

The Rats of Tobruk

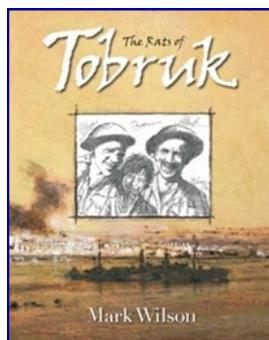
By Mark Wilson

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When a Bedouin boy, Omar, is separated from his family in Libya during WW2, he makes his way to the coast to look for them. Tired and hungry, Omar is taken in and cared for by two Australia soldiers, Bluey and Albert, as they struggle to survive during the Siege of Tobruk. When Bluey disappears during a patrol, Omar is determined to find him, and uses all his knowledge of the desert as he searches for his friend. This is a story of friendship found in the most unusual of places, and a boy's determination against all the odds.



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

Themes:

- WWII
- The Battle for Tobruk
- Determination
- Friendship
- Bravery

Discussion Questions:

- During World War 2, the Senussi tribe and others provided vital support to the allies in North Africa against the Axis forces. Research how they did this and how it played a role in the outcome of the war.
- Research WW2 and Australian soldiers' experiences in the desert war, particularly the battle for Tobruk. Write a short piece about the conflict and its outcomes.
- What was so special about the Australian soldiers who defended Tobruk? What did the German soldiers call them, and why? Write a short piece to profile them.
- What other nationalities played a role in the defense of Tobruk against the Africa Korps, and what were their roles?
- Research Anzac day and write a short piece about what you think it stands for today.
- Mark Wilson's text is spare and suggestive. The horror of war is hinted at, but it is not graphically confronting. How and where in the text has he done this?
- Research and write a short piece on how the Australians lived and survived during the battle for Tobruk.
- What does the term 'bravery' mean to today's youth? Compare this with the term in the context of the story.
- What desert skills did Omar use to track and find his friend at night in the desert?
- What armies constituted the 'Allies' and 'Axis' forces?
- What happened to the Bedouin people living in the desert during WW2 and after its conclusion?
- What might have been in the young boy's mind as he went out into the desert, into enemy territory, to find his friend Bluey?
- Along with Omar's parents, who were the ten thousand inmates kept at the concentration camp in El Aghelia in North Africa during WW2?
- Research and discuss the effect WW2 had on Australian society.
- Discuss the cover of the book and what it conveys about the story, particularly the setting.
- How does the format and design of the book influence your reading of it? Discuss.
- Do a drawing or painting of Tobruk Harbour as it looked in 1942.
- The Australian War Memorial has much information on the 'Rats of Tobruk', which you can research. Create your own Tobruk display.