

Teacher's Notes

# Flapper, VC



MARK WILSON

# Flapper, VC by MARK WILSON

## Teachers' Notes by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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# INTRODUCTION

Flapper is an Australian carrier pigeon during World War II. Sent off to war in the Pacific, Flapper is deep in the jungle on Manus Island, on patrol, when he has to evade enemy fire and deliver the message that will save the soldiers to whom Flapper has been assigned.

This book was inspired by the true story of D D43 Q879, the carrier pigeon which was awarded the Dickin Medal - the animal equivalent of the Victoria Cross - in 1947.

It is a moving tribute to the part which animals and birds have played in war, to accompany Mark Wilson's other beautifully crafted works *The Afghanistan Pup* and *Digger, The Dog Who Went To War*.

This text will add to the body of work which introduces students to lesser known aspects of the war effort during the various engagements in which Australian soldiers have fought. It will encourage them to 'dig deeper' and to uncover facts that are not always shared in history books.

## THEMES

Several themes are covered in this book which might be related to other curriculum areas.

- **Bravery**
- **Heroism**
- **Survival**
- **Hope**

## 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**

### World War Two in the Pacific

**ACTIVITY:** This book describes events which were part of the Admiralty Islands Campaign. Research this history further.

**ACTIVITY:** Manus Island is mentioned in this picture book: 'Manus Island is part of Manus Province in northern Papua New Guinea and is the largest island of the Admiralty Islands. It is the fifth largest island in Papua New Guinea with an area of 2,100 km<sup>2</sup> (810 sq mi) measuring around 100 km x 30 km (60 mi x 20 mi)' 'Manus Island' Wikipedia <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manus\\_Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manus_Island)> Research its history during World War II, and immediately after.

**ACTIVITY:** Papua New Guinea and its history might also be researched to give students a background to how war impacted on the country.

## Carrier Pigeons and Other Animals and Birds in War

**ACTIVITY:** Research carrier pigeons and how they have been involved in war.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Invite students to research the part that other animals or birds have played in war.

**ACTIVITY:** Read picture books, fiction and non-fiction which deals with this topic and discuss.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Discuss the ethics of using animals in war, and how they are treated after they return from the field of conflict. For example, read Pamela Rushby's *The Horses Didn't Come Home* (2012) and discuss. Mark Wilson also concludes by noting that due to quarantine regulations very few animals are taken home after wars.

### Values

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

**DISCUSSION POINT:** What is heroism? Can the term be applied to birds as well as to people?

#### • ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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

**DISCUSSION POINT:** This is a creative narrative which imagines a carrier pigeon in a real historical situation. The author uses this story to convey to the reader something of the feelings experienced by birds in war time and to pay tribute to what he regards as heroism. How does this differ from an expository account of the same experiences?

**ACTIVITY:** Write an acrostic poem, about FLAPPER.

**ACTIVITY:** Write a letter, as if by a soldier to his family, about how Flapper saved their men.

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

#### • 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:** The cover of a book is an important part of its message.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The front and back endpapers depict Flapper, a lone bird, flying in a pastel-toned sky, suggestive of heroism, bravery, and hope.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The title page contains a framed 'portrait' of Flapper looking directly at the reader. It is set against a landscape in which one can see Flapper flying in the sky. How do these two representations work together to suggest the ideas contained in the book?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The format is a large portrait format 26 cm (width) x 28 cm (height). What part does format play in the design of a text? How might this have differed had it been in landscape format?

**ACTIVITY:** The medium or style employed is varied and includes superrealism in acrylic painting on canvas, atmospheric and impressionistic landscapes, watercolour washes, and black and white drawings. [See also Mark Wilson's note on Illustration Technique in his Author/Illustrator's Notes.]

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The colours are moody pastels in tones of mauve, peach, turquoise, and rich purples and greens. How do colours convey feelings in this text?

**ACTIVITY:** Students might be encouraged to use critical literacy skills to unearth meaning in this text. For example, the third double page spread is bordered by black and white images of men with various animals; a reference to the many animals and birds which have assisted soldiers in wars. Encourage students to look closely at each image and discuss what its features are and what they suggest. Examine, for example, the way in which Mark Wilson's sketching adds to a sense of movement and drama in some of the battle images.

**Activity:** Create a graphic novel/comic version of a scene in this book. Read other such books as a guide to style and approach. [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 Flapper's 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.

Watch some YouTube coverage related to this text. [See **Bibliography**.]

4. Organise a classroom display featuring some of the writing and illustrations students have done for this unit with books or texts they have researched as a group.

Create a papier mâché model or collage of Flapper. [See **Bibliography** and **Blackline Master 1**.]

## • LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

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

## • MATHEMATICS

**ACTIVITY:** Discover some of the statistics relative to this conflict.

# 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 is a beautifully crafted acknowledgment of the part that animals and birds have played in war, fighting beside their soldiers. It will encourage students to research this topic more closely and to uncover some incredible stories of faithful and, some would say, heroic service.

# AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTES

## MARK WILSON

My artwork usually starts with a line drawing sketched in with 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 using them directly, so although some paintings look like photos, they are not. They are my 'impressions', used to emphasise important moments in the story, like the painting on pages 4-5 of Flapper landing on his perch after training. It is the second painting that introduces the reader to Flapper's character, and is an 'action shot', so needs to stand out.

As you can see, the full-colour illustrations throughout are mainly acrylic paint on canvas, but the opening endpapers and the illustrations on the 'Fact Sheet' are done entirely in oil paste. I just got carried away! The illustration on pages 26-27 are done in acrylics on card. It is smooth so I can get some really fine detail in there. I always use whatever is best for the page, but also what appeals most to me. I enjoy experimenting with mediums and colour. I'll often just look at the page and say to myself, What will this look like in red, or blue...?

I love sketching, painting in acrylics, doing washes in inks and oils, and generally working with new and different materials to add contrast where needed and variety to the illustrations. Oil pastel is the latest, and the cover of Flapper, VC is a combination of acrylic paint and oil pastel on canvas, with a little bit of Derwent coloured pencil to finish it off.

On pages 6-7, I did a lot of drawings of other animals that have gone to war. I thought the drawings looked good, so I put them in the book without adding colour.

See more about my books at [www.markwilson.com.au](http://www.markwilson.com.au)

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

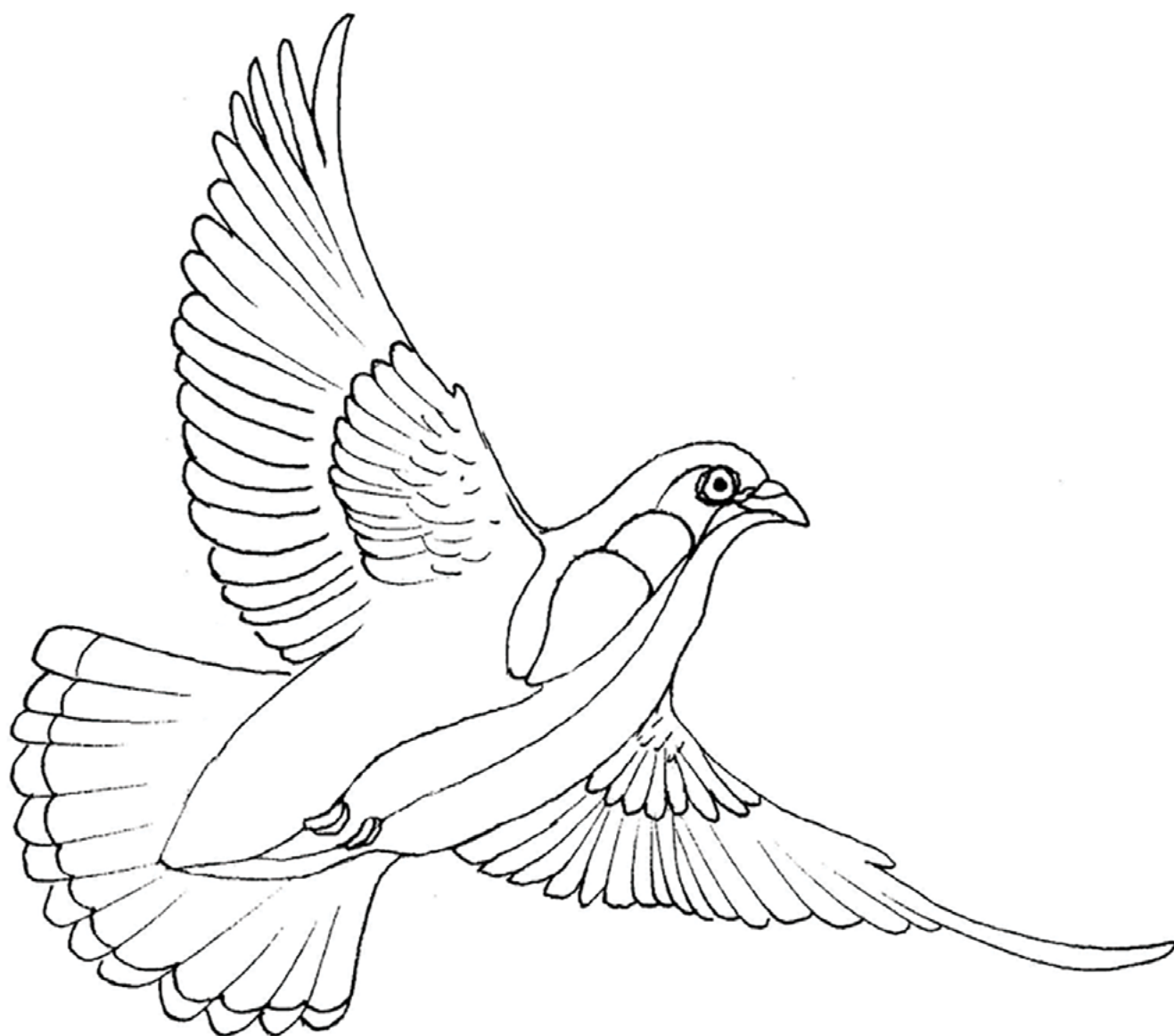
**MARK WILSON** is a multiple-award-winning author/illustrator with seventeen books in print worldwide. Mark has a passion for Australian history and the environment, particularly endangered species, exploring these themes through his picture books and workshops. He has won six Royal Zoological Society of NSW (Whitley) Awards for children's literature, nine CBCA Children's Book Awards, including the Eve Pownall Notable Children's Book Award for *The Afghanistan Pup* in 2015. He also has three Wilderness Society Picture Book Awards and was shortlisted in the Third C.J. Picture Book Awards International. In 2011 he was presented with the Dromkeen Medal for Services to Children's Literature. Mark hopes his books not only encourage students to study their own family history and Australian native species, but to have confidence in their own writing and illustrating. His award-winning books include *The Last Tree*; *Journey of the Sea Turtle*; *My Mother's Eyes*; *Angel of Kokoda*; the *Ben and Gracie's Art Adventure* series, *Inside the World of Tom Roberts*; *A Day to Remember: The Story of the Anzacs* with Jackie French; *Vietnam Diary*; *Migaloo, the White Whale*; *Afghanistan Pup*; *The Horse Soldier*; *Digger, the Dog Who Went to War* and *Beth: The Story of a Child Convict*. For more information about Mark visit: [www.markwilson.com.au](http://www.markwilson.com.au)

# BLACKLINE MASTERS

This is a beautifully crafted acknowledgment of the part that animals and birds have played in war.

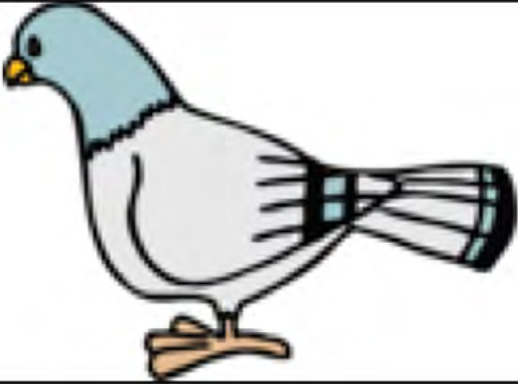







## BM 1 COLLAGE IMAGE

Create a collage of this image of Flapper.



# BLACKLINE MASTERS

## BM 2 NAME THE IMAGE

	
1.	2.
	
3.	4.
	
5.	6.
	
7.	8.

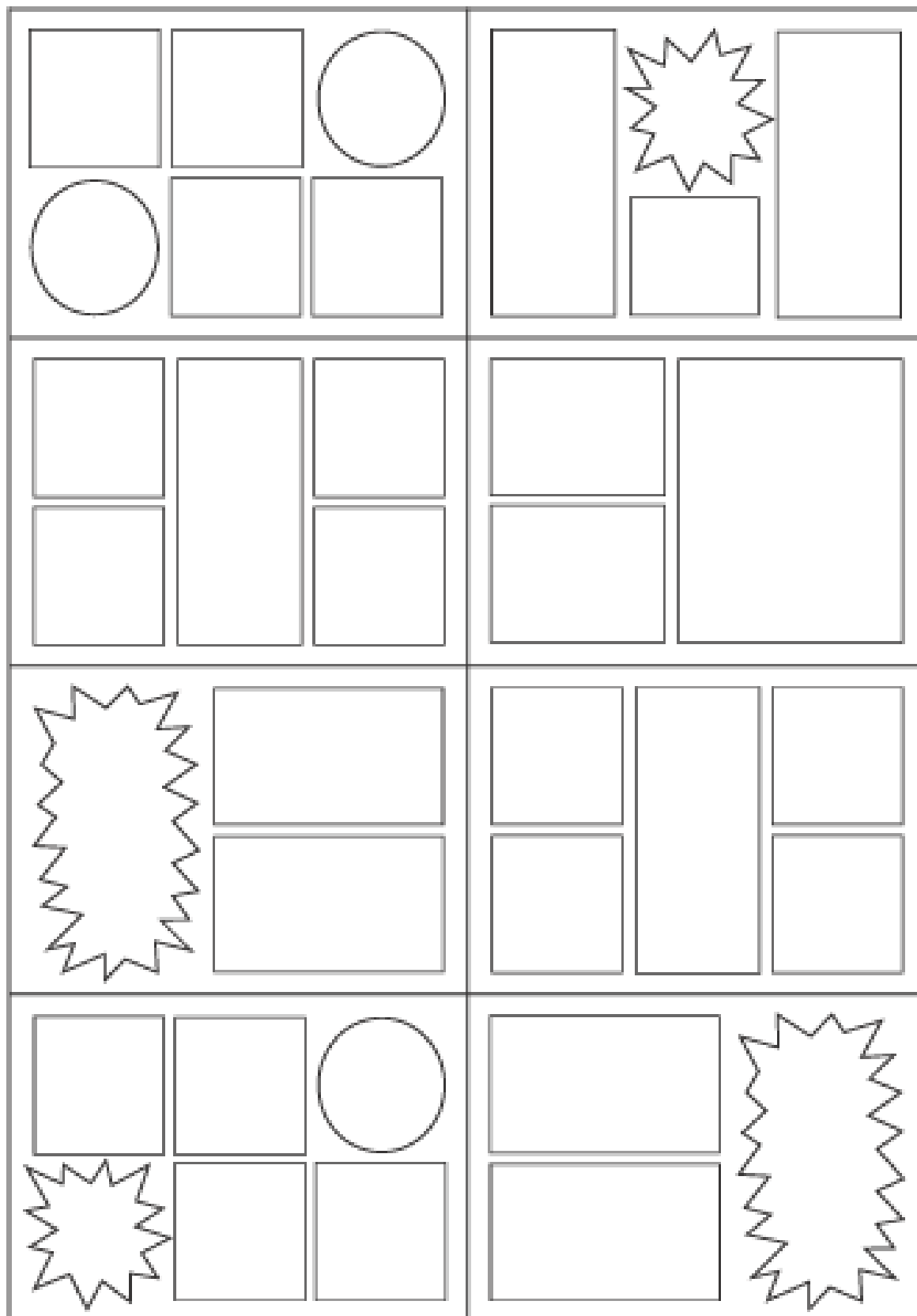
ANSWERS: 1. Pigeon. 2. Tank. 3. Medal. 4. Soldier. 5. Jungle. 6. Aeroplane. 7. Egg. 8. Wicker Cage.



# BLACKLINE MASTERS

## 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. Enlarge on a photocopier to give you more space.



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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.