

RECOMMENDED FOR

Lower and upper primary and lower secondary

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TYPE OF TEXT

Picture book

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

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

THEMES

- Life in early Australia
- Religion in early Australia
- Women in early Australia
- Australian landscape
- Rural Australia
- Education
- Family
- Catholicism

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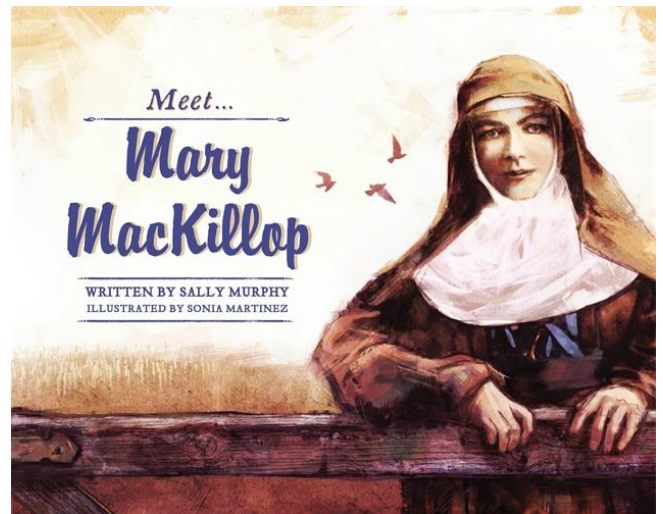
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MEET MARY MACKILLOP

Sally Murphy & Sonia Martinez

PLOT SUMMARY

Saint Mary MacKillop is Australia's first and only saint.

Mary believed all children, no matter how rich or poor, should be given the opportunity to receive an education.

Mary set up many schools around Australia, especially in remote areas. She also became a nun and founded a religious order called the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart.

This is the story of the first school Mary and her sisters established in 1866 in Penola, South Australia.

Mary MacKillop died in August 1909 at age 67. Mary was canonised more than one hundred years later, on 17 October 2010.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SALLY MURPHY is an Australian children's author and poet, who has had thirty books published, including verse novels, picture books, and educational titles. Sally lives in Perth with her family.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

SONIA MARTINEZ is an illustrator and graphic designer. She has studied ancient history, fine art and design, and recently graduated from Curtin University with a major in illustration. Her work incorporates many different styles and media, both digital and traditional. Sonia lives in Perth with her family.

AUTHOR INTERVIEW

1. Can you tell us a little bit about your research for *Meet Mary MacKillop* and the resources you used?

I read everything I could get my hands on about Mary – including books, websites and historical documents. The internet is always a good starting point for research, but it's always a good idea to read well researched books and articles as well.

2. Did your opinion of Mary MacKillop change or deepen as you wrote the book?

Yes. I already knew that she'd had to work hard to set up her schools, but I didn't really know just how hard she had to fight for what she believed in. As I researched and wrote the story, my admiration for her as a strong woman really grew.

3. Why did you choose to tell this particular part of Mary's story (setting up her first school and the Order)?

I needed to choose an episode of her life that showed both her motivation and the obstacles she faced. I think what she had to do to get started is a good indication of the struggles that she had for her whole life.

4. What was the most challenging part of the project?

Creating a sense of who Mary was as a person. I wanted to focus on the work she did, but I also wanted readers to get to know who she was. I needed to get to know Mary. Although she was very

strong and determined, she also had doubts and foibles, just like any human being.

5. What was the most rewarding part of the project?

Getting the chance to share Mary's story with readers who might not know it. Being named a Saint is wonderful, but there's the risk then that we'll lose sight of the human side of Mary MacKillop. Having the opportunity to write a story which shows who she was is really exciting.

6. Why do you think it took so long for Mary to be recognised as a Saint?

When she was alive, not everyone thought Mary was going about things the right way. Just like any other person, she had friends as well as critics. Some of the things her critics said about her when she was alive affected the process of making her a saint after her death. On top of that, the Canonisation process is always a lengthy one. Otherwise anyone who ever did something good could be declared a saint – which might be nice, but sainthood is reserved for people who do extraordinary things and who continue to influence the world after their death.

ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW

1. This is a historical picture book based on a real life story. 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 able to find a lot of photographic sources for Mary MacKillop's early life?

I'm lucky that the old Penola school house is still standing and I was able to use Google Maps to wander the streets of Penola and get a feel for the town and landscape. There are quite a few portraits of Mary after she became a nun, but there are only a few grainy pictures of her and her sisters before that, so I had to be a bit creative. I looked at historical photos from the period to get an idea about things like which hairstyles and dresses were fashionable at the time, but I tried not to get too caught up in the historical detail. It was more important to me to make the characters seem expressive and relatable.

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

I began with loose line drawings based on my collected reference images. I then tidied up the

sketches by laying tracing paper over the top and drawing over them with pencil. I scanned these cleaned up drawings into the computer, recoloured the sketches, and then filled them in with textures, brushstrokes and colour in Photoshop.

3. What was the most challenging part of the project?

Starting with such an iconic photographic image of Mary then imagining her without the nun's habit, and from different angles and with different expressions, was something I found quite challenging. I was illustrating in a more realistic style than I'm used to and had to try to make the characters look consistent from page to page.

4. What was the most rewarding part of the project?

It was fun putting a human face on an historical figure, and trying to make the characters seem like real people. I enjoyed illustrating the relationship and obvious love between the MacKillop sisters.

5. What do you see as Mary MacKillop's most important contribution to Australian life?

I think that Mary MacKillop is an example of someone who truly lived and worked for what she believed in. She helped people understand and value the importance of education for all children, rich or poor. This is reflected in what we value in Australia now: the idea that every child should have the chance at an equal start in life no matter the circumstances they are born into.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. What does the front cover of *Meet Mary MacKillop* tell you about the book?

- Who is the subject of the book?
- Who is the author?
- Who is the illustrator?

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

- Does the blurb explain why Mary is dressed the way she is on the front cover?
- In what time period do you think the book is set?
- What does the blurb tell you about what Mary believed in?

3. What do you already know about Mary MacKillop and life in Australia in the late-1800s? Make a list

and add to it as you read the book. Make sure you look for clues in the illustrations as well as the text.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BY KEY LEARNING AREAS

English

- Story grammar: Create a simple story map of the key elements in the narrative: Setting; characters; beginning, middle and end (See Worksheet 1).
- The story is set in the 1800s in outback Australia. List some of the words in the text, and the objects in the illustrations that give you a clue that the book is set in the past (e.g.: stagecoach, clothes). Are any of these words or objects still used today? What are the modern equivalents of these words and objects?
- Throughout the text Mary and the other characters use dialogue or direct speech. These are fictionalised accounts of how the author imagined the characters would speak. To research this, the author looked at the many letters Mary wrote over her lifetime to her family, friends, bishops, priests and fellow nuns. In particular, when Mary and her sisters were setting up the school in Penola, Mary often wrote to her mother, updating her on their progress. Have a look at some of these letters (see Resources) and write your own version of a letter from 'Mary' to her mother.
- There is a timeline at the back of the book with facts about Mary's life. How is the language in this section different from the rest of the book?

History

- Why do you think the work Mary MacKillop did is still important today?
- Mary MacKillop had three sisters and four brothers. Starting with your grandparents, create a family tree of the people in your family.
- We are lucky to know a lot about Mary from the many letters, journals and accounts she herself wrote, as well as those by the people around here. Many of those documents are now preserved in museums. Why is it so

important to learn about history through first-person accounts? Choose an important event or memory in your life and write about it in a series of diary entries or letters.

- Visit the Mary MacKillop Place website (see Resources) for a virtual tour of Mary's last home and the current site of the Mary MacKillop Museum. What can we learn from looking at places where Mary lived and taught?
- On the first spread of the book we see Mary in a stagecoach. Research the history of stagecoach travel in Australia. What other objects can you find in the illustrations that tell you about the way of life in Australia in the 1800s. Look at things like clothes and buildings.

Art and Visual Literacy

- *Meet Mary MacKillop* uses images as well as text to tell the story of Australia's first saint. How does the story change if you read the text only? Or look at the pictures only? How do the text and illustrations work together to tell the story?
- Have a look at the colours the illustrator has used for the landscape throughout the book. How do the colours signal that this book is set in Australia? What other symbols of the Australian landscape can you find throughout the book?
- Look at the clothing worn by the lady and boy on spreads 5 & 6. Compare them to those worn by the lady and boy on spreads 8 & 9. What do these differences tell you about the backgrounds and circumstances of both sets of characters?
- The illustrator used historical photographs from the 1800s to get an idea about things like which hairstyles and dresses were fashionable at the time. Look at a recent photograph of you with your family and friends. What do you think your clothing and hairstyle will tell future generations about 2013? What are the main changes you can see between fashion in the 1800s and today?
- Draw a map of your school and label the key buildings.

WORKSHEET 1: SIMPLE STORY MAP

Book title:

Author:

Illustrator:

Characters:

Setting:

Beginning
Middle
End

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Mary MacKillop's life, legacy, photos and virtual tours:
<http://www.marymackillop.org.au/>
- Mary MacKillop and the national curriculum:
http://www.marymackillopplace.org.au/museum/curric_links.asp
- Mary MacKillop and Penola:
<http://www.mackilloppenola.org.au/>