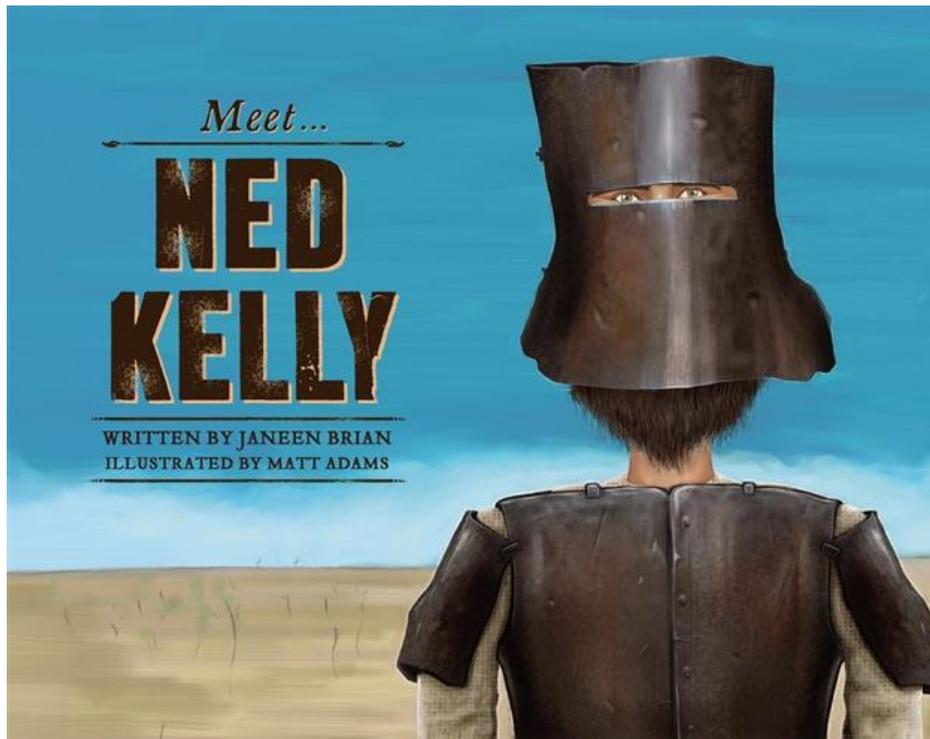


# MEET NED KELLY

Written by Janeen Brian  
Illustrated by Matt Adams



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# OVERVIEW OF KEY LEARNING AREAS AND THEMES

## Type of text

- Picture book
- Poetry
- Imaginative text
- Informative text

## Key Learning Content Areas

- English: language, literature and literacy
- History: Historical knowledge and understanding; Historical skills
- Art

## General capabilities

- Literacy
- Critical and creative thinking
- Historical knowledge and skills
- Visual literacy

## Language Modes

- Listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating

## Themes

- Life in early-Australia
- Australian landscape
- Bushrangers
- Law and order
- Poverty
- Family
- Heroes and villains
- Time; continuity and change

## OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

Ned Kelly was born in 1854 in Beveridge, Victoria. When Ned was a boy his father died and the family struggled to get by. From these humble beginnings to Ned's early brushes with the police and his life as an outlaw, *Meet Ned Kelly* is the story of how Ned became Australia's most notorious bushranger.

Written in a classic ballad-style and matched with bold illustrations from an exciting new illustrator, ***Meet Ned Kelly*** is the perfect introduction to the life and enduring legend of Ned Kelly.

## THE LIFE OF NED KELLY

Ned Kelly was born around 1854 in Beveridge, Victoria. Ned's parents, John 'Red' Kelly and Ellen Kelly, were Irish immigrants and Ned was the second of their seven children.

When Ned was just twelve years old his father died and he was forced to quit school and help his mother on their farm. The family was very poor and they were often in trouble with the law. Ned believed the police and the wealthy landowners treated poor Irish immigrants like the Kellys unfairly.

By the time Ned was 14 he had been arrested twice. The first arrest was for an alleged assault on a Chinaman, and the second was for acting as an accomplice to the bushranger Harry Powers. Both charges were later dropped. The next year, however, Ned was sentenced to three years in gaol for receiving a stolen horse.

In April 1878, a police trooper went to the Kelly farm looking for Dan Kelly, who was suspected of cattle rustling. Dan managed to escape so the trooper arrested Ellen Kelly instead. In court the trooper claimed Ned had tried to shoot the trooper, even though it's never been proven that Ned was even at the farm when the trooper went there. Ellen Kelly was sentenced to three years gaol and a reward of £100 each was put out for the capture of Ned and Dan Kelly.

Ned and Dan went into hiding in the bush and were later joined by two friends, Joe Byrne and Steve Hart. Six months later, in October 1878, three policemen were killed in a shootout at Stringybark Creek between the Kelly gang and the police. The gang were now declared outlaws by the authorities. A reward of £500 was offered for the capture of each member of the gang, dead or alive.

In December 1878, the gang held up the bank at Euroa, and in February they also robbed the bank at Jerilderie. At Jerilderie Ned handed one of the tellers a letter which outlined his justifications for his acts. This letter is now known as The Jerilderie Letter.

The gang wandered free for the next couple of years, relying on the help of friends to avoid the police and stay alive. In June 1880 the gang shot a man named Aaron Sherritt when they discovered he had betrayed them. The gang knew Sherritt's murder would put the police on their trail. The gang made a plan to intercept and derail a train full of troopers that was on its way to Glenrowan.

After pulling up the train tracks at Glenrowan, the Gang took possession of the Glenrowan, holding the patrons hostage as they waited for the police train to head into their trap. But a hostage managed to talk Ned into letting him go free by telling him he had to get to his sick wife. The hostage managed to flag down the police train and warn them of the trap.

The police surrounded the inn and a shootout began. The gang wore metal armour, made from old farm equipment, that protected their heads and torsos, but made it difficult for them to move. Dan, Joe and Steve were killed in the battle, and at 5 am in the morning Ned was shot in the leg and captured.

In October 1880 Ned was tried for the murder of the police officer at Stringybark Creek and found guilty. He was sentenced to death and was hanged in the old Melbourne Gaol on 11 November. He was only twenty-five years old.

# **JANEEN BRIAN ON WRITING MEET NED KELLY**

## ***Can you tell us a little bit about your research for this project and the resources you used?***

I read many books and looked at dozens on articles about Ned Kelly on the Internet. I made notes and crosschecked information from one to the other. Some situations, like where Ned Kelly lived, when police arrested him, and the letter Ned wrote, as well as other reported incidents can be checked and proved accurate from the writings at the time. Others can't. When that happens it's best to hint of what might've happened, rather than state it as a fact. That way wrong information isn't passed on as truth.

I read everything first of all, to get an overall picture of the man and his life. Next I re-read the material and made notes as I went along. I drew up a time line so I could plot incidents that I wanted to include in the book and when they occurred.

Years ago, I had visited the 'Kelly country' and also the prison where Ned was hung, so I had personal memories. Although those memories don't show up in the story, they helped to inform my writing as I went along.

## ***Did your opinion of Ned Kelly and his gang change as you wrote the book?***

Yes. Beforehand, I didn't really understand the social setting of the times and what it must've been like for poor, Irish immigrants. The class system which operated in Britain, travelled across the waves to Australia and yet, those like Ned Kelly saw a chance in a new land to make good. He battled against power and greed and prejudice. He was a strong man, both in size and in his beliefs. He was loyal to his family and provided a voice for those in the community who had little or were the underdogs of the society.

What he did was wrong but I don't believe he was a malicious or callous man. I think his wrongdoings escalated because he believed he and his family were targets for police ill treatment.

## ***Why did you choose to tell Ned's story in the style of the ballad?***

There were three main reasons. First, it was such a large story; I felt I would be able to condense it better in rhyme. Two, because I like to write in rhyme. Rhyme and rhythm can

give a story bounce and energy and a sense of strong emotion and I felt that was in Ned's personality as well. And thirdly because Ned and his family were Irish and the Irish are great poets.

***What was the most challenging part of the project?***

The whole thing was a challenge! From the writer's point of view, the project needed to be researched and written in a short space of time – two months. I was also travelling at the time, so I had to write in unfamiliar places. For example, I wrote while travelling in a boat along The Danube River in Europe, in a mountain flat in the snowy French Alps, and among quaint, historic villages in France. It was during a European Spring and everything I looked at was so totally different to what I was writing about – a legendary bushranger living in country Australia! And because it was a holiday, sometimes it was hard to concentrate!

Getting the voice of Ned was crucial and I had many attempts before the publisher and I were happy and I felt comfortable to go on. I think working in rhyme helped to achieve that. But writing in rhyme had its own particular challenges.

At first, and always comes the story. The story had to be convincing and highlight the turning points in Ned's life and hint at his possible reasons for doing what he did. However, this has to be achieved with brevity. The work was to be approximately 1000 words. Words had to be juggled a million times so the rhyme and rhythm flowed and didn't interrupt the narrative for the reader!

***What was the most rewarding part?***

There were several, actually. I liked learning more about the character of Ned Kelly. I also enjoyed seeing the story taking shape after a lot of hard work. And noting that re-writing really helps, although sometimes one particular phrase or scene is just right the moment you put it down.

Mostly, I wanted to create a story that children would not only enjoy but would help them understand our unique history of Australia, through characters like Ned Kelly. We are who we are today, because of what has happened before.

Another rewarding part was seeing the illustrations, which I really like, and which bring the words to life.

***Do you think Ned was a hero or a villain? Why?***

Neither. I think Ned was a strong personality type, who showed courage and daring one minute, and compassion and kindness the next. I think he acted wrongly against certain people in authority, but to understand why he did so, we'd have to try and understand the frustration he felt about the constant attacks of unfairness and prejudice.

I think it would be hard to walk in Ned's shoes and know exactly how we would've acted in those very early days of Australia's history.

## **MATT ADAMS ON ILLUSTRATING MEET NED KELLY**

***This was your first picture book. You have previously done a lot of illustration work and cartooning for newspapers and magazines. What were the main differences between the two different mediums (newspapers/magazines versus picture book)?***

Doing work for a newspaper is a much less collaborative project than doing illustrations for a magazine or book. Newspaper work requires a picture to go to print the next day, which doesn't allow much time for multiple changes. With magazines, the deadlines aren't so tight so there's time for a little more editorial consultation. But when illustrating a picture book there are more illustrations, more time for consultation with the publisher, and a picture book has a longer shelf life than a newspaper or magazine, so there's a greater need to get the pictures right.

***Did you have to do a lot of research to get the historical details right, such as how people looked and what they wore? Were you surprised by how much material there is out there about Ned Kelly and his gang?***

I don't really like the research side of my job, because too much reference material is never enough for me, so I tend to sit at the computer for far too long trolling through the same pictures over and over again. Luckily, my editor was very happy to do most of the researching, which freed me up to concentrate on drawing and painting pictures.

***What mediums did you use to create the art? Can you explain a little bit about your process?***

I always start with pencil sketches on paper. Once I'm happy with my drawing, I'll scan it

into my computer. I then colour it on a special screen, and I use a program that allows me to replicate pretty much any artistic medium from coloured pencils to oil paint.

***What was the most challenging part of the project?***

I found the biggest challenge with this book was capturing moods and expressions. I found it hard to balance the seriousness of the situations, while also hinting at Ned's laconic sense of humour.

***What was the most rewarding part of the project?***

The most rewarding part was seeing the final product. I think everyone involved in *Meet Ned Kelly's* production did an amazing job.

***Do you think Ned was a hero or a villain? Why?***

I found it hard to judge Ned, due to the many conflicting reports on his life, and I think this is why people are still fascinated about him.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

## Before reading the text

### Activity 1

What does the cover of *Meet Ned Kelly* tell you about the book?

- Who do you think the book is about?
- Who is the author?
- Who is the illustrator?

Does the back cover give you more clues about the book?

- Does the back-cover blurb explain why the figure on the front cover is wearing an iron helmet?
- Where do you think the book is set?
- What time period do you think the story is set in?
- Do you know what a bushranger is? List everything you know about bushrangers and the times in which they lived.

### Activity 2

- What do you know about Ned Kelly and life in early Australia? Make a list and add to it as you read the book.

# Discussion questions and activities by key learning areas

## English

- Cloze exercise: predict the use of rhyme by blanking out certain words from the text (see Worksheet 1).
- Story grammar: Create a simple story map of the key elements in the story: Setting; Characters; Beginning; Middle; End (see Worksheet 2).
- In the tradition of classic Australian ballads such as 'Waltzing Matilda', *Meet Ned Kelly* is written in rhyming verse. Do you think this style suits a story about a legendary historical figure such as Ned Kelly? Why? Can you think of any other classic poems or ballads about early life in Australia? Choose one to read aloud to the class.
- *Meet Ned Kelly* is set in the 1800s in Australia. List some of the words in the text that give you a clue that this is a book set in the past (landowner, bushranger, gaol, bail up!). Are any of these words still used today? What are the modern equivalents of these words?
- On spread 4, Ned says, "This life is unfair! ... Police are drunk or they're greedy. There's no justice from landlords, nor from the law, to help out the poor or the needy." This is a fictionalised account of how the author imagined Ned Kelly would speak. To research this, the author read the Jerilderie Letter, the only written account we have from Ned of his actions in his own words. Investigate the Jerilderie Letter (see Resources) and list the reasons Ned gives for becoming a "forced outlaw".
- Some of the words in the book are bigger than others. Why do you think the publisher has chosen to emphasise these words? Does it change the meaning of the story? Have a go at putting emphasis on different words and see if it changes the meaning.
- There is a timeline at the back of the book with facts about Ned Kelly's life. How is the language in this section different from the rest of the book?
- Have a go at writing a verse poem about your own life so far.

## History

- Why do you think we are still talking about Ned Kelly and his gang today? Why is it important for us to study history, and especially the history of Australia?
- What are the important events in your family's history? Interview your parents and grandparents about your family and then create a timeline of your family history.
- Ned Kelly had seven siblings and four half-siblings. Create a family tree of the people in your family.
- We are lucky to know a lot about Ned Kelly because we have a number of written documents from people who knew Ned, including the police officers who arrested him and the judge who sentenced him. We also have a letter from Ned himself, explaining his actions. There have also been a number of stories and folktales written about Ned since his death. Which sources do you think are more reliable: first-person accounts? Or stories and folktales? Why?
- Hold a class debate about written versus oral history and the reliability of both sources.
- The national Museum of Australia has Ned Kelly's armour in their collection, as well as photos of Ned and his gang. The State Library of Victoria has Ned's original Jerilderie Letter. What can we learn from these objects? And why is it important to preserve them in museums and libraries?
- On the third spread of the book we see a townscape in rural Victoria. What can we learn from this and other pictures in the book about the way of life in Australia in the 1800s. Look at things like transport and housing.

## Art and visual literacy

- *Meet Ned Kelly* uses images as well as text to tell the story of our most famous bushranger. How does it change if you read the text only? Or look at the illustrations only? How do the text and illustrations work together to tell the story?
- On spread 4, one line of the text forms part of the illustration. Why do you think the illustrator and author have done this? How does it change the way you interact with the text and the illustration? Does it draw you into the story and help you to identify with the character of Ned? Choose a recent event from your own life and illustrate it in the same way.
- Have a look at the colours the illustrator has used for the landscape throughout the text. How do they signal that this book is set in Australia? What other symbols of the Australian landscape can you find throughout the book?
- Contrast the portrayal of Ned and his gang to that of the police throughout the book. The Kelly gang are depicted realistically, whereas the troopers are quite stylised. Why do you think the illustrator has done this? Does it influence or inform your opinion of both the gang and the police?
- Examine spread 10. Ned's stance mirrors that of the police officer on the opposite page. Does this help to increase the contrast between Ned's position and that of the police? Does it help to show, for example, that Ned and his gang were outnumbered and out resourced by the police?
- Create a table with two columns (see Worksheet 3). In one column list everything you learn about Ned and his gang from the illustrations in the book. In the other column, list everything you learn about the police and other authority figures. Compare to the two columns. What does it tell you about what the illustrator might think about how Ned was treated by the police?

WORKSHEET 1

## CLOZE EXERCISE

Ned's men were now outlaws in danger.

Rewards were set up for their capture or death.

Ned Kelly was now a \_\_\_\_\_.

Ned and his gang robbed the bank at Euroa,  
though none of the men hurt the \_\_\_\_\_.

A bank teller mentioned that Ned was polite,  
did horse-riding tricks for a laugh.

'I've become a FORCED OUTLAW,' Ned always said.

'I'll harm none that doesn't harm me.

I hate those who bully and who are unjust,  
and there are more 'round these parts who \_\_\_\_\_.'

WORKSHEET 2  
**SIMPLE STORY MAP**

Book title \_\_\_\_\_

Author \_\_\_\_\_

Illustrator \_\_\_\_\_

**Characters** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Setting** \_\_\_\_\_

**Beginning**

**Middle**

**End**

WORKSHEET 2

## **ILLUSTRATION COMPARISON TABLE**

<b>The Kelly Gang</b>	<b>Police and other authority figures</b>
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- Poor (spread one)

- Patrolling the towns (spread 3)

## NED KELLY RESOURCES

### **Kelly gang photos, artefacts and interactive resources:**

<http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/explore/fact-sheets/ned-kelly-fact-sheet>

[http://www.nma.gov.au/education-kids/classroom\\_learning/units\\_of\\_work/ned\\_kelly](http://www.nma.gov.au/education-kids/classroom_learning/units_of_work/ned_kelly)

[http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/irish\\_in\\_australia/behind\\_the\\_scenes/kelly\\_gang\\_arm\\_our\\_installation?result\\_6095\\_result\\_page=4](http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/irish_in_australia/behind_the_scenes/kelly_gang_arm_our_installation?result_6095_result_page=4)

**The Jerilderie Letter:**

[http://www.nma.gov.au/collections/collection\\_interactives/jerilderie\\_letter/page\\_1](http://www.nma.gov.au/collections/collection_interactives/jerilderie_letter/page_1)