

Beth - The Story of a Child Convict

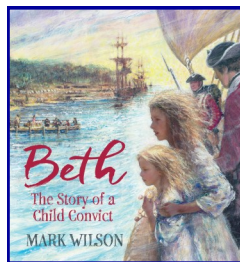
By Mark Wilson

Publisher: Lothian/Hachette

ISBN 9780734416773

\$24.99

Beth is a child convict, caught stealing on the streets of London and sent to Australia on the First Fleet. Through Beth's story, we discover the unbearable hardships those first convicts suffered, not only on the long journey to Sydney Cove but also in the two years of near-famine following their arrival. The story also explores the new arrivals' relationship with the Indigenous population, and the devastation that the Europeans brought with them. But through Beth's experiences we also see the sense of hope that many in the new colony held for the future, and how they survived - and in some cases thrived. This moving story, illustrated with Mark Wilson's beautifully crafted and evocative artwork, was inspired by the experiences of Elizabeth Hayward, the youngest female convict with the First Fleet, and the journals of naval officer William Bradley and Arthur Bowes Smyth, the surgeon and artist from the First Fleet vessel 'Lady Penrhyn'.



Teacher notes have been based on those supplied by the publisher, Hachette.

Themes:

- Convict Life and the Australian Colonial Era
- Indigenous Culture and the impact of White Settlement on the Indigenous population
- Friendship, Compassion and Survival

Discussion Points and Activities:

- One of the first things Beth does is to give her toy doll to Molly. This is an act of sacrifice, for neither has anything to remind them of home. Although Beth has little to celebrate, she finds solace in caring for this younger child, and even some moments of joy and happiness. Discuss the values conveyed in this text.
- This story is inspired by the life of Elizabeth Hayward, the youngest female convict in the First Fleet. Research her life further.
- The convicts who arrived in Australia were not all hardened thieves or murderers. Many, like Beth and Molly, were victims of poverty and circumstance. Research the convict era and the political background to the decision to send convicts to Australia, and also the individual backgrounds of some of those sent to Australia as convicts.
- Mr Brady writes in his diary that the soil is 'nothing more than thick black sand'. How much were the early struggles for food caused by ignorance? Were the settlers unaware of the foods available in this new country? Were their crops and agricultural and hunting methods inappropriate to this new environment? Research the food shortage in colonial times.
- In the story, Beth is not happy that rations for men are larger than those for women and children. How were women and children treated in colonial times?
- What foods would the Aboriginal people have grown, collected or hunted?
- Test your students comprehension by asking them questions from the quiz.
- Invite students to create their own images of Beth and Molly on the attached sheet.

BLACKLINE MASTERS

BM 1 COLLAGE IMAGE

Create a collage by drawing a scene around this image of Beth and Molly and then applying materials such as fabric, cardboard, fur, etc. Students may wish to enlarge this to A3 to allow more room for work on the image.



BM 2 QUIZ

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

1. What ship do Beth and Molly arrive on?
2. Who employs the girls?
3. What work are they asked to do?
4. Where did Governor Phillip send the *HMS Sirius* and why?
5. When the crops fail the girls are ordered to collect wild food. What two foods are mentioned?
6. What illnesses does Mr Brady report breaking out in the colony?
7. How many 'cows, sheep horses, pigs, geese and chickens' did the first Fleet arrive with?
8. What Aboriginal cures/medicines are mentioned in the text?
9. Who inspired this story?
10. Where did the person referred to in 9. eventually live?

Answers: 1. *Lady Penrhyn*. 2. Mr Brady, the surgeon. 3. Collecting wood, and making garden beds. 4. To the Cape of Good Hope for food. 5. Mussels and berries. 6. Dysentery, scurvy and smallpox. 7. Five hundred. 8. Local berries or sarsaparilla vine leaves boiled in water. 9. Elizabeth Hayward. 10. Van Diemen's Land.



The First Fleet