

# Kiwis at War

## 1918: Broken Poppies

By Des Hunt



### Synopsis

Events that occurred before Henry left for the war would have a lasting effect on him as he struggles to stay alive on the battlefields. While at war he would make friends and enemies, but it is Poppy, a fox terrier, who would have the biggest impact on him.

The little dog is separated from a young French girl and as she rides away Henry promises to reunite her with the dog after the war. In the meantime, the dog helps Henry and others in his Company overcome their nerves and fears. Poppy also captures the rats that plague their camp and catches rabbits to supplement their meals. But keeping Poppy also lands Henry in trouble. The major tells Henry that he can keep the dog, but only if he follows a set of rules – and one of them is not to take her into battle.

Mark, a young soldier who is not coping very well with the stress of life at the Front, breaks the rule and hides her in his knapsack, believing she will protect him from getting killed. When machine-gun fire pins them down, Henry, Mark and Poppy seek refuge in a tunnel, the last place Henry wants to hide. The enemy tries to kill them with mortar fire and nearly succeeds. After a tunnel cave-in, Henry lands up in hospital with several injuries in England. He won't be returning to his Company again.

Henry is reunited with Poppy via the last person he thought would befriend the dog – the sergeant who has bullied him throughout the war. The sergeant reminds Henry that he promised to reunite Poppy with the French girl. Henry flies back to France to find the girl, who had held out hope throughout the war that she would see Poppy again. The girl promises to plant a totara seedling as a memorial to Henry's cousin who had died very early on in the war. She later sends him photographs of the memorial and the tree after he has returned home.

### About the Book's Creator

Des Hunt lives at Matarangi on the Coromandel Peninsula. Some years ago he made the transition from writing textbooks for secondary students to novels for younger readers while still maintaining his aims of fostering young people's natural interest in the science of their surroundings. Des has authored 14 books in this genre and has been shortlisted for the NZ Children's Book Awards four times. A widely respected figure in New Zealand educational circles, and one who enjoys speaking in schools, Des Hunt's other books for Scholastic NZ are: *The Last Tuatara*, *Project Huia*, *Cool Nukes* and *Sunken Forest*.

# Themes

- Loyalty
- Reaching out to someone who is not coping
- Friendship
- Courage
- Fulfilling promises

## Shared Learning and Discussion Points

- Look at the cover. What can you tell about the story from the picture?
- What happened in the cave that would haunt Henry for the rest of his life? (p.13-15)
- Why did Henry not enlist at the same time as George and how did he feel about that? (p.20)
- What did Henry learn during his training and how was it different from what he thought he was going to learn? (pp.26)
- What did Henry's mother and aunt give him and why was the hug afterwards so important? (pp.43-44)
- What initiation did Henry have to do, and what did he learn from it? (p.54-56)
- Why did the Red Caps arrest Henry and what did he have to say to prove he wasn't a spy? (pp.61-62)
- What happened to George and how did Henry feel about it? (pp.67-68)
- What did Henry stand on that caused him a lot of pain? And why does the Sergeant say it is self-inflicted? (pp.74-76)
- How do periscopes play an important part in the story? (pp. 72, 88)
- What happened in the crater and how did they keep themselves safe? (p.94-95)
- How did Henry save Jock? (pp.97-98)
- Why did the Sergeant accuse Henry of desertion? (p.101)
- Who did Henry meet that helped him recover? (p.109)
- Why did the Sergeant call shell-shock an act of cowardice? And what did Henry realise about the man? (pp.117-118)
- What did Henry find, and what did he vow to the young girl? (pp.123-124)
- What favour does Henry ask of Chalky, and why does he do it? (pp.129-130)
- Describe the first time Henry shot the enemy, in your own words. (p.134)
- What had Poppy been getting up to back at camp? (p.138)
- What did the Sergeant order Henry to do? What happened next? (pp.144-145)
- Why was Henry sent to Company HQ and what was the outcome? (pp.150-153)
- What sort of animal mascots did the Lance Corporal find in the other camps? (p.165)
- How did Poppy make herself invaluable to Henry's Company? (pp.169-170)
- How did Dixon set Poppy up to get the blame for his act of revenge and how did it backfire on him? (pp.173-178)
- What did the frightened soldier carry in his pocket to help him get through his fear? (p.185)
- What type of dogs were in the Great Rat Hunt competition and who won? (pp.191-196)
- What message did Henry receive from Chalky about Poppy? (p.218)
- What incident landed Mark on kitchen fatigues and why was he happy with that? (p.226)
- What pact did Mark and Henry make? (pp.237-238)
- What do you think Mark has in his haversack that is helping him be less nervous? What were the repercussions of his actions? (pp.248-272)
- What happened to Jock and what did that trigger in Henry? And how did that affect Henry's part in the war? (pp.281-293)
- What new medical technique helped save Henry's life? (p.300)
- What did Henry's brother send him that would enable him to erect a memorial for his cousin George? (p.307)
- What happened to Poppy and how did that make Henry feel? (p.328)
- How did Henry fulfil his promise to Poppy's original owner?



# Activities

## ACTIVITY 1: PERISCOPE WAR!

Get the students to find out who invented periscopes, and where. Then, in groups, students make their own periscopes. (Find instructions online.) Once they've finished, divide the class into two teams and set the class up one team on one side and the other on the other side. Use the desks to make trenches – two parallel lines of desks. Students then use their periscopes to spot the enemy. Students could use paper darts/planes to take out the enemy; if person on other side is hit by the paper dart then they have to leave the game. The team with the most players still 'uninjured', wins.

## ACTIVITY 2: PLUS, MINUS, INTERESTING

Ask your students to write a Plus, Minus, Interesting chart. They can write about something positive they read in the story, something sad or tragic, and something interesting they learned.

## ACTIVITY 3: ANIMALS AT WAR

Have a discussion with the class about the animals that went to war. Is it fair/kind to take animals into battle? How did the animals help the soldiers? Then ask the students to decide on an animal mascot that was mentioned in the book (dog, cat, donkey, goat, kangaroo, bear, etc.), research it and then write a biography about what happened to them during the war.

Teaching notes by Maria Gill



teacher toolkit

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