

Teachers' Notes
Written by Roger Watts



ANIMAL HEROES

By ANTHONY HILL

Introduction

The stimulus for this book came when Anthony Hill first heard the true story of Horrie the Wog Dog. As he explains in his background notes, he then became aware of a wealth of material stored at the Australian War Memorial - stuffed dogs, carrier pigeons, and a horse's head, for example - that led him to consider some of Australia's forgotten animal heroes.

Accounts of animals in war do exist. They have been used throughout history, but this is an attempt to capture the stories of animal heroics in connection with the Australian armed forces, not only in wars but peacetime as well. Whilst some of the stories are familiar, most of these animals appear for the first time.

Hill divides the book into four sections: the First World War, the Second World War, Korea and Vietnam, and Modern Times. Readers are therefore given a good understanding of how attitudes to the use of animals have changed over time. Teachers of various disciplines who wish to focus on a particular conflict are easily able to pick relevant sections for further study.

In the classroom, the book serves as a useful adjunct to textbooks emphasizing the human aspects of any conflict, for although the focus is on animals, it is in their relationship with their owners that their qualities become realised.

The material in the book falls roughly into three categories. Mostly these are stories of working animals, showing how the animal instincts have been utilised and trained to perform certain tasks. Many of those animals which have pushed, pulled, carried and died under appalling conditions remain anonymous, but there are a number of instances where either because of a particular relationship with their owner, or through the consequences of their actions, animals have achieved heroic status.

Other stories tell of animals that have been adopted as mascots because of their symbolic power. Eagles, crocodiles and rams all figure, but in addition a

number of waifs and strays are picked up by troops in conflict and it is interesting to see how the animals' instincts are utilised for mutual benefit.

Finally, Hill looks at those animals that have drifted into the lives of people caught up in conflict and done little more than provide them with comfort. But "little" is the wrong word, for as Hill says, *'They are all living creatures with which servicemen and women can share those gentler emotions they so often have to suppress'*. The contribution of these animals is often underestimated.

This book also offers an excellent opportunity for students to explore the role of animals in literature. There is an extensive tradition going back through Disney cartoons, movies, poetry, novels and Aesop's Fables.

Issues

Apart from the enjoyment value of the stories, the book raises a number of interesting issues for students to consider. Dominant amongst these questions is why so few of these animals were never returned to Australia, even in situations where not only has the animal performed "heroic tasks" but also there has been an enduring relationship between the animal and its owner. A look at Australia's quarantine regulations will provide a large part of the answer, but there is obviously more to it than that.

The issue of such concern to the Animal Rights Movement is whether these animals should have been involved at all. It arises in a number of stories, but Hill doesn't question this overtly. He has an enduring respect for the soldiers involved, something apparent in his earlier books, and in this book too he captures the voices of those men and women who gave so much. At times these voices are humorous, sometimes compassionate, at others, rebellious, but what else would you expect from an Australian fighting force - and it is the relationship between the animals and these men that lift the unconscious instinctive animal actions into something memorable.

Driver's story is perhaps the most typical, as it throws into relief a number of the issues surrounding Australia's use of animals in war, any one of which can be taken up for further investigation by the students. He was the only dog to be smuggled in both directions, out to the war and to return. Adopted by the 7th Company Field Engineers as its mascot, he survived the horrors of the trenches. Like so many of the dogs involved in war he fled and was missing for two days. When he eventually returned and sired a litter of pups, he was shipped back to Australia, but was the object of conflict between the ship's captain who wanted to destroy the dog and the troops themselves who refused to surrender him. Eventually he was smuggled back into the country. He survived a further seven years; his existence a secret from Australia's quarantine officers.

Suitability

The book is suitable for students of a wide age range. Because of this, the activities offered here have been designed so they can be adapted to the

needs of individual groups and students. For example; *Horrie the Wog Dog* can involve students in fairly detailed text analysis, but it can also be adapted to younger students who may wish to investigate some of the more fascinating qualities of animal behaviour such as why dogs are so good at sniffing out smells and how can dogs tell the difference between allied and enemy planes?

Student Activities

Passages for Closer Study

Murphy - The donkey and his Simpson (p.11)

- Simpson and his donkey is one of the best known stories of the First World War. Hill has structured this story so that the focus is shifted to the donkey. How has he done this?
- *'And the legend of Simpson and his donkey began to enter the very consciousness of Anzac and all that it meant'* (p. 14). What does Simpson's story mean to the Anzacs? What is the *'symbolic power'* of his death? (p.17)
- What is there about the donkey's behaviour that suggests great bravery?
- What evidence is there that Jack Simpson is a *'free spirit'*? (p.15)
- What reason does Hill suggest for Jack Simpson not receiving a higher award for his actions? (p.19) There are other alternative suggestions about this. Read them at <http://www.anzacs.net/Simpson.htm>
- Murphy "disappeared". What does Hill suggest might have happened to him?

The Last Race (p.31)

- Why is the story called the last race?
- *'The horse to the right of him had no tail and mane'*. Why is this significant?
- The horses were called *'Walers'*. Do you think this is an appropriate name for them? Why or why not?
- Apart from their sadness at leaving them, why were the soldiers unhappy about having their horses sold to the locals? (p.36)
- Find out about General Harry Chauvel and the events at Beersheba. You can deduce this from reading the story carefully, or you can complete some background research.

<http://www.lighthorse.org.au/histbatt/beersheba.htm>

<http://www.bluestarbase.org/anzacs1.htm>

- Hill intercuts the race with a flashback to Beersheba, October 1917. What are the effects of this technique?
- The race is a fictional account, and at the end the chestnut gelding with the shorn mane and tail is the winner. What effect does Hill achieve by ending the story this way?
- Which of the following most effectively describes this story? Justify your answer:

exciting reflective nostalgic adventurous romantic

- What do you think the riders would be saying to their horses at the end of the race that they would not want others to hear? (p.40)

Horrie and the Five Bob Dog (p 84-7)

- ‘*You don’t think an Australian soldier would leave a mate like that do you?*’ (p. 84) What impression of Australian soldiers have you gained from this and other stories in this collection?
- Why was Jim ‘*well placed*’ to deal with the quarantine inspectors?
- After the apparent death of Horrie, why were the government officials so unhappy? (p.85)
- Why does Hill find it necessary to explain that Jim was ‘*a decent man who loved dogs*’ as he describes Jim’s handing over of the five bob dog to the quarantine inspectors? (p.85)
- Is there any evidence to suggest that the quarantine inspectors colluded with Jim to save Horrie?
- Why does Hill refer to Jim’s mates as ‘*Rebel mates*’? (p.86)
- Why did the Five Bob Dog deserve a nation’s plaudits? (p.86)

Thematic Activities

What is a hero?

This is a good place to start a consideration of the book, as it provides a context for discussion of each of the stories. Activities can be adapted to suit any age group.

Students can begin by brainstorming their own ideas about a hero. This may lead to a discussion of the differences between a hero who has acted bravely, a celebrity who has achieved great publicity and the "hero" of a work of fiction in the sense of the main character.

‘*Murphy - The donkey and his Simpson*’ (p.11) is a most useful stimulus for this activity.

- Students may identify heroic qualities such as bravery, honesty, determination, kindness, and so on. They may note that Simpson was a very "irregular" soldier who behaved in an unconventional way.
- Students can identify the hero in a story, provide pictures of heroes from their own reading, and explain why heroes are important.
- Graphic organisers are very useful for collating students' ideas and representing them on whiteboard or chart.
- Students can work in small groups to read individual stories from the collection, present a report to the class, and discuss, who or what is the hero and why.
- Can an animal be a hero or, because it acts instinctively, does it lack the consciousness to be a hero?

Further activities can include the identification of heroes from within student's own families, community and everyday world.

- Use a set of newspapers to identify heroes in today's world.
- Collect stories about heroes and construct a wall chart to illustrate heroic qualities.
- Use the internet to research heroes and construct a web page on the topic.
- Find a news group on the topic and conduct an on-line discussion.
- Imagine a situation where a child is a hero.

A comprehensive range of lesson plans on this theme can be found at the MY HERO Website (www.myhero.com). This site consists of a variety of stories about heroes including a whole section devoted to animals. In addition there are suggestions for wider reading.

Animal Heroes

After completing research about the topic students can attempt original writing of their own. Students of all ages will enjoy writing about special achievements of animals they own or know about. The special relationship that exists between people and animals manifests itself in a myriad of ways. For stimulus material students may refer to; '*Judy the Changi Dog*' (p.121) or Sandra and '*Boris the Devil Dog*' (p.194).

- Can an animal be a hero without having human qualities?

Horrie the Wog Dog

Horrie the Wog Dog is the subject of a series of student activities available from the National Australian Archives Web Site. It is highly recommended.

Students are invited to argue the case for and against Horrie's execution, and are given a range of authentic contemporary documents for study. They are invited to consider bias within the articles, and to construct documents of their own. They are also given the opportunity to reflect on the relevance of this issue today.

<http://www.naa.gov.au/education/ontour/dogs/horrie.html>

For more junior students there is a range of interesting and practical activities around the use of animals which is offered in conjunction with an exhibition on tour. The tour will be at the Australian Museum in Sydney from March 25 - July 24.

http://www.naa.gov.au/exhibitions/dogs_life/dogs_life.html

Dogs in the Army

A series of three lessons can be adapted for students of all ages.

1) How are dogs helpful to humans?

- Begin by asking students who owns a dog.
- Discuss particular "doggy" characteristics.
- Does anyone own a dog that is special for any reason?
- How are dogs helpful to us?

- Read a selection of stories from Animal Heroes. This could be done in small groups with each group concentrating on one story. Groups can report back to the whole class.

2) Research the techniques used by the army with working dogs. The history of Australian army working dogs can be found at http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-asstd/dogs_of_war.htm

3) Finally, using ideas taken from the website, design and create a memorial for these army dogs or for other "heroic" dogs they know about.

Should animals be used in War?

It is interesting to notice from the stories that many of the working dogs used by the army and those adopted as mascots "went missing" during action. Messenger dogs failed to arrive, others simply ran away in terror.

See: *Driver* (p.5), *Bullet, Trick and Nell* (p.43), *Roff* (p.53), *Gunner* (p.101), *The Dawn Dog* (p.137), *Cassius* (p.153), *Tiber* (p.159).

This suggests that whilst the ability to hear and smell can be extremely valuable, the extreme sensibility of these organs means that at certain times the noise of war would be intolerable to them.

- For this reason is it ethical to use these animals in this way?

Why were the dogs left behind?

It is noticeable also, that as time passes training techniques become more sophisticated and the dogs became more reliable. They also became more valuable, so that it was more desirable to bring the dogs home.

Sadly, in the past it was not policy to bring dogs home after war service. See: *Driver* (p.8), *Horrie* (p.79), *Cassius* (p.160), *Caesar* (p.165), *Boris* (p.204).

- Why was this?

Today, Australia still has one of the strictest quarantine systems protecting animal, plant and human health. A good place to start research on this is at www.aqis.gov.au/travel

The Cavalry

'...135,000 horses... left Australia during the First World War, Sandy was the only one to come home.'

The Battle of Beersheba was the last great cavalry charge in history.

- Research the Battle of Beersheba or other great cavalry charges from history.

Hill's fictional account of the horse race highlights not only the sadness of leaving the horses behind, but the qualities of the riders who have made such an outstanding contribution to the ANZAC tradition.

The Aussie Digger

Many of Hill's stories are illuminated by the characters of the soldiers. Much of the appeal lies in the way soldiers defied authority, by refusing to hand over animals at the end of the war, and even in the way they conducted themselves during the war.

See *Driver* (p.7), *Simpson* (p.15), *Horrie* (p.78), *Last Race* (p.35, 38).

Despite these irregularities Aussie soldiers built up a proud reputation. Stories that illustrate these characters can be read at: <http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-discipline/discipline-ww1.htm>

Warning! Some of these stories contain the original expletives of the participants.

It was the practice of some allied forces to shoot deserters in order maintain discipline under fire. This never happened to Australian troops because they were volunteers.

Students might like to consider the effectiveness of this practice in preventing desertion.

<http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/desertion.htm>

Animals with Human Qualities

Some of the more amusing stories in this collection are based on the humour of talking to animals as if they are human.

- Ask students to read *Sergeant Courage goes AWOL* (p.169). This is called anthropomorphism. Hill uses this technique in *Stan's Bad Habit* (p. 147), and *Snappa gets Promoted* (p.189). He reinforces this humour by using puns based upon the quality of the animal, eg 'no butts about it Stan was dedicated'.
- Find out about fables and try writing one of your own. Use animals from the stories as subjects, or take an animal of your own as the hero in your story. Visit the library or <http://www.aesopfables.com/> to read the originals.

Carrier Pigeons

- Is it ironic that pigeons received medals when Jack Simpson did not? Animals do not receive medals from the military, only civilian organisations eg. Murphy was awarded the Purple Cross from the RSPCA. Read *Pigeon VC* (p 88-98)
- Find out about techniques used to train pigeons. You can start at <http://can-do.com/uci/ssi2000/pigeons.html>
- Research the history of the use of homing pigeons. You can find an historical account at <http://www.interbug.com/pigeon/messaging/>

Mascots

Read a selection of the stories about mascots:

Billy Bantam (p.45)

Jackie (p.47)

Robert (p.48)

Redlead and Company (p.110)

Ferdie (p.115)

Priceless (p.117)

Stan's Bad Habit (p.147)

Sergeant Courage Goes AWOL (p.169)

Snappa Gets Promoted (p.189)

- What are mascots?
- Why do people adopt them?
- How are they chosen?
- Which of these mascots would you choose and why?
- The history of mascots can be said to go back to antiquity and even to the tribal totems and symbols of cave dwellers. Find out about some of these.
- Find out about mascots in use in your own community. Sporting clubs use mascots as well as the military.
- What are the characteristics of the mascot?
- How is it suited to the group who adopted it.?
- Devise a mascot for a particular group of which you are a member.

An animal passport

Their owners gave several animals passports and identity cards.

See: *Zep* (p.22), *Gunner* (p.102), *Boris the Devil Dog* (p.194).

- Design a passport for one of your own pets. Try to make it amusing if you can.

Australians at War

The Australian mainland has not been invaded in modern times. The attack on Darwin is probably the closest thing to an invasion this country has seen.

- Why is this?
- What effect does this have on the type of military force that Australia maintains?
- Australian troops are usually deployed overseas. Find out where Australian troops are in action and why.

ANTHONY HILL

Further Reading

Billy Thunder and the Night Gate by Isobelle Carmody.

- Fantasy fiction. People and animals working together on a quest for good to override evil.
- Lower Secondary

Boys of Blood and Bone by David Metzenthen.

- Dual narrative set today and in 1917 WW1 France. Explores family, relationships, loyalty, honour and responsibility. Wonderful for boys and girls.
- Middle to Upper Secondary

Camel Rider by Prue Mason.

- A compelling adventure of two boys lost in the desert in the Middle East when war breaks out, with only their wits to protect them.
- Upper Primary/Lower Secondary

Finn and the Big Guy by David Metzenthen.

- Award winning author. Bond between people and animals. Themes of safety and making the right decisions.
- Lower to Middle Secondary.

Forest by Sonya Hartnett.

- In the tradition of Watership Down and Animal Farm.
- Middle to Upper Secondary

Generals Die in Bed by Charles Yale Harrison

- A non-fiction account of the First World War first published in 1930. On the VCE list for 2006.
- Middle to Upper Secondary

Hope Bay by Nicole Pluss

- Dual narrative set today and during WW2. A young girl learns the story of two sisters who were forced to hide from the Gestapo in occupied Holland.
- Upper Primary/Lower Secondary

Lionboy by Zizou Corder

- Adventure fantasy story about a boy who can speak Cat.
- Upper Primary/Lower Secondary

The Longest War by Nancy Antle

- Explores issues of the Vietnam War, family and friendships.
- Lower Secondary

The Silver Donkey by Sonya Hartnett

- A new age group for this author, this book tells the fable-like story of two children who come to the aid of a soldier during World War 2.
- Upper Primary/Lower Secondary

The Shadow Dog by Anthony Hill

- Anthony's tribute to his great mate - the dog Sebastian

The Animals - For Reference

Animals	Dogs	Horses/Donkeys	Birds	Other
	Driver	Murphy	Billy Bantam	Smiler-Monkey
	Zep	Missy and Billjim	Jackie	Redlead - cat
	Bullet, Trick, Nell	Sandy	Robert	Ferdie - gliding possum
	Roff	Simpson, Murphy, Roy, HG	Royal Family	Stan - Ram
	Horrie		Pigeon VC	Makai - Dolphin
	Gunner		Pigeon 139 DD 43 T	Snappa
	Judy		Pigeon 879 DD 43 Q	
	The Dawn Dog		Cocky	
	Bruce		Priceless	
	Eros		Sergeant Courage	
	Prince			
	Cassius			
	Tiber			
	Marcus			
	Boris			