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Captain Cook's Apprentice **by Anthony Hill**

Year 7 or 8

Background

Cook's Pacific exploration is such a seminal story for those of us who live in this part of the world, it's not surprising authors return to it time and time again, trying to understand the present by revisiting the past. And the Endeavour voyage was so great an adventure that every new generation deserves to have it told afresh. Even better if it can be through the eyes of one of their own...

Anthony Hill 'Why another cook book?' In *Viewpoint: on books for young adults* 16 (4) 2008 pp. 2-3.

Cook is a giant figure in Australian history who continues to fascinate (consider the most recent series on the ABC, 'Captain Cook – Obsession and Discovery'). A university in Queensland is named after him, and as a true measure of his legacy, he has found his way into the playground lore of children:

*Captain Cook chased a chook,
All around Australia
Lost his pants in the middle of France
And found them in Tasmania*

And also into Australian rhyming slang as in 'Take a Captain Cook at this drongo!'

Anthony Hill is well known for his thoroughly researched, detailed explorations of particular periods in history, particularly in books such as *The Burnt Stick*, *Young Digger* and *Animal Heroes*. Hill's engagement with a historical period is palpable, and he generously shares his references and sources, offering students the opportunity to investigate and explore a pivotal moment in our history.

Captain's Cook's Apprentice takes as its focus, the story of young Isaac Manley, an apprentice on the voyage that took Cook and Banks around the world to Tahiti, New Zealand and finally on the voyage up the eastern coast of Australia, a journey that resulted in the British charting and claiming the land they would later colonise. This historic voyage is presented through the eyes of a boy keen to work his way up the ranks of the seafaring world. A real historical figure, Isaac eventually became an Admiral, and was the last person alive to have sailed with Cook. This is a fascinating story of an extraordinary and fraught voyage, whose adventure, hardships and ingenuity are caught brilliantly by Hill.

As Hill alludes to in the quote above, Cook's voyage has inspired many writers, and comparison with other texts would make a rich study of the period and its historic events. Hill mentions the goat on board the Endeavour, and includes in his bibliography, Jackie French's book *The Goat Who Sailed the World*, the voyage from the point of view of the

goat. There are other accounts of Cook's voyages, fiction and non fiction, with which to compare to Hill's version in an exploration of history and the way it is presented.

Objectives

The National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians says:

The curriculum should provide students with an understanding of the past that has shaped the society and culture in which they are growing and developing.

National Curriculum Board (2008), 'The Shape of the National Curriculum' in *The National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, p. 6.

The VELS discipline of humanities suggests that learning is embedded in the activity when:

...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.

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

Focus

Intrepidness

- From the perspective of a 21st century, global society where exotic climes are only a tourist brochure away, the ingenuity, problem-solving, sheer daring of sailing into the complete unknown is particularly fascinating. It is worth exploring the adventure and achievements of such intrepidness.

The perilous life at sea is told warts and all, as the crew suffers with venereal disease, is flogged for misdemeanours aboard ship, escapes when the ship is set to leave Tahiti, with Cook stopping at nothing to get them back.

Fran Knight *Viewpoint: on books for young adults*, 16 (4) p.4

- Below are some instances of high adventure and 'first times'. Invite readers to find others that stand out to them.
 - p4 Isaac and the Ferryman 'shoot the bridge': prepares the reader for the adventure that is to follow
 - pp9 all that Isaac has to get to know about the ship and look after himself in contrast to the life he has known (he is only 13)
 - p19-21 The first time Isaac has to climb 'over the tops' while they are under sail
 - pp46-50 sneaking off and getting lost in Rio
 - pp58-61 dying of the cold in Tierra del Fuego

- p81 seeing the Tahitians surfing
- p82 eating 'plump vegetarian island rats...singed, gutted and crisply fried for breakfast'
- p86-87 getting a tattoo with 'a bone carved with many small teeth, like needle points set into a wooden handle'.(No one in Europe had heard of tattoos until the *Endeavour*)

Primary sources

The analysis of primary sources is a central component of the study of history. The framing paper under discussion for the forthcoming National History Curriculum says:

History stretches from the distant past to the present, and provides a deeper understanding of present-day events as well as the enduring significance of earlier ones. It introduces us to a variety of human experience, enables us to see the world through the eyes of others, and enriches our appreciation of the contingent nature of change.

National Curriculum Board. 'Introduction' *National History Curriculum: Framing Paper* p. 1

Evidence: how to find, select and interpret historical evidence. This involves understanding the nature of a primary source, locating its provenance and context, asking questions about it, distinguishing between the claims it makes and the assumptions and values that give it its present shape, and the ability to compare competing primary sources.

National Curriculum Board. 'Historical Understandings' *National History Curriculum: Framing Paper*, p. 5.

- Focus on the use of primary sources in interpreting history; students question what they read and consider the various interpretations that have been made of any one primary source.
- The list of thankyou's on pages 257 to 259 make it clear that Hill researched Cook's voyage thoroughly, including the use of original documents. On pages 260 to 264 he lists 'Useful Books and Internet Sites'. The site <http://southseas.nla.gov.au/> includes a number of excellent primary sources including, Cook's journal, different accounts of the crew's time in Tahiti, and a variety of other crew members' journals of different parts of the voyage, including Banks'.
- Comparisons could be made between the journal accounts and Hill's interpretations of particular incidents, to prompt exploration of the way historical fiction is constructed, and the value in reading all accounts and interpretations with a critical eye.
- A stowaway's guide to the Pacific: an interactive adventure in 6 parts (<http://abc.net.au/stowaways/>) is another valuable resource to use with *Captain Cook's Apprentice*. The website tells the adventures of Nick Young and Tayeto, both real people from the *Endeavour*. It is a mixture of fact and fiction that could be used to explore the way creators interpret historical fact to create story and to entertain. The interactive material is engaging and would help students to visualise and appreciate the story of the *Endeavour*, offering a useful support to the study of Hill's text.

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Assessment

- Related to focus one: Although we are given the voyage through Isaac's perspective, it is written in the third person. Select one of the incidents above (or another adventure that you select from the book) and write it as Isaac writing home to his best friend. Get inside his head to capture the thrill, danger and excitement. Imagine that you are Isaac, a young person from a well-to-do family in London, and that you are seeing/experiencing events for the first time.
- Are there any 'firsts' left to discover in the contemporary world, or has everything happened/been experienced before? What are the possibilities? Are there any 'frontiers' still to be explored? Compile a class wiki.

Related Reading

Anthony Hill has his own list of 'Useful Books and Internet Sites' on pages 260 to 264.

- A stowaway's guide to the Pacific [website] : an interactive adventure in 6 parts.
<http://abc.net.au/stowaways/>
- Day, Marele *Mrs Cook : The Real and Imagined Life of the Captain's Wife*
- Endeavour's scientific impact (1768-1771) [website] by Steve Cafferty.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/endeavour_voyage_01.shtm
- The Endeavour 1768-1771 [website]. Natural History Museum (London, England)
<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/interactive/VRendeavour/index.htm>
The Natural History Museum has created a virtual reality model of Captain Cook's ship, the Endeavour

Sea voyages

- French, Jackie *The Goat who Sailed the World*
- French, Jackie *They Came on Viking Ships*
- Hesse, Karen *The Stowaway*
- Hesse, Karen *Young Nick's Head*
- *Master and Commander* (movie)
- Morpurgo, Michael *Alone on a Wide, Wide Sea*

Ingenuity/adventure/pioneering

- Wilder, Laura Ingalls *The Little House on the Prairie* series

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