

Unit written by Dr Pam Macintyre & Dr Susan La Marca

Black Jack Anderson **by Elaine Forrestal**

Year 8 and 9

Background

Black Jack Anderson is the fictional re-creation of the life of a real pirate. The clever, charismatic black American, Jack Anderson, controlled the seas of King George Sound off the coast of Albany, Western Australia during the 1830s. Anderson did not plan this life, but lived it with gusto. This is much more than a story of piracy, however. It is also the story of a fascinating character and his lover during a time of adventure and growth in the new Australian colony. Through an exploration of these lives, Forrestal engages with the era. Class, gender, the indigenous community, crime and family are issues viewed through the eyes of the main characters as we follow their eventful lives.

Forrestal describes her inspiration in a recent review of the book for the *Sunday Times*:

I was ambling through the whaling exhibit at the WA Maritime Museum, researching a story on the Whalers' Tunnel at Fremantle, and noticed a video playing on a loop...I didn't take much notice until the second lap of the room when the three old Albany whalers, talking on the video, mentioned the colourful pirate Black Jack Anderson. I'd never heard of him nor thought WA had anything like a pirate so, intrigued, I started digging.

From 'Pirates of Esperance' by Jan Hallam (Review of *Black Jack Anderson*) in the *Sunday Times*, June 14, 2008.

Objectives

In line with the focus on terminology and class, the students will engage with the text as an exploration of the time and the place in which it is set. The book acts as a secondary source, based on primary sources, and explores a particular historical period.

...students use a range of primary and secondary sources to investigate the past. With support, they frame research questions and plan their own inquiries. They comprehend and question sources and make judgments about the views expressed, the completeness of the evidence, and the values represented.

AUSTRALIA'S MOST

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) *The VELS, Discipline-based learning, Humanities – History, Level 4*, p. 56.

NOTORIOUS PIRATE

The study of English encourages an exploration of language, and how we communicate and interact with a variety of texts. The following statement from the English VELS supports an exploration of the language and metaphor in *Black Jack Anderson*:

They apply their knowledge of spoken texts and oral language to experiment with techniques to influence audiences, including vocabulary, rhythm, intonation, timing, pausing, body language and facial expression. They examine how situational and socio-cultural factors affect audience responses and the impact of different text and sentence structures on readers and viewers. They explore ways of using multimodal texts to enhance visual and verbal communication.

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) *VELS English Domain Level 5*, pp. 22-23.

Focus

Language

Due to its subject, and the time in which it is set, *Black Jack Anderson* contains a rich array of specific terminology. For example:

- Luffed (p. 14)
- Lee quarter (p. 14)
- Squally (p. 14)
- Bark (p. 11)
- Get out his slate (p. 26)
- Transom (p. 60)
- Ro'locks (p. 65)
- Avast and belay (p. 65)

This is only a sample of the large number of words used in the text that may be, in the main, unknown to present day readers. Consider how one reads these words.

- Do you need to always know the exact meaning?
- Discuss with students how reading something in context helps us to understand what the word might mean. Exposure to new words in this way can build vocabulary and increase knowledge of a little known subject.

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Assessment

- Students could:
 - Construct a glossary of a dozen words and their meanings using only the text as their source of understanding.
 - Write a short story about the same period using a number of unusual words from the text to give their story flavour and accuracy.
 - Use their imaginations to create a glossary of new words in the style of the period, words that are not real but sound as though they could be.

Class

There are a number of occasions in the novel when the disparities between classes are made clear by the actions of characters. Consider the way the Captain is treated onboard the ship. For instance, he receives different food to the regular ship mates (p.16). The living conditions of the Newell family (pp. 79–88) and the lowly status of Dorothy (pp. 91-92) clearly indicate their lower class status.

- Discuss these passages and look for other indications in the text of class distinction being made. Compare these to the way in which Anderson lives on his island, in particular, his adherence to a policy of equal shares for all in whatever wealth is accumulated (p. 50). Though this attitude towards wealth indicates a particular view on equality, his behaviour in relation to the Aboriginal women he kidnaps (p. 68) indicates another view of his own status and their relative position within the group.

The Sea

The sea has been used as a metaphor in fiction over centuries and in a variety of cultures. Man has had both a link with, and an aversion to, the sea that has often influenced the way we live our lives. As a geographical obstacle the sea has dominated civilizations, divided people and, in conquering it, different groups have explored and colonised previously unknown lands.

- Consider the sea in fiction, poetry and song. How is it represented?
- What words are used to evoke the feel of the sea?
- Are there any common elements across different texts?

For example, John F. Kennedy (1917 - 1963), said of the sea:

All of us have in our veins the exact same percentage of salt in our blood that exists in the ocean, and, therefore, we have salt in our blood, in our sweat, in our tears. We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea – whether it is to sail or to watch it – we are going back from whence we came.

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- How does this compare with the views of the characters in the text? For instance, the sea is described as 'the great love of their lives' (p. 180), and it is said that the sea 'freed and cleansed them' (p. 180).

These strong emotional descriptions make it clear that the sea has an important role in the lives of the people in the text.

- Compare these descriptions to those in other explorations of the sea.

How the characters earn a living from the sea is central to the text and underlines its importance to them. At one point it is said, 'in a boat they became a united force' (p. 180). Their work on the boat binds them to the sea and each other. This is contrasted with relationships that are usually stormy and dysfunctional, ruled by disharmony. At sea, at work on a boat, the group comes together.

- What is the modern day equivalent? What unites us strongly? Work? Sport? Family?

Assessment

Students could create their own work representing either the sea as it is conveyed in *Black Jack Anderson* or what it means to them. Encourage the use of other media – paint, sculpture, poetry or song.

Related Reading

Pirates

- Barrie, J. M. *Peter Pan*
- Clark, Sherryl *Pirates of Quentaris*
- Crowley, Bridget *Ship's Angel*
- Higgins, Simon *Thunderfish* (present day pirates)
- Higgins, Simon *Under No Flag* (present day pirates)
- Lawrence, Caroline *The Pirates of Pompeii*
- Lee, Tanith *Pirates!: The true and remarkable adventures of Minerva Sharpe and Nancy Kington, female pirates*
- Lee, Tanith *Piratica. II: Return to Parrot Island: being the return of a most intrepid heroine to sea*
- Lee, Tanith *Piratica. III: the family sea: being the gallant tale of a fearless heroine and a fatal secret*
- Masson, Sophie *The Tempestuous Voyage of Hopewell Shakespeare*
- Matthews, John *Pirates Rogue's Gallery*
- Meyer, L. A. *Bloody Jack*
- Mould, Chris *The Icy Hand*
- Oppel, Kenneth *Skybreaker*
- Stevenson, Robert Louis *Treasure Island*

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Early Australia

- Bunney, Ron *Eye of the Eagle* (Indigenous Australian experience of white arrival)
- Metzenthén, David *Wildlight* (early settlement of Victorian coast)
- Murray, Kirsty *Market Blues* (Early Melbourne)
- Newton, Robert *The Black Dog Gang* (The Rocks, Sydney 1900)
- Nicholson, John *Cedar, Seals and Whaling Ships*

Women in History

- De Vries, Susanna *Great Pioneer Women of the Outback*
- Freeman, Pamela *The Black Dress: The Early Years of Mary Mackillop*
- Inserra, Rose *Women in the Convict Era: 1788-1868*
- Park, Ruth *Playing Beatie Bow* (Early Sydney)
- Scutt, Craig *Mary Bryant: The Impossible Escape*
- Selzer, Anita *Governors' Wives in Colonial Australia*

True Accounts

- Atwood, Alan *Burke's Soldier*
- Crew, Gary & Mark Wilson *Young Murphy: A Boy's Adventure*
- Greagg, David *Burke and Wills Forgot the Frying Pan*
- The life of William Buckley – the convict who escaped and survived, living for 32 years with the indigenous people of coastal Victoria
http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/ergo/william_buckleys_escape
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010158b.htm>
- The survival of James Johnson – sole survivor of an 1854 shipwreck in which 121 people died.
<http://image.sl.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/ebindshow.pl?doc=q027/a632;seq=70>
<http://www.armidaleindependent.com.au/pages/2007070415.pdf>

The Sea

- Hemingway, Ernest *The Old Man and the Sea*
- Melville, Herman *Moby Dick*
- The Sea in Poetry
<http://www.poemhunter.com/poems/sea/>

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