



# Never Lose Hope

The story of Australia's first school

**MARK WILSON**



**TEACHERS' NOTES**





# NEVER LOSE HOPE

BY MARK WILSON

TEACHERS' NOTES BY ROBYN SHEAHAN-BRIGHT

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# INTRODUCTION

'He thought of Isabella. He could picture her so clearly, standing in the sunlight by the window, smiling at him as they talked about knowledge, the power of words – and the future.'

The year is 1789, and John is a nine-year-old convict child in the colony of New South Wales who is desperately scrounging for food, when he meets young Isabella, another convict who has been asked by Reverend Richard Johnson and his wife Mary Johnson to teach other children to read. Isabella gives food to John who responds with a bouquet of daisies. He soon joins her class and is enjoying learning to read when soldiers arrest him for the petty theft of food. He is transported to Norfolk Island but he has Isabella's message to keep him company: 'Never Lose Hope.'

Mark Wilson's magnificent photo-realistic artwork brings historical subjects to vibrant life in this, and in his previous works. He is a master of portraiture and of landscape painting and his painstaking historical research is enhanced by his attention to visual detail. The book is enriched by its research into the actual people depicted in this text and into colonial art and artists to whom he pays homage in this visual text.

This is another outstanding work of art by one of Australia's finest picture book artists. It is a testimony to the power of reading and writing to transform a life.

# THEMES

Several thematic ideas are covered in this book which might be related to other curriculum topics below. These include:

## HOPE

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Hope is a human trait which is sometimes difficult to maintain. How easy would it be to become a convict as a child; to be completely isolated from the country and home you once knew; and then to be sent to a brutal penal settlement remote from the settlement you had come to know, as John is?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** 'One morning when the children were playing outside Isabella found John inside still drawing on one of the slates. When she asked him what it was he said it was a farm, the farm he would own some day.' This is an extraordinary dream for a poor convict boy raised in English slums. How much do dreams play in creating our future reality?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Although this book doesn't detail John's future life as an adult, the final frame does give the reader a sense of hope for him. What does it suggest?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** What gives a person hope?

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The primitive school room in this book acts as a metaphor for these convict children's potential to overcome the challenges presented by their backgrounds, via learning.

[See also **Educational History in Australia** below.]

## FRIENDSHIP, COMPASSION AND SURVIVAL

**DISCUSSION POINT:** It is suggested in the final frame in this book that Isabella's intervention in John's life had a profound influence on his future. Can such acts of kindness and love change the course of a life?



**DISCUSSION POINT:** Reverend Johnson and his wife, Mary, clearly demonstrate compassion, as does Isabella. How difficult would it have been to maintain such feelings amidst the brutal conditions endured by these early settlers (invaders)?

# CURRICULUM TOPICS

This picture book touches on the themes above and might be used in conjunction with curriculum topics (for primary or secondary school students) in the following areas:

- **STUDY OF HISTORY, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT**

SOSE topics include:

## **Colonial Life in Early Australia**

**ACTIVITY:** Observe the activities in the opening double-page spread, eg. fish netting, fishing, soldiers patrolling, the spread of a settlement in the background, and land clearing to enable the building of homes. Research the activities engaged in during this time and the challenges faced by such early settlers.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Different forms of housing are evident in the opening spread – a cabin built of timber, and a large tent to the right, and another cabin and tent in the background to the left. Research this topic.

**ACTIVITY:** Isabella's diary entries give some information about the times, as well. For example, she writes about the backgrounds of her convict pupils; about the food supplies running low; about how children are forced to steal; and about the harsh punishments meted out to those who commit such petty crimes. What else did you learn from the diary entries in this book?

## CONVICTS IN THE AUSTRALIAN COLONIAL PERIOD

**ACTIVITY:** Australia was settled ostensibly to house convicts. Research the impetus behind the settlement and the other reasons why Britain decided to establish a colony here.

**ACTIVITY:** Research colonial life and the conditions in which convicts were imprisoned, and later some released to become settlers.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** It's difficult to imagine now that children were treated as adults and transported to a country so far away from Britain. Research the lives of some child convicts and how they managed to survive.

**ACTIVITY:** Mark Wilson tells us in an afterword that this story is inspired by the life of John Hudson who was sent to Norfolk Island and arrived back in Port Jackson five years later. 'But there is no record of what happened to him after that.' Read accounts of the lives of child convicts. [See **Bibliography.**]

**ACTIVITY:** Mark Wilson's previous book *Beth: The Story of a Child Convict* (Hachette, 2016) is a companion to this one, which students might read and compare. They might also read the junior fiction *Secret Histories* series (HarperCollins) Wilson has illustrated, written by Jackie French, which covers the same period in our history and also features Reverend Richard Johnson and his wife Mary Johnson.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The soldiers in this text seem to have inordinate power, and to be a law unto themselves. Research the role of the military in early colonial life, and what powers they wielded.

**ACTIVITY:** Life in these times was precarious. The very same vessel, the HMS Sirius on which John went to Norfolk Island, was wrecked that same year. Research this ship and its history.

## INDIGENOUS CULTURE IN THE AUSTRALIAN COLONIAL PERIOD

**ACTIVITY:** Observe the opening double-page spread in which Indigenous people are depicted working for British settlers, with a trio of them engaged in a meeting on a veranda. Research the early interactions between Indigenous people and settlers.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** In the eighth spread, John is in a cave and there are Indigenous paintings on the wall behind him. What does this scene suggest thematically?

## EDUCATIONAL HISTORY IN AUSTRALIA

**ACTIVITY:** One-teacher schools have had a continuing role to play in Australia's history. Research their development and the role they continue to play in isolated areas.

**ACTIVITY:** Wilson says in a note on the imprint page that Isabella Rosson was Australia's first teacher. She was one of 262 convicts transported on the *Lady Penrhyn, Scarborough and Alexander*, and arrived 22 January 1787. Two years later she was asked to open the colony's first school. Read about her at 'Convict and Emancipist Teachers, New South Wales, 1789–1830' [DEHANZ <http://dehanz.net.au/entries/convict-emancipist-teachers/>](http://dehanz.net.au/entries/convict-emancipist-teachers/) and 'Schooldays with the First Fleeters' *Fellowship of First Fleeters* [<http://www.fellowshipfirstfleeters.org.au/storie3.html>](http://www.fellowshipfirstfleeters.org.au/storie3.html)

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Wilson also explains that Isabella used a 'horn book'. 'It was a sheet of paper covered by a thin layer of flattened cow's horn, meant to protect it. The alphabet was written on the paper, and there were also a few words, and the Lord's Prayer.' What other teaching implements and tools were used in such early classrooms?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** What did you learn about such schools by reading this book and observing the images?

## VALUES

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Discuss the values conveyed in this text.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Isabella has obviously suffered as a convict but wants to give back to other children. What value does she evince in her behaviour?

- **ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**

The text of this book might be studied in relation to the following aspects:

**ACTIVITY:** This is John's story told in third person, past tense. Read about Isabella Rosson (on whose life Isabella's story in this book is based) and then write a short story about her life from the third person point of view, and how she came to arrive in the colony and become a teacher.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** If this had been written in first person by John, how might the story have changed?



**DISCUSSION POINT:** 'Never lose hope' is the message behind this book. What other short sayings might summarise the action in this text?

**ACTIVITY:** Test your students' comprehension by asking them questions about the written text. [See also **Blackline Master 2.**]

**ACTIVITY:** Isabella's diary entries offer an insight into life in the colonies. Write a diary entry as if written by John (after he has learned to write) about his arrival on Norfolk Island. Do some research to discover what life there was like at that time.

- **VISUAL LITERACY**

The visual text of a book combines with the written text to tell the story using the various parts of the book's design and illustrations, as explored below:

**ACTIVITY:** Wilson says in a note on the imprint page that 'The paintings in this book were inspired by the colonial painters John Glover and Thomas Watling.' **Research their work** and compare to this book.

**ACTIVITY:** The **cover** of a book is always an important part of its message. Mark Wilson says in a note on the imprint page that 'The painting on the front cover, bottom left, was inspired by Thomas Watling's "A Direct North General View of Sydney Cove". It depicts the colony in the 1790s, just after settlement. It is the earliest known painting of Sydney Cove.' See 'Thomas Watling's' *Sydney Cove* *National Treasures National Library of Australia* <<http://nationaltreasures.nla.gov.au/index/Treasures/item/nla.int-ex6-s46>> Compare the original with this image. Research the artist's life, eg. 'Watling, Thomas (1762-?)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Volume 2, MUP, 1967 <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/watling-thomas-2776>>

**ACTIVITY:** Examine the larger **image on the top of the cover** of John being taught by Isabella. What feelings does it convey in the way the two are looking at each other?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The front **endpapers** are muted washes suggestive of the weather and of both sea and sky. Practise painting in a similar medium and abstract style.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The **title page** depicts an inset picture of the school house with Isabella and her pupils. What feeling does this image convey?



**DISCUSSION POINT:** The **format** of the book is square in a large size (approx 28.5 x 26.5 cm) which enhances the dramatic impact of these paintings. How?

**ACTIVITY:** The **medium or style** employed is **photo-realism** in **acrylic painting on canvas in both portraiture and landscape paintings**. [See also Mark Wilson's note on Illustration Technique in his **Author's Notes**.] Invite students to use such techniques to create their own images of John and Isabella in the makeshift classroom. [See also **Blackline Master 1**.]

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The **colours** generally used in this book are muted and yet luscious pastel hues with some black and white images. They convey what feelings to a reader?

**ACTIVITY:** Students might be encouraged to use **critical literacy skills** to unearth meaning in this text; teachers might ask them a series of questions. [See also **Blackline Master 2**.]

**ACTIVITY:** **Create a graphic novel/comic version** of a scene in this book. Read other such books as a guide to the style and approach students might employ. [See **Bibliography**.] [See also **Blackline Master 3**.]

- **CREATIVE ARTS**

There are many creative activities suggested by this text. Students might:

1. Create a **classroom mural** which tells the story in a series of frames designed and executed by students.
2. **Write, direct and act a play scene** based on any incident in this book.
3. **Design a Book Trailer based on this book.** Visit sites such as: 'Book Trailers' Insideadog <<http://www.insideadog.com.au/teachers/book-trailers>> for advice.
4. **Create a diorama** of one of the scenes in this book using a cardboard box as your frame.
5. **Organise a classroom display** featuring some of the writing and illustration students have done for this unit with books or texts they have researched as a group.

- **LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES**

**ACTIVITY:** Study any of the topics suggested by this book and notes online. [See Bibliography.]

- **MATHEMATICS**

**ACTIVITY:** Explore statistics relating to early settlement/invasion and the growth both in population and in the numbers of those being educated.

# FURTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

- **Research the work** of Mark Wilson. Compare his other books to this one.
- Research this work by reading non-fiction books such as those listed in the **Bibliography**.
- **Conduct a debate** about one of the issues explored in these notes.

# CONCLUSION

This masterful work explores a significant event in Australia's history in luminous portraits and landscape paintings which enhance the emotional import of this moving story about the power of education and of hope in survival.



# AUTHOR'S NOTES

## MARK WILSON

### ILLUSTRATION TECHNIQUE

All my artwork in this series starts with line drawings sketched in as much detail as I can manage. I then use permanent markers, ink, pastel, watercolour and acrylic paint – and just about anything else lying around; each picture dictates the technique.

I use a lot of photos, but for reference as opposed to directly, so although some paintings look like photos, they are not. They are 'super realism', used to emphasise important moments in the story.

As you can see, the full-colour illustrations throughout are acrylic paint on canvas, but I often overlay parts of these with simple black and white drawings. I use whatever is best for the page, but also what appeals most to me. I love sketching, painting in acrylics, doing washes in inks and oils, and generally working with new and different materials to add contrast and variety to the illustrations where needed.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

**Mark Wilson** was born in Brunswick, Victoria. He took to drawing from a very early age, and also loved comics. He went on to spend most of his teenage years performing as a singer and drummer in a rock band. He studied mural design and painting at the Caulfield Institute of Technology (now Monash, Caulfield Campus). He also did national service with Training Command in the ADF, followed by a Diploma of Education. In the early seventies, he became a designer and illustrator for *The Education Magazine* and *Pursuit Magazine*, and also started illustrating for various publishers including Penguin, Rigby, Brooks Waterloo, Houghton & Mifflin and National Geographic in the USA. In 1981 he held his first solo exhibition of paintings and drawings.

Recently, he has focused on writing and illustrating children's books, and also picture book presentations in schools and at literature festivals. His books include *The Last Tree* (2007 Whitley Award for Children's Literature) which deals with the effect deforestation has on the creatures that inhabit our forests, and *Journey of the Sea Turtle* (2011 Whitley Award) which highlights the fragile existence of sea turtles. Other award-winning books include *My Mother's Eyes* about World War One, published by Hachette Australia in 2009; *Angel of Kokoda* in 2010; the *Ben and Gracie's Art Adventure* series, *Inside the World of Tom Roberts* (shortlisted in the 2013 Aurealis Awards), *A Day to Remember: The Story of the Anzacs* with Jackie French (shortlisted in the 2013 CBCA Awards); *Vietnam Diary* (2013), *Afghanistan Pup* (2014), *The Horse Soldier* (2014), *Migaloo, the White Whale* (2015), *Digger, the Dog who Went to War* (2015), *Beth: The Story of a Child Convict* (2016) and *Flapper, VC* (2017).

For more information about Mark visit: <<http://www.markwilson.com.au/>>





# BLACKLINE MASTERS

## BM 1 COLLAGE IMAGE

Create a collage by drawing a scene around this image of Isabella and John and then applying materials such as fabric, cardboard, fur, etc. to create a vibrant image.



## BM 2 QUIZ

These questions can all be answered by reading or interpreting the text of this picture book.

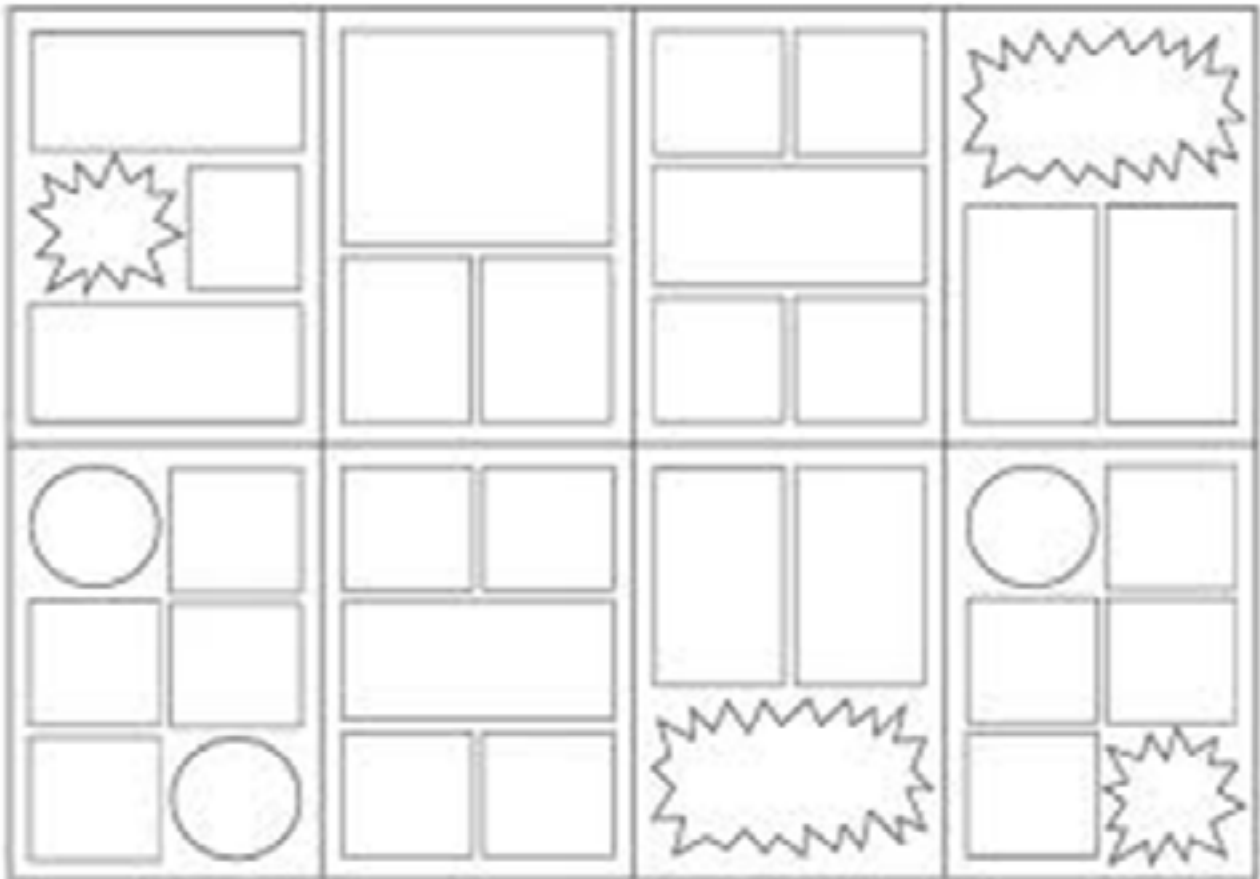
1. What is a horn book?
2. How does Isabella teach the children their letters?
3. What is the date of the first entry in Isabella's diary which appears in the book?
4. What is the date of the last entry in Isabella's diary which appears in the book?
5. What were the main forms of European settler housing in the 1780s which are depicted in these images?
6. What does John bring Isabella in thanks?
7. How many other children are in her class?
8. What did John steal for which he's punished and sent to Norfolk Island?
9. John is sent to Norfolk Island on what vessel?
10. In the final frames, what occupation does the image of John suggest he has taken on as an adult?

**Answers:** **1.** 'It was a sheet of paper covered by a thin layer of flattened cow's horn, meant to protect it. The alphabet was written on the paper, and there were also a few words, and the Lord's Prayer.' **2.** 'She swept some sand on the floor into five little piles, then flattened each pile into a rectangle and dampened it with a wet cloth. Then she put a little stick next to each patch of wet sand, and waited.' Later the children write their letters in the sand with sticks. **3.** October 14, 1789. **4.** January 11, 1790. **5.** Log huts and canvas tents. **6.** Daisies. **7.** Five. **8.** Two apples. **9.** HMS Sirius. **10.** A farmer.



### BM 3 GRAPHIC STORYTELLING

Create a graphic novel/comic interpretation of one of the scenes in this book. Use any of the layouts below as the storyboard for your comic. [You might photocopy and enlarge to A3 to make more space.]



Layouts taken from Comic Book Guide

<http://comicbookguide.wordpress.com/tag/drawings/page/2/>

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright** operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award.