



## *Refuge: Many dreams one land*

By Jackie French

### Book Summary:

When a boat carrying a group of asylum seekers is sunk by a freak wave, Faris wakes from the shipwreck in an Australia he's always dreamed of. There are kangaroos grazing under orange trees and the sky is always blue. On a nearby beach, Faris meets a group of young people who have come from far different times and places. They are also seeking refuge, and each has their own story of why they had to leave their own story of why they had to leave their country to make a new life for themselves. It is only when Faris chooses to return to 'real life' and find his father in Australia that he learns the extraordinary truth about the friends he made in the golden beach. From one of Australia's best-loved authors comes a remarkable story about Australia's long history of migration and the people who make up our country.

### Curriculum Areas and Key Learning Outcomes:

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ACELY1698, ACPMP066

### Appropriate Ages:

10+

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## Introduction

'You think everyone sees the world in the same way?' (p 56)

'The home you go back to each night is *your* Australia. The one you dreamed of.'  
'No! My home isn't a dream!' (p 62)

Thirteen-year-old Faris and his grandmother Jadda are fleeing from persecution in their home country aboard a leaky boat with 34 others. His father had escaped government interrogation five years earlier and now they are going to join him in Australia. But a storm arises and Faris blacks out.

He wakes in the Australian home he has dreamed of, but when he goes to the nearby beach and joins a group of children playing, all of whom are dressed differently, and who come from different cultures, he realises that something is not quite as he'd thought. One of the young people is an Indigenous young man named Mudurra, who keeps his distance but does offer some of his food to the others. Faris realises that in this world each child goes home at night to a home which is a reflection of the Australia which they had imagined when they left home, and that they all come from different times and places. Susannah and Billy explain that some have already been and gone back through the mysterious door on the beach, and that eventually they will all be ready to return to the challenges from which they have temporarily escaped. She explains that the beach provides a 'refuge' for the children who have suffered in order to make their way to Australia: 'This isn't heaven.' 'Then what is it?' 'A refuge,' she said quietly. 'It took me years to find the answer. I sat on the sand hill. I prayed, day after day. And one day the answer came. We are the children who refused to die. Instead of dying we have come here to build up the strength to go back to what we have to face, the strength to live. The strength to go back to our lives and to survive.' (pp 69-70) As weeks pass and the same routine is observed with his new friends, Faris learns each of their stories and visits their imagined worlds over the sand dunes, each of which is a different vision of how Australia might be. Sudanese Juhi arrived in 2005 and decides after falling in love with Mudurra to return with him to 60,000BC; Billy Higgs was a British convict who arrived in 1829; Susannah was an Irish girl who was coming with her large and poor family to find a better home in Australia and arrived in 1923; Greek Nikko came with his family to join the Snowy Mountains Scheme in 1952; German David Weisengarten was a violinist who has lost his family to the Holocaust and arrived from Austria in 1945; Afghani Jamila arrived on Christmas Island in 1993; and Sri Lankan Nafeesa arrived alone in 2009.

After Faris and the others eventually do go through the door, the latter part of the novel is about his reunion with his father and the difficulties entailed in adjusting to this less than perfect world. The novel ends with a meeting with

Susannah, now a very old woman, named Sister Margaret-Mary, who tells him what has happened to all the others.

This is a multicultural history of immigration to Australia. Imaginatively written, it shows that everyone who arrived in Australia came by boat and that each one of them has contributed to our history in different ways. It suggests that empathy and understanding are crucial in our treatment of and response to immigrants and refugees. It also suggests that those who survive are those with the strength of their dreams and with the self-confidence and conviction that they can overcome the obstacles presented to them.

### About The Author

**Jackie French** is a multiple award-winning author who deals with a very wide-range of topics. Of her books she says on her website that:

*There were over 140 at last count, slightly more than we have varieties of apples. If something is worth doing you may as well go heart and soul and boot leather ... I write for kids and adults, fiction, history, gardening, pests control, chooks and some that must be a nightmare for book shops to work out what genre they are. Have a look at 'which book?' for a probably not quite up to date list of what is where and for whom.*

Her website offers further detailed and fascinating insights into her life and work.

[www.jackiefrench.com.au](http://www.jackiefrench.com.au)

### Author Inspiration

Jackie says:

'All books begin somewhere, or some when. But not this one. Instead for years I've been haunted by images of 60,000 years of small boats, facing the waves towards Australia. My ancestors, from more than seven nations and racial groups, came on those boats, many generations past. From that first canoe 60,000 years ago, those arrivals have made our nation.

This is the story of one boy, Faris, but it is also the story of that one extraordinary migration that still continues, to a land at the end of the world. It is set, partly, on the beach of my childhood, the happiest and most carefree part of my childhood (except perhaps in books) where I walked on the sand and sang to the sea and my grandmother fished or painted. That beach was my refuge.'

## Characters

- **The Significance of Character:** Characters are the heart of any narrative, the catalysts for action, and the central core around which all other narrative aspects must revolve and work. In this work there are several major characters (some of whom figure briefly in the action) and a cast of minor ones.

*Discussion Point:* Apart from Faris, which character did you consider to be central to the novel's plot and themes, and why?

- **Major Characters:** Faris; his grandmother, Jadda; his father; Susannah (Sister Margaret-Mary) and Billy Higgs.

*Discussion Point:* Which of the main characters did you find most appealing, and why?

- **Minor Characters:** Mudurra, Juhi, Jamila, Susannah, Nikko, David, Nafeesa, Jamila.

*Discussion Point:* Is there a minor character who might have played a larger part? Why would you have liked to have seen more of this character?

- **Character Arcs** are the curve on which key events show how a character grows or develops in response to events and to interactions with other characters in the novel.

*Activity:* Choose a character and trace an arc on which key events indicate some aspect of their personality or change in their behaviour.

## Themes

### Treatment of Refugees

- 'He hadn't understood, on the sagging boat on its way here, how much Australia didn't want him. But he had nowhere else to go.' (p 203)

*Discussion Point:* Sadly the bureaucratic response to asylum seekers has obscured the word 'asylum' in angry rhetoric about 'queue-jumpers'. Discuss the reasons why asylum seekers pay people smugglers to bring them to Australia and the background to some of their stories.

- Before Faris arrives he has a vision of Australia derived from tourism brochures:

'It was beautiful. A rich country. Bright fish swam on its Great Barrier Reef. Tourists wandered on golden beaches. Its Opera House gleamed under the blue sky. Faris was glad his father was near an opera house, where he could hear the music that he loved.' (p 5)

*Discussion Point:*

Is Australia a rich and generous country? Or is it one which has dark corners as well?

- 'They did not go to the International Organisation for Refugees Camp. "You wait four years, or five there, before you can go to Australia," said Jadda. "You must go to school, to university, not spend your life here waiting." She wouldn't let him learn Bahasa, to go to the local school. He must speak English, for Australia.' (pp 6-7)

And:

'But there was no way to apply to go to Australia in Afghanistan.' (p 118)

*Activity:*

Many people believe that those who board illegal boats are doing so for nefarious reasons. But these two quotes indicate that many are simply desperate to find refuge and that the options for refugees are few. Discuss the options available to Faris and his grandmother; or to Jamila and her family.

Visit the website Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA)  
<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/>>

*Activity:*

Have students access some of this information on refugees and their rights and how Australia has observed those rights.

- Mei Ling's story (p 113) is one shared by many Vietnamese boat people.

*Activity:*

Research this history. Read Anh Do's picture book *The Little Refugee* (Allen & Unwin, 2011) or his memoir *The Happiest Refugee* (Allen & Unwin, 2010).

*Discussion Point:*

How did government policy deal with this influx in the 1970s? Compare to today's policies.

- Vlad was from Bosnia (pp 113-5) where a relatively recent conflict took place between 1992-5.

*Discussion Point:*

Research the causes and the outcomes of the war. See 'Bosnian War' <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bosnian\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bosnian_War)>

- 'I am from a country that you would call Afghanistan. My people are Hazara. The Pashtuns hate Hazara. It has been that way for hundreds of years.' (p 116)

Jamila's story is very relevant to Australia at present as we still have troops in that country fighting the Taliban. Afghanistan has suffered decades of conflict and is still at the mercy of civil unrest today.

*Activity:*

Research the conflict in Afghanistan and how or if it is being resolved. See 'Afghanistan' <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan>>

- In Chapter 14 the trope of a hair-raising rescue is used to symbolise all that the characters have learned from each other.

*Discussion Point:*

Empathy and understanding give them courage, and the strength of their group is more than the sum of all their parts.

- Nafeesa is from Sri Lanka (p 161) where civil war was waged from 1983 to 2009.

**Activity:**

Research the history of this war and the current situation in Sri Lanka. Visit 'Sri Lankan Civil War'

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri\\_Lankan\\_Civil\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lankan_Civil_War)

- 'He was supposed to call someone, to say he had arrived in Australia — the 'alive' call so the owner of the boat would get his money. But he had no number to ring.'(p 204)

**Discussion Point:**

This sort of bureaucratic mystery must be confronted by many arrivals in Australia. Imagine arriving here after suffering years of fear and privation, having no English, and with no understanding of the local laws and customs. How would you feel?

- Many immigrants who arrive in Australia find themselves impoverished and, even when they are highly skilled professionals, forced to work in menial tasks for years while they are having their qualifications recognised.

**Discussion Point:**

How would you and your family cope in such a situation?

- Post traumatic stress disorder is commonly suffered by those who are kept in detention for a lengthy period.

**Activity:**

Research the various forms of detention centres which Australia has developed for refugees. Discuss whether they seem humane responses to the situation.

**Global Conflicts and World Peace**

- The immigration of most of the children in this novel was provoked by either conflicts or persecution.

**Discussion Point:**

What did you learn about the influence of war on people's lives from reading this novel?

*Discussion Point:*

- Billy might be said to be a victim of class warfare in Britain where the poor were routinely driven to crime particularly after the Industrial Revolution.

*Discussion Point:*

Discuss the origins of many convicts' convictions and how their experiences related to economic and social conditions in Britain at that time.

Susannah says to Faris: 'Why is there such a terrible lot of hating in the world? Why do we hate so much that we try to kill those who aren't like us?' 'I don't know.' 'Sometimes I'm thinking that we need to love more. That if enough of us do good things it might balance out the hate.' (p 121) Juhi also says: 'I can make them change! Do you know the saying "God will not change a people, until they change themselves"?' (p 95)

*Discussion Point:*

Can individuals make a difference? What might you do to encourage peace on a national or global scale?

### **Cultural Understanding, Racism and Prejudice**

- The 'White Australia Policy' which was created in response to fears that Chinese immigrants in the late nineteenth century would 'over-run' the country, and monopolise the job market, was officially entitled the *Immigration Restriction Act (1910)* which was the first act passed by the government of the new Federation of Australia in 1901. It was not overturned until 1973 when the Whitlam government finally removed race as a factor in Australia's immigration provisions.

*Discussion Point:*

How much of Australia's recent responses to Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants are fuelled by racism?

**Activity:**

Use these teaching resources as a catalyst for discussion in the classroom: 'Racism No Way: Fact Sheets' <<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/teaching-resources/factsheets/59.html>>

- Faris and Jamila visit a teacher who speaks of Mohammed ibn-Musa al-Khwarizmi (p 136) the great Arabian mathematician and his influence on contemporary mathematics. This story reveals the sophisticated thinking developed in early Arabian history, and challenges western views of their intellectual supremacy.

**Discussion Point:**

What do you know about Arab cultures? What other scientific discoveries or cultural achievements can be attributed to Arab countries? Visit 'Arab Culture' <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab\\_culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_culture)> for background to the local customs and culture

**Women's Rights and Advocacy**

'Jamila caught the ball as though she had never known that women shouldn't shove their way past men — or had she, like Jadda, perhaps deliberately forgotten.' (p 26)

The Taliban refused her and the women in her family the right to education, so Jamila's dream Australian world is a 'city of women' (pp 134-5) and her poem which David puts to music (pp 137-8) draws on the painful experiences of her grandmother and others.

**Discussion Point:**

How would it be to live in a society where women were not allowed access to education, and had to submit all their rights and power to men?

- Jackie French dedicates this book to the Sisters of Saint Joseph who supported both Indigenous students and the rights of women through their advocacy. Sr Margaret-Mary (Susannah) is an example of this sort of charitable support. 'She really cares for David, thought Faris, but she doesn't look at him the way Juhi looks at Mudurra. Susannah cares for all of us.' (p 56)

**Activity:**

Mary Mackillop was the first Australian recognised as a saint and was a member of the order of the Sisters of Saint Joseph. Research her life further to discover why she is considered worthy of sainthood.

## Key Quotes

The following quotes relate to some of the **Themes** above. You might like to present any one of them (or two related quotes) to your students as a catalyst for further discussion, or as the subject of an essay outlining how the quote reflects a central theme in this novel:

<p>'How could his father be a rebel? Rebels shouted, and drew slogans on the walls. Rebels plotted. They didn't live in houses with fine gardens, with rich carpets on the floor. Their sons didn't go to good schools.' (p 4)</p>	<p>'It's a rule, if you like. Always walk across the sand hill by yourself. I'll go home now, to make sure it goes right for you. Don't worry. This is a good place, a safe place. Nothing bad can come to you here. Nothing at all. Good night, Faris.' (p 35)</p>
<p>'It was enough. All he wanted, he told himself. He had lived with fear so long (he shut his mind to what that fear had been, but the memory that he had been afraid lingered). This was a time for sunlight, for white sand. This was a holiday. This was Australia. This was peace. This was home, with Jadda and his father.' (p 49)</p>	<p>'We all arrived here, trying so hard to forget. Every one of us had to face things that are too big for children. But I think you're ready to remember now.' 'I ... I don't want to remember,' he whispered.' (p 63)</p>
<p>'Death is easy for people like us, the easiest thing in our whole lives. But to survive — that's harder. I think that's why we're here. To find the strength, the courage to survive.' (pp 73-4)</p>	<p>'The music sang across the theatre, David's fingers firm and sure. It sang of loss, but of strength too. For the first time since he had seen the beach Faris suddenly knew that this was worth keeping, that this beauty, the knowledge of creating beauty, should not be lost.' (p 108)</p>
<p>'For showing me that a man can walk in the city of women. You, David, Billy, perhaps even my father, and other men too. I wrote the words, but I didn't understand them. We share more than divides us.'(p 138)</p>	<p>'Faris stared at him. Why did you leave us? He thought. Why did you bring all this upon us? The stranger hesitated, then reached out his arms. Faris participated in the hug. He thought they were both relieved when it was over.' (p 206)</p>
<p>'We have done the impossible,' Susannah said quietly. 'All of us here. We found a refuge in our dreams.'</p>	<p>'Were they good men trying to help, or men who just did their job? He didn't know. Perhaps it didn't</p>

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<p>Now it is time to make our dreams real.' (p 186)</p>	<p>matter. But deep down he knew it did. He wanted the gift of life to come from heroes.' (p 200)</p>
<p>'You breathed in fear, in detention. Fear of being sent back to wherever you had come from. Fear that no one would want you, that you would spend your life behind barbed wire. Fear of other inmates, sometimes. Anger was so sharp you could almost touch it.' (p 204) ... 'Days had passed. Weeks or months perhaps, as someone, somewhere, checked out the papers that had survived the journey and his story. Some of the inmates said that you had to wait years here or in some other camp. Faris didn't count the time. It simply passed. In a strange way the beach had been more vivid than real life.' This was not the Australia he had dreamed of. But it was all he had.' (pp 204-5)</p>	<p>'The woman was kind, the sort of practised kindness that said: you are a stranger. Soon you will leave and another will take your place, and I will give him the same smile that I give you.' (p 206)</p>
<p>'His father looked at him steadily. 'I should have been at that demonstration. I should have had the courage to say: "These things must change.' (p 209)</p>	<p>'Nothing here matters, he thought. Yet it was real. And it was all he had.' (p 210)</p>
<p>'This was Australia. Not the Australia that he had dreamed of, the Australia he had longed for when he walked through the door. This was not the Australia of the golden beach and laughing games. But it was real. And like Susannah said, real things can change.' (p 212)</p>	<p>'Back in the smelly flat, when Faris woke one night screaming after a nightmare about a wave, his father had explained 'post-traumatic stress disorder', explained how your body got used to being scared, and imagined other terrors to explain the chemicals inside you that kept the terror there. Had the fear chemicals of his body created the illusion that he had once known a small white beach?' (p 214)</p>
<p>'In three years nothing important had passed between them. Their life was only now, not then. The silence</p>	<p>'Faris nodded. They had permanent residency, but the safety of Australian citizenship was still to come. Australia</p>

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<p>stretched. The waves danced grey lace across the sand.' (p 222)</p>	<p>treated them well, now, but both knew how quickly that could change. Perhaps he would never speak with the freedom that the other kids at school took for granted, kids who had never known how a few words, a small action, might destroy a life' (p 225)</p>
<p>'Faris nodded. They had permanent residency, but the safety of Australian citizenship was still to come. Australia treated them well, now, but both knew how quickly that could change. Perhaps he would never speak with the freedom that the other kids at school took for granted, kids who had never known how a few words, a small action, might destroy a life.' (p 225)</p>	<p>'The gift of friendship. Every one of us, bruised and battered by other people. We learned understanding there. We learned that together we were strong.' (p 234)</p>

## Curriculum Topics

### Language and Literacy

- ***This novel is a combination of Realism and Fantasy in which the Literary Trope of the Time Slip or Dream is Employed symbolically to explore wider issues*** — When Faris 'wakes' after the dreadful storm at sea he finds himself in the Australia he has dreamed of (Chapters 2-25). But there are differences too: the kids playing on the beach are all from different times and cultures.

*Discussion Point:*

How does this combination of realism and fantasy work? Why do you think the author chose to imagine this dream beach and the people on it? How would the story have differed if it had been a completely realistic account of Faris's journey? Discuss with students how the time slip or dream device is employed to develop the theme of Faris and the other children becoming strong enough to survive their challenges in the real world. Read and compare to other novels which use this device.

- ***Narrative Structure*** — The novel follows a chronological structure describing Faris's journey. It also includes flashbacks to incidents in the past leading up to his arrival in Australia, and in the **Author's Note** some brief accounts of the other children's stories.

*Activity:*

Create a timeline of all the incidents referred to in the book and **Author's Note**.

- ***Narrative Perspective*** — This work is written in third person from Faris's perspective.

*Discussion Point:*

How else might this story have been told? Could it have been written in first person? Why/why not?

- ***Faction*** — The experiences of the characters in this novel are based on the real experiences of people who have contributed to the history of Australia, so in one sense it is a work of 'faction' where fact and fiction are combined.

*Discussion Point:*

Choose one of the characters and locate a story which is a true account of a similar experience. Use Nadia Wheatley's *Australians All* (2013) as a source for the stories.

- **Use of Literary Devices such as Simile and Metaphor** — 'The sky was grey. The sea was grey too. It shivered. The sea filled the world. Its fingers slapped at the tiny boat with its grey timbers and grey metal framework at one end.' (p 1)

*Activity:*

Identify the type of device used in this quotation. Then locate examples of other literary devices in this novel and discuss their meaning and effect.

- **The Cover of a book is both an ideogram for the contents and a marketing tool.**

*Activity:*

Jackie French says (p 245) that she has deliberately left Faris's country and culture vague. Create a new cover for the work imagining the Faris you 'see' when you read this book. Use techniques such as collage. Write a blurb for the back cover as well.

## History

- **History of Immigration** — This book demonstrates that Australian history is multilayered and that it consists of many stories of immigration. As an island nation all the residents of this country arrived here from somewhere else; from the first Indigenous inhabitants to early visitors from Asia, Portugal, Holland and France, and then to British, European and Asian settlers.

*Activity:*

Read other oral histories, memoirs or secondary sources about some of these immigrants. For example, read Nadia Wheatley's *Australians All* (2013) or her *My Place* (1988) Ill. by Donna Rawlins, both of which give insights into this history.

*Activity:*

Choose a journey referred to in the novel and then write a diary entry as if it is being written by that person.

- **Historical Events** — This novel traces some of the major events in both world history and Australian history through the experiences of the characters.

*Activity:*

Choose one of the characters and the event which led to their journey to Australia, and research the impact it had on Australia. Eg. Billy — Convict settlement in Australia; David — Holocaust during WW2; Nikko — Snowy Mountains Scheme. [See 'Snowy Mountains Scheme' <<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/snowy-mountains-scheme>>]

## Values

- **Values** — This novel is about 'character' and developing qualities such as strength, resilience, bravery and empathy. Discuss quotes in relation to such values, for example, 'Impossible is a word for people who don't want to try,' said Jadda fiercely.' (p 8)

*Activity:*

Create a table and list some of the values demonstrated in any of the scenes or events in this book with a corresponding quote to illustrate it.

- **Individual/Community** — This novel invites questions about how an individual can influence a community, a nation, or indeed the world.

*Discussion Point:*

Invite students to consider how the characters in this novel each went on to play a positive role in their community. What role might Faris play in Australia's future?

### Further Points For Discussion

1. 'The only place to go to is the one that you have left.' (p 88)

*Discussion Point:*

How does this quote relate to the experiences described in this book? How does it relate to your students' lives?

2. Read this passage: 'Take whichever bed you like,' said the man, and suddenly, even though the man was a stranger, Faris wanted to cry for him, because all he had to offer was a choice of beds... I knew one, at least, would call the police.' (pp 208-9)

*Discussion Point:*

This heartbreaking scene occurs when Faris first joins his father after years apart. Instead of being a happy evening, it reveals the complexity of their relationship and also the story behind his father's disappearance. Discuss this scene in terms of the novel's themes.

3. Jackie French makes several points in her **Author's Note** (pp 244-5) about the complexities involved in a nation's response to asylum seekers.

*Discussion Point:*

Based on your research, conduct a debate on Australia's use of offshore processing centres such as Manus Island and Nauru.

4. Jackie French writes: 'In *Pennies for Hitler* I wrote that hatred is contagious, but so is kindness. Sometimes being good to others — as a nation, or as individuals — can be as powerful as guns.' (p 245)

*Discussion Point:*

Discuss Jackie French's comments about kindness. Is our society one which encourages kindness?

5. Food is a very big part of the shared experiences of these children and becomes symbolic of how they learn to share their experiences and cultures as well.

*Discussion Point:*

Choose a scene where food is being shared and what that scene reveals about the characters and their feelings.

6. Nikko, David and Billy each imagine an Australia in which their European food and lifestyle is part of the culture.

*Discussion Point:*

Many communities in Australia understandably reflect the inhabitants' desire to both embrace Australian culture but to preserve their own as well. For example, read about the German communities in SA, or the Greeks in Melbourne, or the Italians in the Snowy Mountains, NSW area. [See 'German Settlers in South Australia' <<http://www.southaustralianhistory.com.au/german.htm>> or 'Fact Sheets Australian Communities: Greek Australians' <<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/teaching-resources/factsheets/56.html>> or 'Fact Sheets Australian Communities: Italian Australians' <<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/teaching-resources/factsheets/58.html>>]

7. There are several very strong women in this novel: Jadda, Susannah, Jamila, Juhi and Nafeesa.

*Discussion Point:*

In this novel, the contributions made by women to Australian culture is as strong a theme as is that of how immigration has contributed to our nation's culture. Invite students to choose a woman who has made a difference to Australia's history or to contemporary culture to research further.

8. Australia is often described as an 'island nation'.

*Discussion Point:*

Does this make us an insecure nation, or does it make us a more cohesive culture?

9. 'Refuge' is the title of this book and is the word used to describe the world in which Faris and his friends find temporary relief.

*Discussion Point:*

What does refuge mean to your students? Invite them to describe their dream world of refuge and compare the differences and similarities between these worlds.

10. What was the major idea that this novel conveyed about the migrant experience in Australia?

### Notes On The Text

At the back of the book, the **Author's Note** (pp 244-256) by Jackie French covers many historical and cultural issues referred to in this text. She also includes Susannah's list of the 26 other children who arrived on the beach, as Faris did, and the fictional histories of what became of them. These fictions, though, are based on real events which happened to other real people. This should be an invaluable resource to teachers in using the book, in conjunction with these notes, in the classroom.

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