

Edel Wignell PO Box 2484 Rowville Victoria Australia 3178
Tel. (+61 3) 9753 3597 e-mail edelwig@vicnet.net.au www.edelwignell.com.au

ABN 50 922 795 309

Edel Wignell, *Christina's Matilda*, ill. Elizabeth Botté
2011, Interactive Publications (IP Kidz), Brisbane
ISBN: 978 1 9214798 7 8 (Hb); 978 1 9214798 8 5 (ePub)

NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Edel Wignell ©

1. When you were a kid - recollections

There is no doubt that Christina Macpherson's parents and family would have told her about the family's involvement in the bushranger event - the siege by Dan Morgan - when she was a baby. Probably she told the story to her friends at school.

* Students could imagine the differing accounts told by her older sister Annie (19 years) and her brothers Gideon (17) and Angus (nearly 14), and the nursemaid Alice Keenan. After discussing in pairs or threes, they could present the recollections as dramatic monologues, using the voices, the language and the manners appropriate to the particular character.

* Students may tell or write about an incident in their own childhood, based on their earliest memories. They could discuss with parents, older siblings and grandparents and discover that details may be enriched. Perhaps they will discover contradictions, disagreements and exaggerations. Students' reports may include comments, such as: 'Dad says, Grandpa has *false memories*', or 'Nanna is a *drama queen* – I don't believe everything she says'.

2. Illustrations

When Elizabeth Botté was commissioned to illustrate *Christina's Matilda*, she used several devices to indicate the historical setting of the book, capture the atmosphere and bring the 19th century to life. Students may suggest these, and comment on the following:

- * Photography - portraits of individuals and groups.
- * Presentation of historical documents.
- * Page borders with appropriate symbols - domesticity for indoor scenes, and flora, fauna and farming for outdoors.

Website, Elizabeth Botté: www.illos.net

3. Class consciousness

Christina's Matilda can be a starting point for the study and discussion of class, both in Australia and overseas.

* Students may discuss the arrival in Australia of the first European settlers and the 'straitjacket' of class in the 18th and 19th centuries, then move to observations of the present day when there is less focus on it.

* Students whose parents are immigrants, especially those from Asia, may contribute by explaining the particular forms of class consciousness still existing, such as the *caste* system in India, and how this affects people's lives.

* Enrichment: an excellent novel to read and discuss is Jackie French's *A Waltz for Matilda* (2010, Angus & Robertson, Sydney) set in 1894. Matilda, aged 12, sets out from the city slums to find her father, a leader in the union movement and in conflict with landowners and troopers.

4. Women's place

It is remarkable that, in the mid 20th century, Christina Macpherson's contribution to 'Waltzing Matilda' was forgotten and academics and folklorists argued, both verbally and in print, about the origin of the tune. Discussion may centre on the following aspects of 'women's place'.

* Until recent times, both in listings of famous Australians and in biographical collections, women were omitted from history or given token representation. Since the 1960s and 70s, writers and researchers, such as Germaine Greer, Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, and many others have brought feminist history and thought to the fore.

* In the 18th and 19th centuries, Indigenous culture was researched and reported by male explorers and anthropologists. Many either ignored or made superficial observations in regard to women's place. Understanding and appreciation by Westerners of the importance of women in Indigenous communities is relatively new.

* Enrichment: an excellent novel to read and discuss is Jackie French's *A Waltz for Matilda* (2010, Angus & Robertson, Sydney) set in 1894 – see note above (4). The place of both pioneering white and Indigenous women is revealed, as well as details of manners, clothing, the Suffrage Movement, the attitudes of males to entrepreneurial women...

5. Changing attitudes

Following the above, it is appropriate to note the fact that, until recently, *modesty* was regarded as a virtue. Young people, both males and females, were told by parents and grandparents: 'Be modest about your achievements'.

* Students may discuss this fact with families (especially grandparents), report their findings and give their opinions. Note the fact that, in mid-20th century, when Christina Macpherson's part in the creation of 'Waltzing Matilda' was forgotten and academics and historians debated the origins, Christina did not publicize her role.

In contrast, today young achievers in many fields are expected to publicize. They become part of marketing and publicity teams, with the aim of selling products or promoting services. For example: a young sailor who sails around the world may become the spokesperson for a commercial product; a young writer whose book has been released is expected to publicize it – even initiate a Book Launch.

* Students may suggest reasons for change, including inventions in media and social communications. They can imagine what life was like pre-television and the Internet.

- What kinds of television shows do people like? Why are contests popular? Why does Oprah Winfrey have a huge following...?

- How has the Internet, especially the availability of social communication (blogging, Facebook, Twitter...) influenced attitudes?

* Debate: Modesty is a desirable trait.

6. The Queensland Version

In *Christina's Matilda* two versions of the song are introduced. Firstly, the original 'Waltzing Matilda', was a Scottish tune, 'Craigielee', played by Christina Macpherson with lyrics written by 'Banjo' Paterson in 1895. Then, in 1936, modifications were made by Marie Cowan to both the tune and the words to promote a brand of tea.

There is another melody which is completely different. It was composed in 1907 by a music teacher, Josephene Pené, of Cloncurry – a friend of Bob Macpherson. It is called 'The Cloncurry Variant', or sometimes 'The Queensland Version' or 'The Buderim Tune'.

- * A pair or a group of students may research and find this tune.
- * Discussion may follow their presentation. The class may sing the three versions, then vote for the most popular one.

7. The history of photography

Readers of *Christina's Matilda* will notice the serious gaze of the portrait subjects.

- * Students with knowledge of the technical aspects of photography may suggest the reasons for this, and the succeeding developments which have revolutionized the art of photography.
- * Students with a special interest in photography may research histories of photography and display pages or demonstrate on the whiteboard to illustrate the point.
- * A time line could highlight various aspects, from the introduction of photography in the 19th century to present day photography using mobile phones.

8. Home tutoring

Many wealthy early settlers in Australia, such as the Macphersons, brought a tutor with them to ensure that their children were educated. Most families were large, with ten or twelve children aged from infancy to late teens. It was a busy occupation for the tutor, who 'lived in'.

In the last ten years, home tutoring has become popular again, with parents being the teachers, assisted by Departments of Education and the provision of services on the Internet.

- * Discuss and debate the advantages and disadvantages of this form of education.

9. Cemeteries

Cemeteries, in both country towns and the city, are fascinating places to visit. Christina Macpherson's grave can be found in the St Kilda Cemetery (inner-suburban Melbourne).

* An excursion to a cemetery can be an enlightening experience, but research is needed. A group of students may prepare for a class visit to a local cemetery, obtaining background information and a map.

- * Students may discuss the highlights, then engage in art activities or creative writing.

10. Bushrangers

The bushranger Dan Morgan was one of several Australian bushrangers who became famous. The opening pages of *Christina's Matilda* outline the last segment of his life. Students who are interested in the bushranger phenomenon may enjoy further study and activity to:

- * research Dan Morgan's life,
- * research the lives of other bushrangers and the reasons why they embarked on lives of crime,
- * gather the information into a book, with an appropriate cover and Table of Contents,
- * debate the fairness or unfairness of the treatment of bushrangers by police and courts of law.

www.edelwignell.com.au

<http://ipoz.biz/Titles/CM.htm> (trailer)

www.illos.net.au (illustrator, Elizabeth Botté)

<http://ipoz.biz/Store/Store.htm>

Controversy – origin of the 'Waltzing Matilda' tune

Mendelsohn, Oscar, **A Waltz with Matilda: On the Trail of a Song**, 1966, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne

Mendelsohn, Oscar, 'Waltzing Matilda Again', 1970, in **Meanjin Quarterly**, Vol. 29 (3), pp. 377-379

Mendelsohn, Oscar, 'Matilda Waltzes Again', 1971, in **Meanjin Quarterly**, Vol. 30 (4), pp. 478-483

Pearce, Harry H, **On the Origins of Waltzing Matilda (Expression, Lyric, Melody)**, 1971, Hawthorn Press, Melbourne

Pearce, Harry H, **The Waltzing Matilda Debate: Replies to Criticism, New Verification on the Bold Fusilier, Josephine Pene, etc**, 1974, Rams Skull Press, Kuranda

References

Forrest, Peter & Sheila, **Vision Splendid: A History of the Winton District, Western Queensland**, 2005, Winton Shire Council and Winton District Historical Society & Museum, Forrest, Peter & Sheila, **Banjo & Christina: the true story of 'Waltzing Matilda'**, 2008, Shady Tree, Darwin

Magoffin, Richard, **Fair Dinkum Matilda**, 1973, and **Waltzing Matilda: Song of Australia**, 1983, both Mimosa Press, Charters Towers

Magoffin, Richard, **Waltzing Matilda: Ballad of the Fair Go: Commemorating our Song's 110th Anniversary**, 1995, Pictorial Press Australia, Corinda

May, Sydney, **The Story of Waltzing Matilda**, 1944, W R Smith & Patterson, Brisbane

O'Keefe, Dennis, **The Creation of Waltzing Matilda**, (unpublished)

www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/banjo-a-love-cad-and-rotter/story (14 June 2008)

Parker, Godfrey (Thomas Edward Bulch), 'March Craigielee' - arrangement of Scottish folk song, 'Thou Bonnie Wood o' Craigielee' - played for the first time in Australia at the Warrnambool Races on 24 April, 1894 (in Magoffin, Richard, **Waltzing Matilda: Song of Australia**)

Ross, Lance, **'Banjo' Paterson's Waltzing Matilda**, 2010, self-published, Melbourne (first published, 2005, The Five Mile Press, Melbourne)

Song Book Board of Sydney and Melbourne Universities, **The Australasian Students' Song Book**, 1911, George Robertson, Melbourne

Edel Wignell, **A Bluey of Swaggies** (comp.), Edward Arnold, 1985, Melbourne

Wood, Thomas, **Cobbers**, 1934, Oxford University Press