

RANDOM HOUSE TEACHERS' RESOURCE KIT

When Our Jack Went to War

Sandy McKay

It's 1917 and Jack enlists. And although 13-year-old Tom is envious of his elder brother, he soon changes his mind as the reality of war becomes more apparent.

We follow Jack's story through his letters home and through the eyes of his younger brother. Tom writes about life at home in New Zealand: living with Mum and their young sister, Amy; learning to hunt with his uncle; getting a puppy; and learning to knit for the war effort.

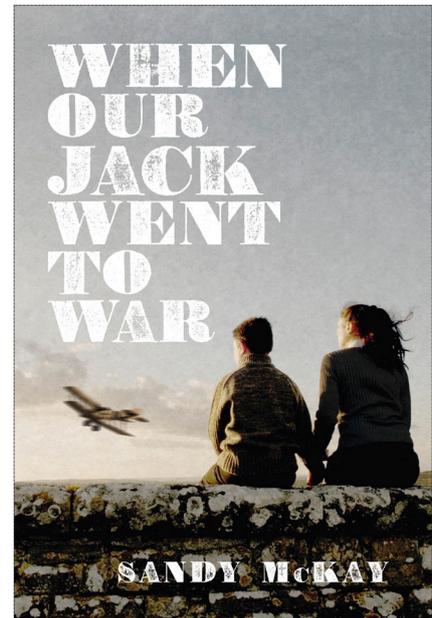
Jack writes of his first-hand experience in Trentham, the troop ship, Britain, France, the Battle of Messines and finally, Passchendaele.

When Our Jack Went to War is a fictional account of a real-life tragedy, based on the author's research into the death of her own great uncle, who died in 1917.

Sandy McKay ably conveys how war affects everyone — it's a superb meditation on war and its devastating effect on soldiers and their families.



Sandy McKay is the author of more than a dozen children's books. She won the NZ Post Book Award for *Recycled* in 2002.



SPECIFICATIONS:

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RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS:

- Before Reading
- Language
- Characters
- Themes
- Comprehension Questions
- Creative/Research Responses

Price (GST inclusive) and author details are correct at the time of writing but are subject to change without notice. Visit www.randomhouse.co.nz for up-to-date information.

Before Reading

1. What does the cover picture indicate about the book's content?
2. When and where might the story be set?
3. What does the title suggest to you?
4. Read the author's dedication (p. 5). If you wrote a book, to whom would you dedicate it and what would the dedication say?
5. Discuss as a class what you feel about war. Do you think war is ever justified? Why/why not? Would you join up? Why/why not?

Language

1. What do you think the genre of this book is? List the aspects that are indicative of this genre.
2. The story is told in the first person. Why do you think the author chose to do this? Was it effective? Choose a passage in the book and rewrite it in third person narrative.
3. Figurative language is used to convey ideas that might otherwise be difficult to express. One example of figurative language is the simile. Examples of this are 'fit as a fiddle' (p. 12) and 'packed in like sardines' (p. 16). Find more examples from the book.
 - happy as a sandboy (p. 72)
 - loose cannons (p. 79)
 - stir-crazy (p. 79)
 - brass monkey weather (p. 84)
 - knocked for a six (p. 91)
 - a stiff upper lip (p. 92)
 - killjoy (p. 96)
 - tender-hearted (p. 96)
 - holding the fort (p. 98)
 - stick-in-the-mud (p. 99)
 - spick and span (p. 99)
 - spreads like wildfire (p. 109)
 - scarce as hens' teeth (p. 116)
 - at death's door (p. 117)
 - stone cold (p. 117)
 - breaks his heart (p. 119)
 - the apple of his father's eye (p. 130)
 - top notch (p. 144)
 - bloodbath (p. 149)
 - straight as a die (p. 154)
 - at the coalface (p. 166)
4. The author uses symbolism in the book. What are the phrases below typically symbolic of? What is the origin of these phrases? Research their origin. Choose ten phrases and draw cartoon interpretations of them.
 - Jack Robinson (p. 13)
 - all hands on deck (p. 35)
 - running like clockwork (p. 35)
 - what a lark (p. 39)
 - were in stitches (p. 39)
5. What figure of speech are the following words examples of: 'clattered' (p. 16), 'slurp' (p. 17) and 'pow' (p. 22)? Find five more examples from the book. Write a poem or descriptive paragraph that includes the words.

6. The author uses animal imagery in some similes, for example, 'swooped like vultures' (p. 55) and 'dropped like flies' (p. 175). Find other examples from the book. Then think of ten other animals and create a simile for each.
7. The author uses nature imagery in some similes, for example, 'gushed out like a geyser' (p. 55) and 'roaring across the sky like a thunderbolt' (p. 124). Write a poem about a force of nature using three similes.
8. 'A gaggle of geese' is a collective noun (p. 59). Think of the collective noun for ten other animals.
9. AWOL (p. 138) and ANZAC (p. 62) are examples of what figure of speech? Think of three more examples relating to war vocabulary.
10. Tom makes a pun about Jack being 'in the wars' (p. 154). Think of three other examples of puns.
11. What figure of speech is 'hollered like hillbillies' an example of (p. 155)? Think of this figure of speech for ten other letters of the alphabet.
12. There is a lot of colloquial and informal language in the book. Define the following words from the book:
 - blimey (p. 11)
 - tuckered out (p. 18)
 - bollocking (p. 18)
 - lavvy (p. 18)
 - billy-o (p. 18)
 - hard yakka (p. 19)
 - chocka-full (p. 20)
 - tucker (p. 26)
 - cheerio (p. 26)
 - gift of the gab (p. 27)
 - fair dinkum (p. 27)
 - scares the jeepers (p. 29)
 - spun us a yarn (p. 49)
 - cobbers (p. 92)
 - crook (p. 96)
 - doddle (p. 116)
13. There is a lot of military and war-related vocabulary in the book. Define the following words from the book:
 - Allies (p. 17)
 - Huns (p. 17)
 - court-martial (p. 21)
 - conchie (p. 44)
 - diggers (p. 93)
 - Mills bomb (p. 100)
 - desertion (p. 138)
 - shell shock (p. 138)
 - no-man's-land (p. 138)
 - conscription (p. 145)
14. Find definitions for the following words from the novel and write one sentence for each:
 - seditious (p. 33)
 - pedantic (p. 66)
 - haberdashery (p. 67)
 - heathen (p. 69)
 - reserved (p. 93)
 - bleak (p. 95)
 - tedious (p. 99)
 - hierarchy (p. 99)
 - mercifully (p. 104)
 - idle (p. 104)
 - morale (p. 115)
 - oblivion (p. 127)
 - farce (p. 127)
 - lull (p. 127)
 - annihilated (p. 132)
 - atrocious (p. 149)
15. Describe in a paragraph how the tension builds and falls away during the book. Find a passage in the novel that is high intensity and another of low intensity. Copy both out and compare the language used (choice of words, length of sentences, the pace at which details are revealed, etc). How is language used to create intensity?

Characters

1. Think of three adjectives each to describe Jack, Tom, Ma, Mrs J, Uncle Ced and Stampy.
2. List the qualities of Tom and Jack's personalities and find examples of when they display each of these qualities.
3. Choose an important event from the novel and describe Tom or Jack's reaction to it.
4. What do you think Tom learns in this book? How do you think he has changed by the end of the book? How do you think his view of himself and the world has changed?
5. How does the relationship between Tom and Ma develop through the book? What are the main events that contribute to the development?
6. What are the different pressures on Tom and Jack throughout the novel? What factors lead to the decisions they make and how do they cope with the situations they find themselves in?
7. What does the novel say about friendships and/or family and their importance during difficult times? List examples of episodes when friends and/or family are either a help or a hindrance to Tom and Jack.
8. Do you think Tom and Jack are realistic characters? Why or why not?
9. Draw a picture of one of the characters based on their physical descriptions, for example, Jack in his uniform (p. 11) or Mrs J (p. 17).
10. Write a character summary of one of the following characters: Tom, Jack, Ma or Mrs J.
11. Which character did you particularly like or dislike? Why?
12. Which character do you most identify with? Why?

Themes

Discuss the following themes and find examples from the book which illustrate each:

- the chaos of war
- sacrifice and loyalty
- death, grief and loss
- the definition and importance of family relationships and friendships
- patriotism
- courage and strength
- humour and humanity

Setting

The book is set in New Zealand, France, England, Scotland and Belgium during World War I.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Jack need to go to war (p. 10)?
2. Why wouldn't Ma let anyone take out the axe that was jammed in the tree stump (p. 11)?
3. Why is Arnold given the nickname 'Stampy' (p. 19)?
4. What peculiar evidence was disclosed at the court-martial (p. 21)?
5. What does Jack think of Sergeant Harvey (p. 23)?
6. Why does Tom need to know his sums (p. 24)?
7. What does Jack mean when he says being in Trentham Camp is a bit like 'no-man's-land' (p. 26)?
8. What thought 'scares the jeepers' out of Jack (p. 29)?
9. Why does Mrs J come over to the house on his Dad's birthday (p. 35)?
10. What advice does Jack give to Tom for anyone joining up (p. 40)?
11. What happens to the conscientious objectors at Trentham Camp and how does Jack feel about this (p. 44)?
12. What does the zoo keeper tell Jack about elephants (p. 50)?
13. What type of music does Tom think they have in Germany (p. 52)?
14. What does Tom say is in short supply and why is this (p. 59)?
15. Why does Tom get 'goosebumps' in church (p. 62)?
16. Who has 'a sharp little personality' and what does it match (p. 67)?
17. What does Jack think about the settlers who came out to New Zealand and what makes him think this (p. 71)?
18. What alleviates the boredom on the ship and what does Jack think of it (p. 77)?
19. What does Tom think about school (p. 81)?
20. Why does Tom's chest hurt when he sees the telegram man (p. 88)?
21. Who makes Sergeant Harvey look like a 'pussycat' and why (p. 99)?
22. Which games does Jack compare the war with (p. 103)?
23. What does Jack see when he is on leave (pp. 109–111)?
24. What does Jack find humbling when he stays near Ypres and why (p. 117)?
25. Why is Charlie Walker the 'proudest man in Flanders' (p. 124)?
26. What does Jack consider a 'miracle' as he writes from a frontline trench (p. 127)?
27. Why does Tom think Jack will be home before you can say 'Jack Robinson' (p. 134)?
28. Why does Mrs J think Jack sounds like Dad (p. 137)?

29. What does Arthur Weir get when he 'copped a bullet in his arm' and what does it mean (p. 144)?
30. Why does Jack end up in a hospital and why is he 'counting his lucky stars' (p. 151)?
31. What does Amy do to make Tom think she has got quite an imagination (p. 154)?
32. What new word does Tom learn from Mrs Stains and who and what does it relate to (p. 157)?
33. What reminds Jack of Tom and his friend Frank Morrison and why (p. 159)?
34. Why does Mrs J come over a lot (p. 173)?
35. How does the family get to Wellington and why do they go (pp. 177–178)?
36. What does Jack leave Tom in his will and why (p. 180)?

Creative/Research Responses

(You can use a variety of ways to present your responses. For example, PowerPoint, charts, posters, storyboards and written reports.)

1. The novel is subtitled 'A fictional story based on a real-life event' (p. 3). Choose a significant event from your own life to write a fictional short story about.
2. Jack imitates the Prime Minister (p. 10). Write your own version of the Prime Minister's speech for the radio, encouraging New Zealand men to enlist. Perform it for your class.
3. Tom shoots rabbits with his Dad's old .22 (p. 11). What are the current gun laws in New Zealand? Compared to other countries, for example the USA or the UK, do you think they should be stricter or more liberal? Why?
4. Jack is training to be a carpenter (p. 13). What does this job entail? What job do you want to do? Where would you like to work? What qualifications will you need? What would the work entail? See if you can arrange to be an intern or shadow a worker at the company of your choice. Write a report of your experience and present it to your class.
5. Many New Zealand and overseas place names are mentioned in the book, for example, North East Valley (p. 20), Wellington (p. 49), Aberdeen (p. 72), Bath (p. 161), Ypres (p. 117) and Egypt (p.101). Find any other places that are mentioned in the book. Locate these places on the relevant city, country or world map. Choose one of the places mentioned and design and create an entry for a travel book for this place as it is today. Include information such as population size, geography, history, things of interest, weather, etc. Research and compare these details with how your chosen place would have been in 1916.
6. Tom is practising his signature (p. 22). Using cursive script, create a signature for Tom as well as for yourself.
7. Tom writes about his school days (p. 24). Research and list any similarities and/or differences from school today, for example, class size, materials available, curriculum, discipline, etc.
8. Jack is sent a fruit cake made by Tom and Ma (p. 25). Choose three other dishes mentioned in the book and write, illustrate and bind a recipe book of your choices.
9. Tom describes the pencil sketches that accompany his letters to Jack (p. 27, p. 64, p. 75 and p. 78). Choose one and draw your own sketch of it.
10. Mrs Stains gives the students a history lesson about the reasons New Zealand must fight in the war (p. 31). In groups, devise a script based on a possible discussion between the class and Mrs Stains that could have followed her lesson. Act this out.
11. Tom researches elephants in the school encyclopedia (p. 51). Create entries in a children's illustrated encyclopedia for both Indian and African elephants.
12. Tom goes to a Charlie Chaplin movie (p. 52). Research this actor and the movies he was in. Why do you think his movies

were so popular during the war? Watch one of his movies and write a review.

13. Tom and his family are subject to rationing and take on the task of knitting for the troops (p. 59). Design a poster for a marketing campaign to inform the general public about these two measures using the following quote from the book as part of the campaign: 'It's not just soldiers making an effort for the war these days' (p. 25).
14. At school Tom and his classmates must draw the flags of several countries (p. 81). In pairs, and without researching the flags, attempt to do the same. Compare your flags with the actual flags.
15. Harold Duncan must sing *God Save the King* in school assembly (p. 82). Investigate the national anthem of New Zealand during World War I. When did this change and why? Research, listen to and write the English translations of the national anthems of any three countries mentioned in the book.
16. In one letter Jack includes a description of an exterior of an English inn that he visits while on leave (p. 98). Find other examples of descriptions of exterior and interior spaces. Draw one of these based on the descriptions, then describe and draw an exterior and interior space of your choice.
17. Mrs J offers to send Jack a bottle of 'Baxters' for his lungs (pp. 107–108). In groups, choose this or another product of that era and create a modern marketing campaign for the product, for example, radio jingles, posters, television advertisements, etc.
18. Stampy and Jack sometimes play the game called 'What I would give my right arm for' and Jack mentions what he missed from New Zealand (pp. 119–120). In pairs, imagine you are away from home and play this game. Write a list of what you would miss.
19. Jack mentions coming across books by Jane Austen (p. 128) and Mark Twain (p. 159). Write an author study of these authors.
20. The New Zealand concert party called 'The Tuis' perform a haka for the homesick troops (p. 140). Research the role of the war concert party. Create a programme for one of their shows, including songs of the era, such as 'It's a long way to Tipperary' (p. 145). Perform your programme for your class.
21. Frank's sister and Jennifer Skelton both become nurses (pp.157–158). Research the role of women in World War I and what part they played. Present your findings to your class.
22. When he is in hospital, Jack notes that parcels arrive from the Red Cross (p. 159). Does this organisation still exist today? Find out about others who have suffered as victims of recent conflicts. How are they being helped? What agencies have been set up? How can you help? Set up and design a charity campaign to help. Think, for example, about marketing techniques, etc.
23. Tom mentions a news report from the front which stated that the 'ANZACs fought like tigers' (p. 165). Research the ANZACs. Discuss how ANZAC day is still commemorated in your local area, if you think it is still relevant to do so and why.
24. A poem by Jack and a description of Tom's dream are included in the book (p. 169 and p. 170). Interpret and present them both in two movie storyboards.

25. After the war a monument is erected in front of Jack's school (p. 178). Find out if there is a World War I monument in your local area. Locate it on a map. Visit it and study the names and writing on it. Write a descriptive paragraph about your emotional response to this monument, keeping this book in mind.
26. 'Our Jack's Will' is included in the book (p. 180). Write out your own will.

Pamphlets, Brochures and Magazines

27. Jack goes on weekend leave to Wellington. Create a tourist brochure and map including the sights Jack and his friends saw there (p. 49).
28. Tom plays the games Ludo (p. 56), patience and draughts (p. 74). Choose one of these or your favourite board or card game and create a pamphlet showing the rules and how to play it.
29. On the ship, Jack contributes to the magazine 'From Maoriland to Blighty' (p. 77). Design and produce the magazine cover and a page of poems and sketches.
30. When Jack is in London he visits several famous landmarks and buildings (pp. 109–111). Choose one of the landmarks he visits and/or a famous landmark in your own local area and create a tourist pamphlet about it.

Newspapers

31. The book is full of newspaper articles and clippings. Choose one of the clippings to research. Write a news article for a social media website or your local newspaper in a current, modern journalistic style. Think about what type of language, sentence and paragraph structure, headings, etc, you would use. How does it differ from the style of

journalism found in the clippings included in the book? List the main stylistic differences.

Poetry

32. At school Tom is asked to write a poem about summer using 'interesting adjectives' (p. 81). Write a poem about a season.
33. Poems about the war by Stumpy and Jack are included in the book (pp. 141–143 and p. 169). World War I inspired such poets as Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. Read some of their poetry and compare it with the poems in the book.
34. Write your own poem about war or death.

Letter writing

35. Ma, Mrs J and Mr Gilbertson all debate the point of view that 'England's war is our war' (p. 10) and whether or not New Zealand soldiers should have been sent to war (p. 17). Discuss as a class whether or not you think New Zealand needs an army. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper saying why or why not. If possible, use recent news in your argument.
36. Tom notes that people were writing letters complaining about the fact that school teachers and farmers did not have to go to war (p. 41). Write a letter of complaint about the conscription process to your local newspaper.
37. Imagine you have been ordered to fight in a war and have decided to be a 'conchie' (p. 44). Write a letter expressing your feelings or objections to fighting.
38. Ma and Mrs J want to write to the Prime Minister (p. 145). Find out who protects

the wellbeing of your community and write a formal letter to them about a community issue that concerns you. Research the procedures involved in lobbying against a decision that has been made for your community that you disagree with.

39. Jack writes Tom letters from the trenches describing the 'machine guns thundering like cannons overhead' while his 'teeth rattle like bullets in my gums' (p. 122). Imagine you are fighting alongside Jack in the trenches. Write a letter to someone at home and describe your trench warfare experience, using all five senses.
40. Jack thinks stretcher bearers have the worst job at the front (p. 129). Research their role in war. Then write a letter to someone at home and describe your experience as a stretcher bearer, using all five senses.
41. The family receives a letter from Arnold Wilson (Stampy) (pp. 174–175). Write a letter of reply from either Ma or Tom.

Sources and Author Research

42. The book is sub-titled 'A fictional story based on a real-life event' (p. 3). What are the sources used in the book to find out about the past? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each source? Why was research necessary and important to this book?
43. Study the section entitled 'What Do You Know About the First World War?' (pp. 183–189). In groups, choose and research another war New Zealanders have fought in, for example, the Maori Wars, the Boer War or World War II. Use primary and secondary sources, such as interviews with veterans, diaries, journals and books, including *The Illustrated History of New Zealanders at War* by Marcia Stenson. Take each heading from the

section and answer the question as fully as possible with the information you have gathered.

44. Read the author's note (pp. 190–191). Using bullet points, list the six main reasons that you think motivated her to write the book.
45. In groups, create timelines for Jack and Tom that show the main events of the novel for each character. You could also place the main events of World War I, including those mentioned in the book, such as Britain's Declaration of War (p. 7) and the Armistice (p. 176), on the timeline.
46. On a world map, track Jack's journey from New Zealand to England and beyond.
47. The book is full of dramatic, suspense-filled action sequences, such as the description of the battle at Messines Ridge (pp. 130–132). Look at the language the author uses in these sequences. Write a dramatic action scene about something that has happened to you.
48. Design your own cover for the novel, including the blurb.
49. Do you like the design and layout of the book? Why or why not?
50. Do you think the novel would make a dramatic film? Write a letter in support of the film for possible investors and include which actors you would like to star in the film and the reasons behind your choices. Look at some movie posters. Notice the pictures and the words. Design a movie poster to advertise the film.
51. Write a dramatic monologue from Tom's point of view, retelling the experiences he's had in the book, including his discovery that Jack has died. Perform it for the class.

52. Find other books dealing with World War I, for example, *Letters from the Coffin-Trenches* by Ken Catran. Write a comparative review, to compare and contrast the book with at least one other book dealing with this theme.
53. Rewrite one of the climactic scenes as a video script.
54. Write a review of the book, aiming it at the readership of your favourite magazine, newspaper or website. Consider the following questions:
- Which characters appealed to you the most? The least?
 - How did the story make you feel as it unfolded?
 - What ideas in the book awakened your interest?
 - What did you dislike or find boring?
 - Do you think this is a significant book? Why?
 - Why is this book important for today's readers?