them and discuss an authentic answer this character would offer. Provide a physical symbol or item of clothing for each character. Select one group to go first, give them the item, (e.g. Joan the parcel all bundled up, Dad the white feather), and invite each of the other groups to ask the questions of the character that is on the hot seat.

- Students may choose any character from the text. They have to collect five objects that represent some aspect of that character. They bring them to class and each student shares the five items and their reason for choosing each one. These items then form the basis of a writing task as that character. It may be a journal entry, letter, interview with a newspaper, obituary featured in their local paper, or speech made over their grave. The form they choose is as important as the understanding they show of that character.
- This can act as an extension from the Show bag task, or as a separate task entirely. It also features as a possible creative assessment task. Given that *Loyal Creatures* was born out of the twenty minute monologue Morris Gleitzman wrote to accompany *War Horse*, the ability to tell a powerful and detailed story in a short space of time is highly relevant to this text. A monologue has to create a distinct and authentic voice of a character, it has to talk to the audience on a personal level and it has to edit effectively. Allow students five minutes to present a monologue from a character other than Frank. It may take place at any time in the text, many years later as the original does, or during the war itself. Students have to write the piece themselves, rehearse, select an appropriate costume and any props and present this to their class. Peer assessment could be used as well as teacher assessment and feedback.

### LANGUAGE

Gleitzman has tried not only to ensure this story is historically accurate, but that it also captured the language used at the time. As readers listen to Frank's story, his voice seems to step out of the page and transport us back to a time and a place where the colloquial expressions vindicated just how far away from the rest of the world Australia was. The slang expressions, the idioms, the imagery and metaphorical descriptions are very particular to the time and place of Frank's youth and they invite us back into his world. Students may not recognise many of the expressions used in this novel as Australian's use of English has become more international and less parochial. But



this language brings the sense of humour, camaraderie and high-spirited larrikinism the Australian troopers were known for. It is part of our history and our identity and it tells a story of where we have come from and how important our heritage was, and still is.

### Activity

This activity can also work with any quotes from the book. For this task, discuss the following five examples of colloquial language with students. Then invite them to find as many examples of rhyming slang, idioms, colloquial expression in the text. Divide the class into two teams and each student is given one chance to share an example of slang from the text. The other team then gives an explanation of the expression. They get a point for an accurate example and an accurate definition. Each student only gets one turn.

*Tell those nags to pull their heads in, Frankie.* (p3)

*Rest of that trip was good. Mostly on account of me keeping my trap shut about the war.* (p13)

*Dad was in like Flinders fence-posts too.* (p22)

*Top clobber they gave you in the Light Horse.* (p26)

*I did, sticking my chest out like a scrub turkey with a mozzie bothering it.* (p21)

*Heat and dust. Flies I reckoned I'd met before in Dubbo.* (p40)

*Crowds, markets, some very impressive piles of bricks, exotic pong of strange tucker.* (p40)

*Poor blighters hadn't had a decent feed in weeks. Bones in gunny sacks.* (p41)

*A week later the penny dropped.* (p47)

## SYMBOLISM

### White feather

Frank's Dad refuses his fifteen year old son's requests to go to war. It is not out of cowardice, or even trying to protect his son. It is because of a promise he made to his deceased wife. He can't risk leaving Frank an orphan, or worse, lose the only surviving member of his family. That is until the bodies of his mates start coming back and the white feather arrives. Sitting on their kitchen table, all wrapped up in a box and tied with a bow, the seemingly innocent feather carries the blame and accusations of a whole town, or so it feels to Ted Ballantyne. Sent by the women of the district whose husbands have already left to defend the nation, they mistakenly think it is their duty to encourage others to follow their lead. This particular feather is sent to Ted from Joan Prescott's mother and it is a gesture she later

deeply regrets. The feather symbolises cowardice and a reluctance to do what is required. It symbolises the un-Australian attitude of leaving it up to your mates to do all the hard work. And therefore it is highly effective; upon receiving it Ted and Frank immediately head to Sydney to volunteer.

### Questions

- How do you feel when you discover what is inside the box?
- Why is the symbol of the white feather so effective?
- What inspires Joan's mother to send it?
- What comment does Frank make about the women who sent the feathers when they are in the parade in Sydney?
- What else could be used instead of a white feather?

### Letters

The simple act of communication was almost impossible for these men in the trenches and stuck in the desert on the other side of the world. It took months for those at the front line to exchange letters to their loved ones at home, contributing to the sense of isolation and homesickness they experienced. Frank's hopes were riding on Joan's approval of his bravery and his decision to go and fight and return home a war hero. When her parcel arrives the excitement of a reply is quickly displaced by the hollow pit of rejection he experiences. Not knowing has kept him going, filling his head with dreams of their future together, but now that she has asked him to stop writing the whole point of heading off to war seems a little shallow. With his dad and mates killed by the enemy, his medal has lost some of its sheen. It's only Frank and Daisy now.

### Questions

- Imagine how Frank must have felt when he gets Joan's parcel. How do you feel about the fact Joan knew about his father and his medal, but still chose not to write?
- Otton tries to warn Frank this might happen. Why doesn't Frank listen?
- Explain the significance of each of the items in the parcel.
- Write one of the early letters Frank sends to Joan. How would he describe what is happening?





### The bayonet

This weapon is a symbol of a violent and cruel death. But the most telling feature of the bayonet is that Frank cannot use it. It acts as a symbol of revenge, but when Frank finds himself unable to kill the Turk, it becomes a symbol of compassion and humanity. This is a recurring symbol throughout the text, and the meaning changes, therefore the motif of the bayonet varies at different points during the text, saying something quite significant about a number of the characters. For Johnson who creates this vicious weapon, it represents his fierce willingness to seek retribution, to deal out justice as he sees fit. It also distinguishes him as someone quite different to Frank. For Otton who refuses to own one, it is symbolic of his gentle nature, his ability to talk himself out of confrontation, rather than physically defend himself or attack the enemy. And for Frank it is indicative of his heroism. Coupled with his decision to bury the soldiers he killed, his reluctance to use the bayonet on his enemies is testament to his humanity; despite himself, he cannot help but see these other men, as exactly that, men just like him.

#### Questions

- List all of the ways the bayonet gets Frank into trouble. Are there any times it helps him?
- What does it say about Frank that he orders this particular type of weapon? How is this proven to be contradictory?
- How does the bayonet act as an indicator of character?

### The desert

The location these men are sent to is both completely foreign and somehow familiar. The Light Horse Brigade, many of whom were from rural Australia, were familiar with vast distances, extreme heat, little water and dry, sandy landscapes. They rode Walers, horses that were specifically bred for these conditions and as a result were exceptional soldiers themselves. They were a valuable asset to the Australian Army as they were strong animals, with stamina and endurance. They were made for surviving in this treacherous landscape. These men and their animals may have been sent to the other side of the world, but because of their breeding and experience they were able to excel and play a crucial role in defeating the enemy. Amidst dust storms, little water and hand held combat, the desert was both friend and foe. For many men and their animals it became their final resting place.

#### Questions

- How does Daisy enable Frank to survive despite all the perils of the desert?
- How does the desert contribute to Frank's final decision?
- Why does Frank's job back home become so important in the desert?

#### Activities

- Find as many adjectives as you can for the desert.
- Do some research into the type of horse a 'waler' is. Why were these horses so appropriate for the fighting in Egypt and Palestine?

### Water

Water, the search for and the lack thereof is a permanent and critical struggle in the text. As well as strategising about their next attack, those in charge of the troops in the middle of the Egyptian and Palestinian deserts were constantly on the search for water. Thirst and dehydration were as much of a threat as the hidden enemy. And so water becomes the symbol for sacrifice. Ted knows these men need water more than they need soldiers to fight and instead of volunteering his own expertise, his son becomes an asset so valuable he isn't allowed to risk himself in combat. It saves his son's life, and costs him his own.

#### Questions

- How do Frank's actions make him the hero of the text?
- Explain how the injury Jimmy sustains in the parade costs Ted his life.
- Frank is too naïve and full of false bravado to fully understand, but his knowledge of how to find water is far more valuable to him than any special order bayonet. Explain.
- Think of the traditional associations with water and its symbolic properties, (e.g. rebirth, cleansing.) Do any of these apply to this text?

### The medal

It is somewhat of an accident that Frank actually achieves the medal he desperately hoped for. The courage and tenacity of Daisy, and a fair bit of luck sees him ride through the battle of Beersheba all the way into town. When the scouts call out to Frank to protect the wells, he knew exactly what to do. Using his expertise he was able to disarm the explosives and subsequently save the only water they had for miles around. The captain describes his response as showing 'superb initiative', the



strategic significance of the medals is not lost on those in charge and Frank is awarded handsomely for it. Yet, the impact of his medal is short-lived and shallow. His father has already been killed, and now Otton is gone too. When the letter arrives from Joan acknowledging the achievement, yet asking him not to write, the medal loses its sheen and glory. It is a symbol of courage, but also of great sacrifice.

### Questions

- Why are Joan's words of congratulations so empty? How does this taint his medal?
- What themes are normally associated with accolades like this? What do you associate with this medal?

### Activities

- What happens immediately after his efforts at Beersheba is far more defining than the medal he receives. Read this section again and explain.
- Design the medal he would have received. Do some research into the type of medal he might have been awarded.

### General activity

- Divide students into groups so each group becomes a symbol. Have students design a visual for that symbol and then label this with all of the adjectives relating to it in the text. Then use the quote list below to link the relevant quotes to this symbol. The group then chooses a theme they consider appropriate for this symbol and write a paragraph that shows how the symbol explores the theme of the text.

## THEMES

### War

War fuels so many novels, poems, artworks and songs not only for the futility or sacrifice or honour, but for the friendship and raw emotion it exposes. It puts men at their most vulnerable, it forces them to face their fears, find their courage and sacrifice their lives. It has them declaring their undying love for those who have been left behind, and weeping in devastation for those who will never return home. In World War One that promise of travel and adventure was tempting and highly appealing to so many young men and women. They wanted to do their bit and defend their country, and perhaps earn some medals and recognition on the way. They had no idea of the sheer terror they would face.

These young men, some still boys, couldn't possibly have comprehended what they had

signed up for. Shipped off to a distant land, with little communication with those back home and facing treacherous conditions, they had no choice but to follow orders. *Loyal Creatures* explores the reality of war for these young men. Morris Gleitzman reveals their naivety, their vain hopes for glory, but more than that, he explores their friendship. He tells the story that has been untold; the harsh and tragic end to so many of these horses that fought bravely and protected their riders honourably.

Animals have been used in warfare in many circumstances, with little consideration for the impact on the animal, or the soldiers who they worked with. They were loyal servants these horses, who had no choice but to get on a boat and run through the combat lines they were thrown into. And at the end, when the war was won and they had been instrumental in achieving the success, they were expendable. Their loyalty was taken for granted, their debt never re-paid. To the military these loyal creatures were merely property, but to the men who loved them, it was another soldier they had to bury.

### Courage/bravery

What does it mean to be truly courageous? Does it mean sacrificing yourself in the face of great adversity? Does it mean doing what is right no matter what the cost? Does it mean putting the needs of others, more vulnerable than you, first, no matter what impact this will have? Courage is explored in many ways through this text. It is more than the youthful bravado of heading off to fight the enemy with little personal regard. Gleitzman portrays courage as something that is inherent in us, but also as something that can be learned or drawn out depending on the circumstances.

Frank has a deep connection to animals, to their welfare and their suffering. When he sees the farmer aim the gun at the helpless dog who no longer serves his masters purpose, he doesn't hesitate in protesting. It costs him a physical beating and a fair bit of pay. And the dog still gets shot. But he couldn't refrain, the risk was worth it, it was the right thing to do. His father agrees. This is indicative of the boy he is and the man he becomes. His own welfare is not paramount. Time and time again Frank throws himself in the face of great peril, desperate to save the deserters from the firing squad and his beloved Daisy from a similar end. He doesn't need a medal to prove that he is brave, the people he loves already know this.

### Loyalty

The title of the book is derived from the final line in the monologue and the novel. It comes from Frank's realisation that despite everything they did for the army, for their country, they were merely



pawns in a big strategic game, and their lives meant very little to those who controlled them. Patriotism was bred into the men from a young age. They signed up for this war that was in a faraway place, between countries other than theirs, out of a sense of duty and desire. Duty to serve and desire to win.

World War One had no need for conscription as the military had as many men, and women, as it needed. People wanted to fight for their country, prove their loyalty. The horses had much less of a choice, but seeing as they were gentle beasts, loved by their masters, they were shipped off as well and they did what they were told. They were sent across battlefields, faced machine gun fire, bayonets, thirst, extreme weather, exhaustion. They were servants to their nation; much like the men who rode on their backs and tended to their wounds. But unlike the men, their efforts went unrewarded. The inscription that features on the title pages of the novel is a testament to the loyalty of the horses of World War One. They suffered enormously and they never came home. Their price for loyalty was the highest anyone could pay.

### Friendship

One of the great legacies of this war was the mateship that this terrifying environment bred. These men, often just boys, were thrown together, miles away from home and unable to contact the ones they loved. They were asked to do the most terrible of things and if they survived the counter attack, they had the wounds of their bodies and minds to tend to.

They relied on each other, for hope, for company, for distraction, for conversation, for friendship. They did whatever it took for their mates, even with great consequences for themselves. And when the gunfire ended, they counted their losses and buried their dead. Some went over with mates, others made friendships there, and many, many didn't come home. The beauty of war, is there is any, is what it can reveal about the human capacity to endure and hope. The only way these men continued to ride into battle, to put themselves under threat was because they were surrounded by men who would do the same for them. The camaraderie sustained them.

These creatures were not just loyal to those giving the orders from above, but also to their mates they stood side by side with on the battlefield. And often these mates were of the four legged variety who gave them great comfort and a memory of home. To have to bury them as well, even when they had survived the worst of it, was a cruelty that tormented many for years to come.

### Sacrifice

Many of the motifs that feature in the text explore the notion of sacrifice. They are closely linked to notions of bravery, but with the worst possible outcome. Ted Ballantyne truly understands what sacrifice means. Perhaps if Jimmy had have made it onto the boat and over to Egypt, he wouldn't have had to show just how courageous he was. But ever since that white feather arrived, he was desperate to show those who sent it, that he was as courageous as the rest of them. Dying on the fields of the Dardanelles seemed like a good way to prove his point.

Ted has a number of choices at the beginning of the novel. He chooses not to go to war, and then does. He chooses to spend all of his pay and beg for compassionate leave to ensure Jimmy has a good life. He chooses not to take Daisy, nor look for a new horse. He knows he will be chosen to be a foot-slogger and he is satisfied that he might finally put the burden of being labelled a coward to rest. He can finally shake the feather from his consciousness and die a proud and loyal soldier. Like Daisy, and all of the other horses who did whatever was asked of them, he put his life on the line for the greater good of the country, and he never returned. Just as Daisy would never see her daughter again, that was the last Ted would ever see of his son.

### Responsibility

As a nineteen year old boy, at the end of a four year stint at war, Frank has an idea about responsibility. He knows what it means to be held accountable for his actions. He was punished for challenging a British Officer and did the time that came with the charge. He felt responsible for the Turk soldiers he killed, and after burying his friend he went and found the men he killed and buried them in the desert as well. He knew it was part of his job, but the compassion he felt for these men who would not be going home, was indicative of his sense of responsibility. When he watches in horror as other horses are machine gunned to death, he knows what he must do. Daisy is his friend, his responsibility, and just as her life was in his hands, so too is her death. Frank is a product of his father, but he is a man of his own volition and moral fibre. It might be the hardest thing he ever has to do in his life, but it might just be the most compassionate.

### Theme activities

- Divide the students into enough groups for one theme per group. Distributing Skittles or other coloured lollies is a fun way to organise the groups. Each group is allocated a theme, and they become the expert on this theme. Provide them with the notes above and the quote table



and have them create key notes and choose five quotes to share with the new groups. Rearrange the groups to have one student from each expert group. Each expert student shares their understanding of the theme with the rest of their group until everyone has recorded their notes for each theme.

Frank	Daisy	The parade in Sydney	Otton
Saying goodbye to Daisy	Joan	Jimmy	Mrs Prescott
Beersheba Wells	The boat trip	Ted's death	The sandstorm
Designated as horse holder	Acquiring the bayonet	Court Martial	The parcel arrives
The war ends	White feather arrives	Dad	Johnson
Burying the Turks	The medal	Otton's death	They join the Light Horse

- Back in their original expert groups, students have to create a book trailer for *Loyal Creatures* where they focus on their theme. They can use PowerPoint or Photo Story 3 or other programs to create their final product. Each group need to focus on their theme and identify the symbols, characters and quotes that are pertinent to their allocated theme. The groups then show these to the class. This could form an assessment task.
- Invite students to stand on a line according to their personal position on a topic. One end of the line represents the viewpoints that strongly agree, and the other end is where they stand if they strongly disagree. Any topics can be used, these are some possibilities.
  - Ted was foolish for not getting himself another horse.
  - The white feather is a cowardly action.
  - War does not reward loyalty.
  - Only the courageous survive war.
  - The military were right to dispose of horses in this way.
  - Daisy is the true hero of the novel.

## ACTIVITIES

- There are any number of letters Frank could write; back home to Joan, to the family of his mates, to his extended family about his father. There are opportunities to write letters from many of the other characters in the novel.

- Write the back story for one of the other characters. Explain how they got here, what had made them sign up and what was surprising about their experience of war.
- The report of the court martial would have been recorded. The officer presiding over the case might have recorded their insights into the type of man Frank Ballantyne was.
- Use the following table to play a game of quote bingo. Read out a range of quotes and the students have to allocate a quote to a character by placing the number token that corresponds with the quote on to the table. As the text is told from Frank's perspective, the quote is unlikely to have been said by the other character, especially for Daisy, but it can be a quote to describe the character or the relationship Frank has with them. This table also includes key events and places, but these are optional. The first student to complete the whole table wins by calling out bingo! Review their answers as a class.
- News reports would have been written based on certain events and sent back to Australia to be published in the local newspapers. These might include the Battle of Beersheba, the Dardanelles disaster, the end of the war. Consider how the realities of what was happening to the horses might be disguised.

## ASSESSMENT

### Creative tasks

1. Write three of the letters Frank would have written and sent to Joan Prescott. They might be from very early in their journey, the boat trip over, being ordered to be part of the Water Deployment, meeting his friends, etc.
2. At the end of the war, the men who have survived and are returning home are all issued with a service report from their commanding officer. It includes any reports during their time in the Light Horse Regiment of exceptional service, misdemeanours, court martials, awards for bravery etc. Choose any character that serves with Frank, including Ted, and write the report that might have been written for this man. Rely on the information provided in the text for accuracy.
3. There are many accounts of soldiers who served in World War One. Find some of these stories that may have been recorded as journals, letters home to loved ones, songs or poetry. Write your own from the perspective of Frank, Otton or Johnson. Think about what their perceptions of this war might have been





and carefully describe the surroundings, the friendships, the fear and the loss they faced.

4. Alternatively, students could spend some time researching other stories of men who left Australia to fight in World War One. They might have been part of the Light Horse like Frank, or part of the infantry. They might choose one of the many women who offered their services as part of the medical deployment that also left to support the men fighting. Students use the information they have found to create a character profile and write the monologue that tells their story. Follow the instructions listed for the Character Monologue.
5. Sometimes students respond more positively to poetry when it is referred to as song lyrics. With students, access some war songs/ poetry that explore the experiences of World War One. A really good example of a song that has a contemporary meaning and relevance and may be familiar to students is the Hilltop Hoods cover of the 1975 Vietnam War anthem 'I was only nineteen', (even though it addresses the Vietnam War). It is an excellent example of using poetry/ song lyrics to tell a story. Considering the story of Frank or Joan, or Johnson or Otton or Ted, students write their own song lyrics to explore what it was really like being a 'loyal creature'. There are many examples of war poetry from World War One that are highly accessible to students that would be excellent stimulus also.

end of World War One if we are to truly honour their memory. Discuss.

### Essay topics

1. *We were just loyal creatures too, our heads turned this way and that by politicians and generals and the dark waters in our own souls.*  
Loyalty goes unrewarded in the text. To what extent is this true?
2. Mateship was critical to surviving World War One for many men. Discuss.
3. Courage is important in war, but compassion is essential. Discuss.
4. The white feather symbolises the belief that it was more desirable to die serving your country than living with the shame of staying at home.  
Discuss with relevance to *Loyal Creatures*.
5. The futility of war is best summarised with the killing of thousands of horses that served their nation. Discuss.
6. The greatest sacrifice in the novel is the one Ted Ballantyne makes for his son. Do you agree?
7. It is essential that students today learn about the demise of the thousands of horses at the





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