



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary
(ages 9+)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, HASS, Languages and Science
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Investigate historical, geographic, civic and economic concepts and ideas
- Analyse how language and writing can evoke mood, tension and characterisation
- Use of humour and figurative devices
- Understanding relationships and stress, discussing resilience, perseverance and the power of human connection
- Discuss social and economic inequality

THEMES

- Australian history – WWII
- Torres Strait Islands
- Friendship
- Personal and social ethics
- Human rights
- Racism
- Loss and grief

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia

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The Fighting Stingrays Simon Mitchell

PLOT SUMMARY

What would you do if you were told your best friend is now the enemy?

Charlie, Masa and Alf are best mates – loyal and adventurous. They're the Fighting Stingrays.

In between school, swimming and fishing on idyllic Thursday Island, they have a ripper time role-playing bombing missions and other war games. But when Japan enters World War II, the Fighting Stingrays are told that one of their own is now the real-life enemy. Drawn into a dangerous game of cat and mouse in the Torres Strait, their friendship and loyalties are tested as the threat of invasion looms closer.

Winner, 2018 NSW Premier's History Awards – Young People's History Prize

Notable Book, 2018 CBCA Book of the Year Awards – Younger Readers

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simon Mitchell worked as a computer programmer before deciding to branch out and 'try writing in a language that consisted of more than 1's and 0's'. He has completed a Diploma in Professional Writing and Editing at RMIT, where he wrote the first draft of *The Baked Bean Bandit*. Other titles by Simon include *Do You Dare?* *Tough Times*, three Aussie Bites and a picture book *Louie the Pirate Chef*.
www.simonmitchell.com.au

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

From Simon Mitchell:

The Fighting Stingrays is a work of fiction, but most of the major events in this story actually happened – the internment of Thursday Island's Japanese population, the evacuation of (non-Indigenous) civilians, the bombing of the island group by Japanese planes and the looting of civilian homes.

My grandmother, Robin Rogers (nee Hockings) was born on Thursday Island in 1924 and – apart from a stint at boarding school – lived there until the island was evacuated in January 1942. Her father, Frank Hockings, and uncle, Norman Hockings, ran the Wanetta Pearling Company, one of the many pearl-shell companies that formed the bedrock of the island's economy before World War II.

Grandma describes her childhood as completely idyllic. The life of a kid on Thursday Island seemed to consist of all-day picnics on white sand beaches, catching fireflies on humid evenings, climbing gargantuan fig trees and slurping on an endless supply of fresh mangoes and coconuts.

Grandma was also one of the few white Australian children to experience a multicultural childhood in the pre-war years. The need for cheap foreign labour meant the pearling industry was exempt from the White Australia Policy, so the Thursday Island area was home to hundreds of Japanese, Chinese, Malays, Indians and other foreigners, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While there was still a definite racial hierarchy and varying levels of segregation based on skin colour, Thursday Island was – by 1940s standards – a place of relative racial harmony. But then Japan entered WWII, and the island's entire Japanese community was interned, an event my grandmother witnessed first-hand.

It was my grandma's vivid memories, combined with Thursday Island's unique social setting and little-known role in WWII that inspired me to write this story.

WRITING STYLE

- What is the writing style the author has used? Consider how and when information is revealed, and the use of the intimate-third-person perspective. What is another way this story could have been told? Compare and contrast to another book with a historic setting that you have read. And compare and contrast to an adventure novel.
- The author has used language and phrases, especially in dialogue, to reflect the setting and time of the story. Choose some of the Australian phrases and idioms used in the book and discuss their meanings and origins.

KEY STUDY TOPICS

Researching historical information

- Read the extra section at the back of the book *The History of Thursday Island*. Do you think that the author has used information he's gathered to lead the plot of the story or has he only used his imagination? Or do you think it was a combination of both? How has something in your past influenced your life or your story?
- When the Fighting Stingrays are marooned on Gecko Island they discover a ramshackled hut they think once belonged to a shipwrecked sailor, Old Nick. The author used a real-life story as inspiration for this part of the narrative. Read the article in the link and discuss how real life can inspire elements of stories and the pros and cons of historical research.
<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/36071937>
- At the beginning of World War II things began to change for the inhabitants of Thursday Island because the Strait is so close to other countries in the Asia Pacific. Imagine how Aussie troops arriving on the island combined with a new navy base, air strip, search lights and weapons set up on neighbouring islands would have affected the boys as they observed these changes to their sleepy tropical island. Write a diary entry by one of the boys showing this shift through his eyes.
- During the war all Japanese, German and Italian nationals living in Australia were interned in camps as they were considered the enemy. Can you think of any other instances in the past or present when something similar has happened?



- A *wap* is a traditional tool used by Torres Strait Islanders for hunting and fishing. Research other traditional tools that may have been used by Indigenous Australians in the past; are any of them still used in modern-day life?
- At the end of the book, World War II is still being fought and the Fighting Stingrays think the Japanese Army may invade Australian soil. Do you know what the outcome of that war was? Did the Japanese Army really intend to take over Australia as some of the characters in the book believed?

Australian Identity

- What does it mean to be 'Australian'? How might different people answer that question depending on their cultural background, gender or other factors? How might two characters in this story see their Australian identity differently?
- Can you find an example of an ethical dilemma in the book? What is it and what would you have done?
- Charlie observes that because of the diverse community involved in the pearl-shell industry on TI, it was hard to believe the island was part of Australia. Multiculturalism like this wasn't prominent in much of Australia in the 1940s. Do you think things have changed for Australia? In your community or at your school is there a range of backgrounds, languages spoken or countries of birth?
- Bill, who works for Charlie's father as a cook, sleeps on the boat when it's moored at TI because Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal Australians weren't allowed to live on TI. This was government policy of the time. How do you think Bill and his family felt about this law?
- By the end of the story, Charlie has changed his mind about wanting to join Australian troops to fight in the war? What experiences do you think caused this shift?

Science

- The boys use a crystal radio set in the story – which is a radio that doesn't have a power cord or batteries! Research how this radio works and any other tools or modern items in use that don't require a power source.

Language

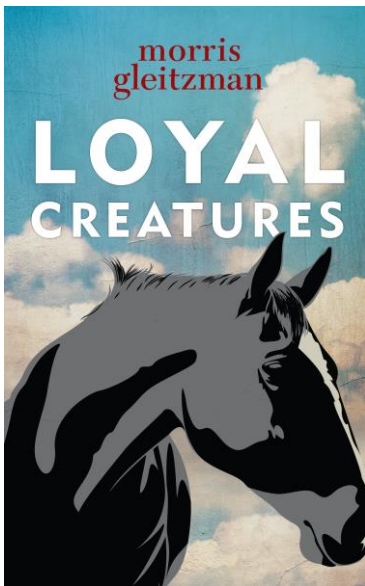
- Torres Strait Islanders speak Torres Strait Creole, a mixture of English and traditional languages. Do you know of any other languages that are a combination of others? Where do you think English stems from? Can you think of any words commonly used by English speakers that are actually from another language? Why do you think these words have been adopted? E.g. *cafe*
- When Masa is sick with malaria, Charlie overhears the two Torres Strait Islanders talking in Creole. What do you think *kam ya* and *maskita* mean?

Storytelling

- What does the cover tell you about the tone and content of the book?
- When Charlie learns that Captain Maddox knows where Masa and Alf are hiding he jumps from the Ormiston in the hope of warning his mates. What do you think it would have been like to observe the boy jumping into the ocean? Write a diary entry, short story or letter from the point of view of a passenger witnessing Charlie's actions from the deck of the Ormiston.
- In the first weeks the boys are stranded on Gecko Island they are happy. What tools and items do they have to ensure their survival? Do you think you'd be able to survive on the island? What would you do differently?
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FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

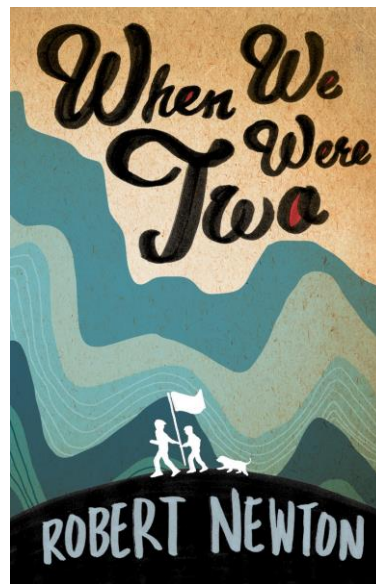


Loyal Creatures
by Morris Gleitzman

Like many of his mates from the bush, Frank Ballantyne is keen to join the grand adventure and do his bit. Specially as a chest full of medals might impress the currently unimpressed parents of his childhood sweetheart. So Frank ups his age and volunteers with his horse Daisy ... and his dad.

In the deserts of Egypt and Palestine he experiences all the adventure he ever wanted, and a few things he wasn't expecting. Heartbreak, love and the chance to make the most important choice of his life.

From Gallipoli to the famous charge at Beersheba, through to the end of the war and its unforgettable aftermath, Frank's story grows out of some key moments in Australia's history.



When We Were Two
by Robert Newton

Dan had to go. He felt he had no choice, but leaving home was never going to be easy . . .

Dan and his brother Eddie take off for the coast, in search of their lost mother, in search of a better life . . . but it's a long road they face and Dan must use all his wits to get them there in one piece.

When they are taken under the wings of a group of would-be soldiers marching over the mountains to join up for the Great War, Dan and Eddie's journey becomes something quite unexpected. The experiences they share will shape their future beyond recognition.



Do You Dare: Tough Times
by Simon Mitchell

Do you dare . . .

Let a girl join your cricket team?

Fight for your friends?

Risk everything to save your family?

It's an adventure in Australian history.

Do You Dare?

An exciting, action-packed adventure set in 1931.

ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	AGE	RRP	QUANTITY	TOTAL
The Fighting Stingrays	Simon Mitchell	9780143784104	9+	\$17.99		
Do You Dare?: Tough Times, 1931	Simon Mitchell	9780143308010	8+	\$14.99		
Loyal Creatures	Morris Gleitzman	9780670077427	9+	\$19.99		
When We Were Two	Robert Newton	9780143566830	9+	\$17.99		
History Mysteries: Diamond Jack	Mark Greenwood	9780143309260	8+	\$12.99		
History Mysteries: The Lost Explorer	Mark Greenwood	9780143309277	8+	\$12.99		
History Mysteries: Lasseter's Gold	Mark Greenwood	9780143309321	8+	\$12.99		
History Mysteries: The Last Tiger	Mark Greenwood	9780143309253	8+	\$12.99		
TOTAL						

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