



Boys of Blood and Bone

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Summary

Henry is heading up to stay with friends at Saint Helena Bay when his car breaks down just outside a country town. Forced to stay over in the town while his car is fixed, Henry is befriended by two local teenagers, Trot and Janine, and the enigmatic and very old Cecelia. To Cecelia Henry looks exactly like Andy Lansell, her fiance who left to fight in the Great War eighty years ago, and never returned. She shares with Henry her memories of Andy and lends him Andy's diary. His car fixed, Henry heads off to Saint Helena Bay for a week of sailboarding with his friends, but his head is full of Andy's story, which begins to unfold in parallel to Henry's story. As Andy and his mates head inexorably towards the bloody tortuous Western Front, Henry and his mates face challenges, dangerous situations and tragedies of their own.

This novel will appeal to teenage readers. It deals with the themes of personal and public duty, responsibility, friendship and death within both modern and World War One settings.

Before reading the novel

The cover

What can we glean from the split cover and the title of *Boys of Blood and Bone*?

Guided reading

Read chapter one together. Get students to brainstorm a profile of Henry (clothes, age, hobbies, family) from the information from chapter one. Encourage students to predict later events from the clues contained in this initial chapter.

- What do we learn about Andy?
- Why is there less detail about Andy in contrast to what we learn of Henry?

During/after the reading

Issue for discussion: The parallel story

This novel really contains two stories, those of Henry and Andy. They are interconnected through Henry's visit to Stratford. Henry's story unfolds through a narrative; Andy's unfolds through a diary. In some ways Andy's life begins to unfold similarly to Henry's. This is called a parallel story.

- What is the effect of these different styles? Did you enjoy reading it?
- Read Henry's first impression of Andy's diary on pages 36–37. See pages 125–126. How does Henry's viewpoint influence the picture we get of Andy?
- How do we gain further information about Henry?
- In what ways does the diary (first person) differ from a narrative (third person)?
- How does the sort of information we receive as reader's change?

Issues for discussion: The use of the diary format

- Ask students who keeps a diary. Why? Discuss other diaries they've read.
- Why does the author use the diary format?
- What can you gain from the reading of a diary that you don't get from using the third person?

Part A: Characters

Henry

- What sort of young man is Henry? (pp36, 41, 79-101, 109, 114, 128, 273)
- How did the following impact on his character?
 - Being away from home (Saint Helena Bay, Stratford, France)
 - Meeting Trot and Janine (Stratford, Saint Helena Bay)
 - Breaking up with Marcelle (pp25, 235, 43,48,70, 109)
 - Visiting France (chapter 32–37)
 - Facing death (chapter 24)

Andy

- How do readers find out about Andy? How does this influence our view of him?
- Describe his character and interests. (pp3–4, 13, 18, 22, 31, 36, 68)
- In what ways is Andy weak? Does this make him more or less appealing?
- In what ways are Andy and Henry similar/different?

Janine

- How does meeting Janine affect Henry?

Trot

- Describe Trot's character?
- In what ways is he a contrast to Henry and his mates? (pp2, 35, 42, 76, 77)

Mates Nick and Marcus

- What is the role of these two characters in relation to Henry and the plot?

Darcy and Bob

- What is the role of these two characters in relation to Andy and the plot?

Part B: Themes

Family

- Is Henry close to his family? (pp3, p41, 245)
- Find examples that demonstrate their respect for each other.
- Describe the relationship Andy has with his family and his home.
- We learn very little about family from Andy's diary and more about the farm, horses and land. What can we assume from this? (pp 3–4,18-19, 22, 49)

Duty

Referring to the following page numbers, in what ways is Henry bound by a sense of duty?

- Henry feels bound to read the diary (pp125–126)
- To go to Trot's funeral (pp194–5)
- To be predictable (pp228–229)
- How is Andy bound by duty? (pp46, 49, 51)

- To do the right thing? (p63)
- Honour/dishonour (p74)
- Frances-Jane (p83)
- Disillusioned (p205)
- Done his duty (p277)
- Which character is most bound by duty? Why?

Death

- How does Henry imagine death? (p38)
- How does he react to Trot's death? (p174)
- What does he consider is the value of life? (p284)
- Andy faces death often during the wartime battles:
 - 'He was no longer scared of the dead.' (p152)
 - 'Boys were dotted with blood and small pieces of flesh like rind of some strange fruit.' (p139)

How does this description fit with the notion of the glory of dying for your country?

How does Andy's death impact on others? (pp277–278)

Danger

Henry faces danger while sailboarding (chapter 15) and when Marcus narrowly escapes the boat (chapter 21). How does Henry behave in these situations? What personal qualities

Mateship

- Both Andy's and Henry's mates play important roles in their lives. Divide the class and ask half the students to profile Nick, Marcus and Henry's friendship and the others to profile Darcy, Bob and Andy's friendship. Ask students to find examples of the importance of mates during times of crisis in the novel. Do Andy's and Henry's mates ever let them down or cause conflict? What unites them?
- Consider the friendship between Janine, Trot and Henry. How does this fit in your understanding of mateship? Does gender effect this?
- What role do mates play in the students' own lives? Do they cause conflict between you and your family? Do friends always support you in a crisis? What is the role of a mate?

Evolution of the ANZAC Spirit

- What did being an Anzac mean to Andy, Darcy and Bob?
- Why did young men travel half way around the world to fight for Britain?
- Find an example of a recruitment poster for WWI. (There are many in books and on the Internet) What images did the ads use to persuade men to join?
- Why was Henry interested in travelling to France to investigate Andy's experiences?
- The Anzac tradition is alive and well in Australia today with attendances at the Anzac Day march (and Gallipoli in Turkey) getting higher every year. How do you account for this?
- What does being an Anzac mean to young Australians today?
- Is the Anzac spirit alive in Australia today? Can it be applied to situations other than during wartime?
- Would you ever visit Gallipoli, Villiers-Bretonneux, or attend the April 25th march? Why or why not?

Part C: Learning Activities

Diary Writing

- Imagine a diary kept by Trot during his stay at Saint Helena Bay. What would it include? What might Trot's concerns be at this time? How would he feel about Janine and Henry's friendship? Consider the differences between Trot and Henry and his mates.
- Brainstorm this example with the class, then set students the task of writing a diary from the viewpoint of one of the following characters: Darcy, Cecilia, Janine, Marcelle, Henry or Trot. Then read out aloud. This might be a good classroom activity if you read the novel together. This should create interesting discussion on character and point of view and the role of the diary. (Could also be a homework exercise.)
- Write the Eulogy to be read at Andy's funeral service. Who would speak? What would they say?
- Write the Eulogy to be written in the local paper. Keep in mind the sort of things that were important to Andy: horses, land, Australia and his mates.

Writer's Technique

Landscape

'Andy, after a while, turned for home, seeing the house sharp white against the darkening hills and blurring trees. He could smell the place; subtle, vague scents of wood smoke, grass, horses, cattle and dirt. He listened to his boots strike, heard the muted gabble of Corellas and the swish of his shirt. He felt the air passing over his face and hands, holding heat although the sun had set, and in his breast pocket the small notebook Cecilia had given him bumped like a heart beat. Already she'd dated the first page and made the first entry. Already Andy knew it by heart.' (p4)

- How does the writer appeal to our senses in this passage?
- The author regularly refers to the landscape and countryside throughout the novel. Find another passage where the landscape is well described and justify your choice. There are examples of France and trench life in later chapters.
- Get students to close their eyes and describe the smells, sounds, and feel of things in the classroom. You could further this activity to descriptions of places that other students have to guess the answer.

Memory

- 'Going away had swung the gate of his memory wide open.' (p8) In what ways did going away focus both Henry and Andy's lives? Why?

Heat/Cold

'He felt numb. He would've liked to sit down in the sun and recover, or at least think things through.' (p139) 'He could not imagine it being sunny . . . the coldness of the ground.' (p25)

- Explain the author's use of heat and cold throughout the novel.

Darkness /Light

- Why does the author refer to darkness and light throughout the novel?
- What do you associate with these images:
 - 'The shadows of the trees lay deep and dark at odds with the sunny openness of the paddocks . . . darkness hinting at death, secrets and the unspoken.' (p26)
 - 'There was no possibility of him leaving this place for the darkness . . . The good things are like light . . . Home is like light.' (p225)
 - English darkness (pp72-74)
 - Shadows/darkness (p33) in the Avenue of Honour
 - Lightness and dark in the France chapter with Henry and Marcelle

Part D: Guided Approach to Selected Passages

Passage One

'He looked across the camp, men moving, men sitting, the pointy, tooth-shaped tents incised against the sky like fifty miniature circuses . . . the camp, the afternoon, the smell of Darcy's cigarette, the lines of tents, the sound of wind in the pine trees, the sight of a magpie gliding – all things, everything, seemed to Andy to be of significance. He felt a sense of recognition and identification with what was around him, although he knew it was not that all these things were so special in themselves, but that being alive and being in Australia was. He felt that the journey had begun, that life was leading him somewhere that everything, even as he sat here, was changing. He took out his diary, but it was not possible, as usual, to write what he was thinking, so instead he'd write what was happening. And so he wrote something that was true, but it was only a small part of the truth.' (pp39–40)

- How does the author appeal to the senses in describing images of Australia?
- Why was it only a small part of the truth?
- Why is it easier to write what's happening than what you're thinking?
- What does this whole passage tell us about Andy?
- What is important to you about being in Australia?

Passage Two

'It was a bit like, Andy felt, walking through a play on a stage, the walls of a few houses and shops rising and real-enough, but flat like the scenery painted on canvas that it had been his job to move between acts for the annual Stratford high school show.' (p117)

'He felt like an actor and that everything he said was like lines from a script.' (p123)

- To what extent were the lives of Andy and Henry predetermined?
- What choices did they have?
- To what extent is your own life predetermined?
- How would a World War effect your life?

Passage Three

'Someone's been spreading the blood and bone a bit thick,' Bob said. 'By the smell of it.' (p136)

- Explain this image. Why *Boys of Blood and Bone* for the title? Is it effective?

Passage Four

• Choose one war or battle section you like. What is it that makes this section appeal to you? Does the author appeal to your senses? How? Are the places and characters real to you? Why?

Part E: Longer Responses

'That's not what guys did then or now. Or not many guys.' (p125)

- In what ways do Andy and Henry's behaviour determine their final outcome?

Personal response

'History was basically one day turning into the next, Henry thought. Things changed only slowly, but change they did.' (p222)

- In what ways has history shaped your life?

There are many examples of war poetry from World War One. War poetry, as selected by the teacher, would compliment the study of this text.

Part F: Research Activities

In groups or pairs, students could research one of the following topics and make an oral presentation to the class. Students should make use of the novel, reference books, war diaries, and the Internet. Emphasise the benefit of photos, pictures and maps when making an oral presentation.

- Many Australians fought in France yet this is less known than the Gallipoli campaign.
- Present an overview of Australian involvement in WWI in France and Belgium.
- Investigate the Battle of Passchendaele.
- Research the Monument to Australian soldiers in France (at Villers Bretonneux).
- Present a profile of aspects of the uniform or conditions, eg Great Coats, Rising Sun Badge, trench warfare, weapons.

<http://awm.gov.au> The Australian War Memorial in Canberra

This is a fantastic site. There is a search facility so students can search for a specific topic within the site. eg 1918: Australians in France. There are lots of photos and primary sources, which are of interest.

There is a map of France in 1918 which shows many of the towns listed in this novel. Students can click on towns to gain further information about the battles fought there.

This would make a great whole class activity if there were access to a Computer room.

www.penguin.com.au