

Alfred's War

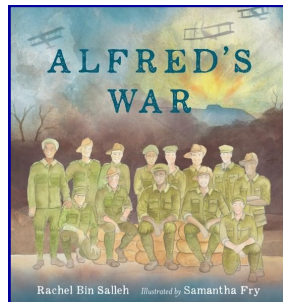
By Rachel Bin Salleh & Illustrated by Samantha Fry

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Alfred's War is a powerful story that unmask the lack of recognition given to Australian Indigenous servicemen who returned from the WWI battlelines. Alfred was just a young man when he was injured and shipped home from France. Neither honoured as a returned soldier or offered government support afforded to non-Indigenous servicemen, Alfred took up a solitary life walking the back roads – billy tied to his swag, finding work where he could. Alfred was a forgotten soldier. Although he had fought bravely in the Great War, as an Aboriginal man he wasn't classed as a citizen of his own country. Yet Alfred always remembered his friends in the trenches and the mateship they had shared. Sometimes he could still hear the never-ending gunfire in his head and the whispers of diggers praying. Every year on ANZAC Day, Alfred walked to the nearest town, where he would quietly stand behind the people gathered and pay homage to his fallen mates. Rachel Bin Salleh's poignant narrative opens our hearts to the sacrifice and contribution that Indigenous people have made to Australia's war efforts, the true extent of which is only now being revealed.



Teacher Notes have been based on those supplied by the publisher. A full version is available on our website.

Themes:

- World War I
- Indigenous Servicemen

Discussion Questions & Activities:

- Why does Alfred live outside? Why do you think he keeps moving around, sometimes sleeping in parks or under trees? What does this tell us about Alfred's sense of belonging and acceptance? In what ways would this have conflicted with Alfred's sense of connectedness to his country?
- Why do we only see Alfred's face properly for the first time several pages into the text? How does this reflect his lack of recognition and identity in the eyes of white Australia at this time? How do you think such attitudes have changes over the past 100 years? What do you think still needs to change?
- How do the illustrations help tell the story of Alfred's War? Which is your favourite illustration? Why? Why are such soft colours used to help tell his story? How does this reflect Alfred's humility and grace?
- In the role of Alfred, write a journal entry that shares your thoughts as you head to the city to enlist. In addition, write a letter to your family telling them that you are off to war. How might these two pieces of writing be similar and different from one another?
- How is the fact that Alfred has to live on the outskirts of town a reflection of the way in which many Indigenous soldiers were ignored once they returned home?
- Why doesn't Alfred talk about his experiences when he arrives home? Why do you think he 'curled into a ball and slept in the shadows' some days? How does this part of the text help young readers to better understand the horrors of war and its impact on soldiers? Why is it important that the story continues beyond the war itself?
- Why do you think Alfred chooses to stay in the shadows on Anzac Day before quietly joining the people gathered? Why doesn't he join the Anzac march?
- Why is the story called Alfred's War? What else do you think Alfred is fighting?
- On the last page opening, Alfred is shown with his mates in a photograph in which he is an equal. Why is this an effective way to communicate this important message of the story?
- Why did so many young men volunteer to fight in World War I? What were they hoping would happen when they went abroad?
- Create a timeline that shows the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders being granted citizenship.
- How are the rules and laws of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders different from those of early Twentieth Century 'White' Australia?