

SOLDIER BOY

The Play



Adapted from the classic novel

ANTHONY HILL

TEACHERS' NOTES

SOLDIER BOY

Soldier Boy The Play adapted from *Soldier Boy* by Anthony Hill

First published by Penguin Random House 2001

Teachers' Notes

Written for the novel by Jane Pulford, adapted for the playscript by Sarah Read

Suggestions for classroom activities based on *Soldier Boy*





Below are some suggestions for approaching the play and novel. The play lends itself to students undertaking individual tasks and some group research. Classroom talks or presentations would complement this text.

Curriculum Links and Activities Guide

Learning areas: English Language & Literature

The following icons have been used throughout this guide to signify links to the Australian Curriculum Core Capabilities and English 7-10 Sub Strands.





Core Capabilities

- Critical and Creative Thinking 
- Ethical Understanding 
- Personal and Social Capability 
- Intercultural Understanding 

Cross Curriculum Priorities

- Sustainability 
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures 

English: Sequence of content 7-10, Sub Strands:

- Literature and Context: 
- Responding to Literature: 
- Examining Literature 
- Creating Literature 

Before the reading

The cover

- Ask students to look closely at the front cover of the novel – without looking at the back cover. What questions come to mind? Why is the scroll included? What sort of novel do they think it will be?
- Discuss students' initial responses. Read the back cover together. Hopefully this will elicit a discussion of Anzac Day and the Gallipoli Campaign.
- Briefly outline who were Allies and who were enemy. Point out that Constantinople and Istanbul are the same city. Discuss why Anzac Day is so significant in Australian History. A brief look at the enclosed maps would be useful.

During the reading

If you are attempting a whole class reading it is sometimes useful to have a few easy tasks for students to complete whilst reading. This helps students concentrate and focus on the text.

There is a chart in Appendix A which is suitable for note-taking. This is an important skill for all students. Teachers could allocate one or two students to be responsible for each topic during the reading. Students would note page references and make brief notes in column one only. Students could then report back to the rest of the class at the end of each chapter or lesson. Alternatively this could be a general classroom or homework exercise if students undertake their own reading. Students could then fill in column two after the reading. This should result in some good discussion and/or a written response comparing their lives with that of Jim Martin.

A further task might be to mark on a map of the world/Middle East some of the major place names Jim passes through on his journey. A more detailed map of the Gallipoli peninsula is included in the text and in much of the reference material on the subject.

NB: The chart would probably be better reproduced on A3 to allow for large handwriting.

Discussion following the reading

Much of the appeal of this text to junior secondary level is that the main character is fourteen years of age – roughly their age. How do they feel about going to war, the appeal of the army life, love of the Empire, loss created by war? If you have a multicultural class some students may have direct experience of war, and this would need to be considered when embarking on a discussion of this nature. The use of column two in the chart would be instrumental in prompting discussion and/or a writing piece.

Part A: Activities for Reading the Play

Setting the Stage

An important part of analysing a play is considering the **production** and **design elements** (setting, lighting, costume, sound) that have been outlined by the playwright, and to think about the impact of these choices. Take a look at the stage descriptions for the setting up of the stage:

On one side of the stage a kitchen table, dresser, hat-stand and a few chairs represent the Martin family home at Hawthorn, Melbourne. On the other side an army stretcher representing the hospital ship, which stays throughout.

Activity

Draw a picture of the stage as described above, labeling all the key features mentioned in the stage description.

Questions

1. What do these two sides of the stage represent?
2. What predictions might we make about this play through the staging? What two aspects of war might be addressed?
3. Later in the play, there is also reference to a multimedia screen in the background. What does this allow for directors to add to the staging of a play?

Prologue

An interesting feature of the prologue is that all the dialogue takes place off stage. This means it is important to consider how sound is being used to create an experience for the audience.

Activity

Using the script, make note of all the different sounds that audiences would hear in the prologue of the play. For each sound, consider how this sets the scene for the opening of the play. What atmosphere is created here?

Research

Listen to the song *It's a Long Way to Tipperary* and read through the lyrics. What is the main theme of the song? How does this relate to Hill's play?

Act 1 *Joining Up*

Act 1 follows Jim's story from the outbreak of the War to his departure for Gallipoli. There are some key characters that appear in this section of the play, look to the specific scenes where we are introduced to the following characters, complete the table outlining your first impressions of them.

Character	How are we first introduced to this character?	What first impressions do you have of them? Use a quotation to justify your ideas.	What values does this character embody?
Jim			
Amelia			
Charlie			
Jim's sisters			
Rex Venables			
Lieutenant-Colonel McLaren			
Cec Hogan			

Costume Design

Choose one of the characters above and design their costume for different parts of the play. Create two 'looks' for this character to be worn in two significant moments. Label your drawing with quotations from stage directions or character descriptions. Write a short explanation for your choices.

Key Scenes

- *Act 1 Scene 1 and Scene 11* – the Act begins and ends with a seriously ill Jim being treated for typhoid. The rest of Act 1 is told through a series of memories from Jim as he lies dying.
 - * Why do you think Hill structured his play in this way? Look up the term **dramatic irony**. How does this structure create a sense of dramatic irony as the play progresses?

Act 1 Scene 7 – In this scene, Amelia and Charlie agree to sign Jim's consent letter.

- How does this scene reveal the sense of duty that Jim feels to join the war? Why is Rex Venables included in this scene?
- Look at the following interaction between Jim and Charlie:

CHARLIE: But you mustn't go to war. You don't realise what it means.

JIM: I'm well into cadet training, Dad. I'm learning the drill.

CHARLIE: Let others take the risks ...

JIM: And have me miss all the fun?

How does this conversation reveal the misinformation spread about the war to young men at the time?

Act 2 Under Fire

Act 2 continues to delve into Jim's memories, this time following him as he makes his way to the trenches of Gallipoli. In this Act we see the stark contrast between Jim's expectations of war and the harsh reality of the trenches.

Symbols

Letters become an important symbol in this section of the play, as it becomes increasingly clear that Amelia and Charlie's letters are not reaching Jim. There is an evocative stage direction in Act 2 Scene 3: *AMELIA'S letters could drift onto the stage from the flies and lay there, trampled upon during the action, to suggest Jim never received them.* What impact does this have for audiences watching the play? What might these letters symbolize? How is the tragedy of the play amplified through them?

See Writing Activities in Part C for activities involving letters.

Key Scenes

- *Act 2 Scene 2 and Scene 4* – In these scenes Jim and the other soldiers are hit by an enemy submarine. There is a lot of action in this scene! In groups, decide how you would stage this scene using only the furniture in your classroom. Present your scenes to each other and explain your choices.
- *Act 2 Scene 7* – In this scene, Jim, Cec and the other new recruits encounter The Veteran in the trenches of Gallipoli. For specific activities relating to the enemy, mateship, and life in the trenches, see Part B: Themes.
- *Act 2 Scene 10* – In this scene, Jim is writing a letter home when a soldier tells of an explosion on the foreshore. Look at the following lines and consider the truthfulness of Jim's letters home.

JIM [*with letter*]: "Nowhere's safe on Gallipoli." Should I tell Mum that? No. She'll worry. Um ... "Flies are bad. More than sixty men have gone down sick in our Battalion, and we've only been here a few weeks." No. "My mate Cec had the gut-ache, and went down to the beach hospital for a few days." Don't put that in. Say [*writes*] "Don't worry about me, as I am doing splendid over here."

SERGEANT and SOLDIER 1 (*if doubled*) exit. Light up on AMELIA reading letter and writing one of her own.

AMELIA: "... Doing splendid over here." [*Writes.*] "That's lovely for you, dear."

- *Act 2 Scene 15* – This is a short but powerful scene where Jim dies. Look closely at Jim's final lines. How is the relationship between mother and son explored here?
- *Act 2 Scene 17* – In this scene, Charlie's parents are torn apart by grief and guilt. While this play is about a young soldier at war, it is just as much about those left behind at home. How is the tension between these two explored in this scene? Do you think Amelia's anger is justified?

Epilogue

In the Epilogue we learn about the real lives of the characters in the play. What is the impact of ending the play with this?

Activity

Look up the photos of each of the characters in the play. How does this impact the way you read the play? Look up another Australian soldier from WW1 and research his story (you can do this on the Australian War Memorial website). Write a letter/diary entry/short scene in which you bring an aspect of his story to life.

Part B: Themes

Family Relationships

Jim

- What sort of a young man is Jim?
- What events show that he is willing to take risks while also being conservative?
- Outline the events in Jim's wartime experiences for which he is not prepared.
- How did the following contribute to his growing up?
 - * school cadets
 - * working at his Aunt's hotel and on farms
 - * enrolling in the army
 - * torpedo attack on the *Southland*

Amelia

- Describe Amelia's character.
- Why does she sign the papers?
- What events give you an insight into her character?
- Was she typical of women of that era? Explain.

Charlie

- Write a short character profile of Charlie. Include his occupations, interests, war service and role as a father to Jim.
- How does he react to Jim going to war?

Mateship

Cec Hogan

- Cec becomes a great friend of Jim's. What qualities does Cec have?
- Cec's family give him a book of Burns poetry/songs. What does this tell us about them? Compare and contrast Jim and Cec's family.
- The boys begin to confide in each other. Why? What do they have in common?
- What does the letter to Jim's parents (p 133; Act 2 Scenes 13, 16) tell us about Cec?

The enemy

- Briefly outline who were on the side of the British/Australians and who were the enemy?
- Before going into battle the Anzacs can't wait to get into 'Abdul'.

- Why is it easy to hate someone you don't know?
- In Act 2 Scene 7, the Veteran offers a surprising perspective on the enemy, 'You can't really hate Johnny Turk. It's his country. He's doing it as tough as we are. Brave, too.' Why does this shock the Sergeant so much?

3. Duty, Honour and Patriotism

Each of the characters is motivated strongly by their sense of duty (be that to their family, their country or their convictions). Compare Jim with Rex Venables. In what way are they similar? How does duty drive both of their actions?

Conscientious Objectors

- What does it mean to be a conscientious objector? Why did people reject military service?
- <https://www.indaily.com.au/opinion/2018/11/09/its-time-to-remember-australias-conscientious-objectors-of-world-war-i>
- In Act 2 Scene 5, we hear from Amelia that white feathers are being placed in Rex's mother's letterbox. Why did this happen?

In 1901 Australia became a Federation, but we were still part of the British Empire. What did being part of the Empire mean?

Empire Day

- Research Empire Day. It was held on May 24, Queen Victoria's Birthday (p 21, p 22, p 48).
- Try an encyclopaedia. Students with older relatives such as grandparents could ask their memories of this. It was still celebrated in the 1950s.
- How and why would this have been celebrated?
- Compare and contrast Anzac Day and Empire Day.
- What role does England play in Australia's life today?

Flags

- A flag is essentially a coloured piece of fabric. Research the design of the current Australian flag. What do the components of the Union Jack and Southern Cross stand for?
- What is the role of the flag during wartime?
- What other flags do we have in Australia?
- Why are some people seeking to change the Australian flag? Why might this upset some older people? What should be included? What is your opinion of this subject?
- How does a country arouse Patriotism?
- Would you fight for Australia?

4. Loss of innocence and the reality of war

There is a significant contrast between Jim's enthusiasm for joining the fighting in Act 1 and the stark reality of life in the trenches in Act 2 in Scene 7. What is the effect of this?

- Read these descriptions of life in the trenches at Gallipoli: *The Conversation* Flies, filthy and bully beef: life at Gallipoli in 1915. Create a poster that outlines the challenges faced by soldiers on the front line.

Part C: Learning activities

Writing activities

Journals and letters

Read some of the letters contained in the novel's Appendix. (i.e. spelling mistakes, punctuation, forms of address.) Brainstorm some of the reasons for this. Discuss the letter as the main form of communication in the absence of telecommunications.

- Students could write one or more journal entries into Jim's journal.
- Write a journal account from Cec's point of view after he and Jim confide in each other about their age.
- What impression might Cec have of Jim and the Martins?
- Write one of the letters from Amelia (or another family member) to Jim that he did not receive.
- Write a letter from Rex to his mother. In what ways is he similar to Jim?

Recruitment Campaigns in Australia

- It was voluntary to go to WWI. Why did young men want to go?
- Find some real examples of recruitment posters of that period. What do they feature? What enticements were made by the recruitment posters? In what ways was war glamourised? (both texts and the Internet are useful sources.)
- Design a recruitment poster encouraging young men/women to go to war in 2000-24. What would you include? How might the posters differ for men and women recruits?

News

- Brainstorm the ways in which news was communicated in 1915. Discuss the role and purpose of different forms of news such as newspapers and if radio news was broadcast.
- Design the front page of the daily Melbourne *Herald* newspaper when Jim's death is made public, December 18, 1915 (page 16, available through Trove online.) Include weather reports, summary news, sport headlines etc as are presented in the current front page of a newspaper. Photos could easily be imported from one of the recommended web sites. (There are also some examples of actual news reports available online e.g. www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/ and also www.news.bbc.co.uk). Write up on computer using one of the writing package newsletter formats.
- Using the same scenario as above imagine and write a radio news report when Jim Martin's death becomes known. Include the full report with weather, sport, other headlines and other war news. Remember that radio news requires shorter sentences and often a quick 'grab' from a spokesperson such as the army. Present to class in person, on audio or video tape.

Additional Scenes

- Write an additional scene to be included in the play. You might choose to write a scene that explores Rex's story or others who were at home, or you might like to explore another interaction with the soldiers in the trenches. Make sure you use the conventions of script writing to help you set the scene. Like Hill does, consider how you would design lighting and sound, and use stage directions to create dramatic effect.

Writer's technique

When fact meets fiction

- The film *Gallipoli* is an example of a true event that has been fictionalised. (There are many other examples of novels and films, choose an appropriate model for your students – biographies are a good example.) Discuss with students the sorts of original sources the writer can take information from. Consider all the references in the Afterwards, Appendixes and References that Anthony Hill has used in the novel.

Teachers may also like to photocopy and discuss Anthony Hill's Afterword in these teaching notes.

- Students should select an incident from the news such as a disappearance, flood, earthquake or discovery of a body or scientific discovery and create a story from the facts. Some research should be done in order to make this realistic. (At times students are at pains to point out that this sort of writing is lying. They are very concerned about what is the truth. Reassure them that what they are writing is fiction with a factual basis. It is not wrong. Many great stories have been sparked by real events.)
- When adapting his novel to a play, Hill included the character of Rex who is mentioned often but never appears. What is the purpose of this character? What alternate perspective does Rex offer?

War Poetry

- Throughout the novel and play there are references from Cec Hogan's book of Robbie Burns poetry. Why would the author have included these? Consider the pages where Burns is quoted and discuss with students the impact of the quotes.
 - * Robert Burns *Scots Wha Hae*
 - * Kipling's *Recessional*
- There are many examples of war poetry that would complement the study of this text. The following are just a few to consider, there are many more. How do the poems' image of war and Jim's dreams of serving at the front differ? Compare and contrast some of the poetry and the Battalion song.

Wilfred Owen

Dulce et Decorum est

Futility

Anthem for Doomed Youth

Kenneth Slessor

Beach Burial

- Depending on your class's level and ability this could prompt the writing of their own poetry, reading of further poetry and individual recitals. There is also a text titled *Men who March Away* which is an anthology of war poetry.

Part D: Group class presentations

In groups or pairs students could research one of the following topics and make a presentation to the class.

- Research Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Who was he? What were his main achievements?
- Present an overview of the Gallipoli Campaign: how many were injured, how many were killed? What number of Australians, British, New Zealanders, etc? What strategies were employed?
- Investigate the story of Simpson and his Donkey. Why is this famous? What does it tell us about the reality of war?
- Rising Sun Badge. What is the significance of this badge?
- Research the ships of WWI – (Could look for the *Berrima* and the *Southland*) and maybe the hospital ships. What role did they play in the war? (Internet good for this.)
- Present a discussion of the Anzac uniform. What did it consist of? Consider coats, boots, socks, hats etc. What fabrics were they made from? How were they washed? What were puttees and why were they used? In what ways was the uniform inappropriate for Gallipoli?
- Some students may have memorabilia of WWI (e.g. the Egyptian tablecloth p 63) including medals from Grandparents, bits of uniform, tins etc. These students could give a talk to class outlining their origin and significance.

- Despite not being counted among the citizens of Australia at the time, many Aboriginal Australians served in WWI. Use this site to research the experiences of these soldiers: <https://www.awm.gov.au/about/our-work/projects/indigenous-service> ✖
- Investigate the sorts of diseases that soldiers caught in WWI. What symptoms did they have? What treatments and vaccinations were available? Describe the role of the hospital ships; what specific problems did they experience? www.cimm.jcu.edu.au/hist/aif/landing.html
- Who was Colonel John Monash? Why was he famous? For what is he known today?
- What pranks and games did the Anzacs and the Turks play on each other? Use this novel, play and other sources to give a discussion.
- What is the significance of the Lone Pine Memorial? see p 70 and the end of novel. Visit the AWM website.
- In 1914 there were no computers or mobile phones. What methods of communication were available during WWI in the battlefield?

(Students should refer to books, encyclopaedia, newspaper articles from the time and make use of the Internet.)

Part E: Online Sources

The following are just a few of the hundreds of sites that are particularly educational, accurate and easy to use for students.

www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/

The Boards of Studies NSW Educational Resources index.

This is an outstanding site. It has great photos, information and primary sources on lots of different topics. Good for original newspaper reports and some maps also.

<http://awm.gov.au>

The Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

This is a fantastic site. It is very educational and particularly good for historical details of current commemorative services. The site has its own Site Search facility so students can search for their own topic within the site e.g. *WWI and Uniform*. The site includes a commentary from the Turkish point of view which might be interesting for some groups. There are also photos and other primary sources such as Honour Rolls, war documents and so on.

www.worldwar1.com/pharc007.htm

Trenches on the Web – Photo Archive: Gallipoli Then and Now

This site mainly contains photos. It has some good detail and some interesting photographs.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk>

The site is interesting for actual examples of the news from WWI. Because it is a BBC site it obviously has a British focus and much of it is about battles in WWI, not necessarily Gallipoli. It does cover some of the Gallipoli campaign from the British point of view. Some examples of reports from a young Australian reporter called Murdoch.

Part F: Further activities

- A class viewing of the movie *Gallipoli* would complement the study of this text. There are a few brief sites on the movie on the Internet, one with study notes.
- An excursion to a local war memorial would allow students to research soldiers from their local areas.

Appendix A: Comparisons in time

Take brief notes in the first column WWI during your reading of the novel.

Aspect of life	World War One 1914-1918	2000s
School life		
Empire Day		
Disease		
Food		
Role of women/girls		
Street Parades		
Cadets/Army		
Domestic life – Baking Family size		
Slang		
Patriotism		

Afterword

Anthony Hill

I first went to Gallipoli in 1995 for the 80th anniversary of the Anzac Day landings when working as a speech writer for Governor-General Bill Hayden. The thing that struck me was the large number of young Australians and New Zealanders who'd come to the dawn service. Thousands of them. And it wasn't just their presence, it was their silence. Whatever Anzac was saying to me, it was speaking to them too. I thought "I'd like to find a story that would show you the real nature of war. Is it the big adventure? Or is it something else?"

There was one idea for which I did a lot of research, reading and visiting army camps, although nothing ultimately came of it. But a few years later Sir William Deane was going to Gallipoli, and amongst the briefing notes from the Australian War Memorial was a page from a book with a photo of Jim Martin, and a brief caption saying he was believed to be the youngest Anzac. I put him into the speech for Lone Pine, and remember standing up at my desk and saying, "There's a book in you!"

Indeed there was. At the War Memorial were some of Jim's letters, memorabilia, photos, medals and presents home from Egypt. I discovered his nephew, Jack Harris, lived not far from me. He told me the stories he heard as a boy about his uncle Jim who went to war and died at Gallipoli. I met other members of the family who had more medals, photos, another letter and memories which they willingly shared with me, as they have continued to support the project to my deep appreciation.

There were other more personal connections with the tale. I was able to visit Mr Roy Longmore, the second last surviving Anzac, who had served in Jim's battalion, and glimpsed something of the real Gallipoli. I realised that as Jim walked down Glenferrie Road to school he would have passed my grandfather's real estate agency. And a great uncle Howard not only served with the 21st Battalion but in the same Company as Jim Martin. They would have known each other. Howard was to die in France, and my grandmother never ceased to mourn him. Such was the enduring impact of the Great War on the home front.

Even much of the military research I'd done for the earlier idea found a place in the story. While the technology of war has changed vastly, the internal relationships between officer and soldier, and between the soldiers themselves, have not. And the etiquette of bayonet practice and the firing range is still much as it was.

So, once I began writing *Soldier Boy*, my own experience kept making contact with what now must be the imagined reality of Jim Martin's life. And this underpinned much of what I was trying to do with the book and now the play: to blend the voice of the storyteller, playwright and biographer into a reasonable approach to truth.

I never alter a known external historical fact. Where the record is silent and I have to make assumptions, I try to make them as plausible as possible based on whatever primary and secondary sources I can find. Jim's experience after the *Southland* was torpedoed is one example. Another is the supposition that Jim worked on the farms near his aunt Mary, to whom he was close, to help explain why he described himself on the enlistment form as a "farm labourer". Unlike a historian, the storyteller doesn't have the luxury of saying "we don't know what happened next."

I acknowledge this openly in the Chapter Notes, to be found on my website [www.https://www.anthonhillbooks.internetbasedfamily.com/soldierboychapternotes.html](https://www.anthonhillbooks.internetbasedfamily.com/soldierboychapternotes.html).

The hope is that when new material does come to light, it can be incorporated while maintaining the integrity of the original work. We now learn, for instance, that while Jim Martin is the youngest known Australian Anzac, a New Zealand boy, Leslie Shaw, two weeks younger than Jim, was actually at the Gallipoli landings. He was only thirteen when he enlisted in England.

On the other hand, as a novelist and playwright I feel free to explore the inner life of my subjects – their thoughts, emotions, confusions, contradictions and beliefs – in a way denied a non-fiction writer who lacks documentary or oral evidence. For me, characters never really come to life until they start to speak. And it's surprising how often imaginative fiction can help one to get near the essential truth of a situation.

By trying to re-live Amelia's thought processes when confronted by Jim's threat to run away, it became much easier to understand why she signed the consent letter. As a father, I could see why she didn't simply tell the authorities that her son was only fourteen. Otherwise she risked losing him for ever. Which in fact is what happened – but Amelia couldn't know that at the time. As a man imagining Jim's fears as he lay sick and dying in his dugout, I began to realise why he didn't report to the medical authorities. The shame of discovery, of being stripped of everything and sent home in disgrace, was more than the boy could bear.

The sensible thing, for both mother and son, would have been to do the opposite of what they actually did. But we are not always rational beings. Emotion often provides a much stronger impetus than reason for action. And the great virtue of fiction writing is that it can help to convince the reader or an audience of that where non-fiction, with its emphasis on objective fact and logic, is limited.

Like our response to the dreadful realities of warfare, fallible human nature remains substantially what it always was.

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