



RECOMMENDED FOR

Lower and upper primary

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** History, English, Literacy

THEMES

- Australian History
- Role of women in society

PREPARED BY

Random House Australia

PUBLICATION DETAILS

ISBN: 9780857983879 (hardback)

ISBN: 9780857984883 (ebook)

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Meet Nancy Bird Walton

Written by Grace Atwood

Illustrated by Harry Slaghekke

PLOT SUMMARY

Nancy Bird Walton grew up during the golden age of aviation. By the time she was 13, Nancy knew she wanted to fly. When she was 18, Nancy studied under the famous aviator Charles Kingsford Smith. This is the story of how Nancy began her career as Australia's first female commercial pilot.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Grace Atwood loves stories of all kinds. She lives in Sydney with her family and a slightly unhinged silver bengal cat.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

As a child growing up in the 1970s, **Harry Slaghekke** was always captivated by the exciting and powerful illustrations used on model construction kits of that era, and how they would transport him to other dramatic times and places. Very often the theme was aviation, a passion that has remained with him.

Whilst at art school, Harry had the good fortune to learn those same full-colour rendering skills that he had once admired.

These days, Harry works as an illustrator, taking on the challenge of making clients' ideas come to life through a variety of styles and subjects, as well as some of the influences from nostalgic imagery that was used during the 40s and 50s. He's always drawing, even when he's not working.

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

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

Nancy Bird Walton was such an interesting woman to research. She had done lots of interviews and written her own book, so there was no shortage of information about her.

Did your opinion of Nancy Bird Walton change or deepen as you wrote the book?

Absolutely. Before writing the book, I hadn't quite realised how dangerous flying was in the 1920s and 30s. Navigational tools were non-existent, and the wings of some aircraft were made out of fabric . . . You had to be fearless to be a pilot in the early days of aviation!

Why did you choose to tell this particular part of Nancy's story?

I thought this part of Nancy's story best illustrated her determination to do something different. Women pilots hadn't gone on barnstorming tours before Nancy and Peggy took off in 1935.

What was the most challenging part of the project?

Choosing what part of Nancy's inspirational life to focus on. She is very well known for her connection to the Flying Doctors, and I thought it would be worthwhile showing what she'd done prior to that.

What was the most rewarding part of the project?

Seeing the story come to life so beautifully under the skilled hand of illustrator Harry Slaghekke.

What do you think is Nancy's greatest legacy?

I think she is a role model for any person who has a passion to follow a path less travelled. Her success certainly opened the way for women to become commercial pilots.

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

As well as books, you do illustration for lots of different mediums. What are the main differences between illustrating picture books and your other illustration work?

With commercial illustration, the aim is often to promote the product or service. Taking the depiction of apples as an example, we tend to make them look perfect in shape and rich in colour, with perhaps a hint of fine water droplets on the skin to imply freshness. With book illustration, you have an opportunity to be more authentic in what you illustrate, not to always show everything at its best, but how best to convey elements of the story as it may have been.

This is a historical book, based on real people and their stories. Did you have to do a lot of research to get the historical details right, such as how people looked and what they wore?

I probably spent as much time researching and gathering reference images as I did illustrating, in order to be happy with elements in each scene. Sometimes, though, there are just no historical images available, and there is a need to be mindful that we are telling a person's story and not just creating a historical reference book on de Havilland aeroplanes. So, as they do in the movies, I took a little bit of artistic licence with the detail.

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

I have spent most of my earlier illustration career working with traditional mediums, and love that painterly feel that was often used in the 1940s. Today, however, digital illustration offers a lot more

speed and versatility to the artist. My goal has been to try to create that lovely period feel, with the advantages of the digital technology. I still start with a pencil sketch, and then work in layers beneath it working from the background to the foreground, with a few of my few favourite digital paintbrushes – and ‘saving’ often!

What was the most challenging part of the project?

The most challenging part is illustrating what you can't see or, to put it better, illustrating that which you have had no reference to what it may have looked like. For example, the inside of a 1930s hangar or workshop. So you do the best job you can in creating what it *may* have looked like in order to convey the story.

What was the most rewarding part of the project?

The most rewarding part is when (with the aid of good references) you can create an illustration that looks like you were there at that time, painting that person or scene. They often look the most authentic and are able to transport you back to the time when Nancy was there. The front cover is one of my favourite illustrations for that reason.

Did you know much about Nancy Bird Walton before the project? Did your opinion of her grow or change through the course of the project? How?

I had heard of Nancy Bird Walton before but never knew her personal story, so it was a real privilege to get to know of this courageous young Australian woman and the risks that she took. I hope she inspires a new generation of young Australians to have courage and belief in themselves and what they would like to achieve in their lives.

3. What do you already know about Nancy Bird Walton and the role of women in aviation? Start a list and add to it as you read the book.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. What does the front cover of *Meet Nancy Bird Walton* 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 who Nancy Bird Walton is and what she is famous for?



KEY STUDY TOPICS

English

Questions

1. Create a simple story map of the key elements in the narrative e.g. the setting; characters; beginning, middle and end. See Worksheet 1.
2. The text in *Meet Nancy Bird Walton* is organised into simple sentences and short paragraphs. Does this style suit the story? Why? Discuss how the text works in conjunction with the illustrations and why it is effective to have only short paragraphs on each page.
3. There is a timeline at the back of the book with facts about Nancy's life and career. How is the language in this section different from the rest of the book?

History

Questions

1. When Nancy Bird Walton and Peggy McKillop set off on their first barnstorming tour in 1935, they had to use incomplete road maps, a compass and a watch. How different do you think the same trip would be today? Think about the advancement in technology and transport.
2. Nancy was born in 1915 in Kew, New South Wales. Considering the time period and the town she grew up in, why do you think her father initially didn't want her to become a pilot?
3. Do you think Nancy's career has been a positive influence on the role of women in aviation in Australia and worldwide? Why?

Activities

1. Research the life of another female aviator, such as Amy Johnson, Jean Batten or Amelia Earhart. Create your own 32-page picture book about your chosen subject, complete with illustrations. See Worksheet 2.

Visual Literacy

Questions

1. Illustrator Harry Slaghekke has used a particular style of drawing in the book. What kind of style is it? Why do you think he chose this particular style for Nancy's story?
2. Can you tell that the story is set in an older time by just looking at the illustrations? How has the

illustrator created an impression of 1930s Australia? See Worksheet 3.

Activities

1. Choose one spread from the book to analyse. Make two columns. In one column write down everything the text tells you about the story on that page. In the other column, write down everything the illustration tells you about the story on that page. Does the illustration tell you extra things that are not in the text?

OTHER BOOKS IN THIS SERIES



Meet Ned Kelly
by Janeen Brian & Matt Adams

Ned Kelly was born in 1854 in Beveridge, Victoria. This is the story of how Ned Kelly became Australia's most famous bushranger.

Teachers' resources available.



Meet Mary MacKillop
by Sally Murphy & Sonia Martinez

Mary MacKillop is Australia's first saint. Mary believed all children, no matter how rich or poor, should have the chance to learn. This is the story of the first school Mary opened with her sisters in 1866 in Penola, South Australia.

Teachers' resources available.



Meet Captain Cook
by Rae Murdie & Chris Nixon

Captain James Cook was an English explorer and Navy captain. In 1770 Captain Cook and his crew on the HMB *Endeavour* were the first Europeans to discover the east coast of Australia.

Teachers' resources available.



Meet the Anzacs
by Claire Saxby & Max Berry

Anzac stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. It is the name given to the Australian and New Zealand troops who landed at Gallipoli in World War I. The Anzac name is now a symbol of bravery and mateship. This is the story of how the Anzac legend began.

Teachers' resources available.



Meet Douglas Mawson
by Mike Dumbleton & Snip Green

Douglas Mawson led the first Australian expedition to the Antarctic. This is the story of how Mawson survived the dangers and challenges of the frozen Continent.

Teachers' resources available.



WORKSHEET 1: STORY MAP

Book title:

Author:

Illustrator:

Characters:

Setting:

| |
|------------------|
| Beginning |
| Middle |
| End |

WORKSHEET 2: RESEARCH PROJECT

Nancy Bird Walton is one of many inspirational female aviators who were pioneers of their time. **Amy Johnson** was the first woman to fly solo from England to Australia. **Jean Batten** was the first woman to fly a round trip from England to Australia. **Amelia Earhart** was the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic.

Choose a female aviator to research. Think about what they have contributed to the role of women in aviation. Why did they want to become a pilot? What obstacles did they have to overcome? What did they achieve? Collect photos and facts, then write your own story about what makes your chosen female aviator historically significant.



Amy Johnson



Jean Batten



Amelia Earhart



WORKSHEET 3: VISUAL LITERACY

In 1943 J. Howard Miller created this propaganda poster in an effort to provide an inspirational image to boost worker morale in wartime America. However, it was only in the 1980s when it became famous. It was widely produced in many forms and used to promote feminism.

The style of illustration is similar to the style Harry Slaghekke used in *Meet Nancy Bird Walton*. What do you think he was trying to achieve by using this style?



ORDER FORM

| TITLE | AUTHOR | ISBN | SCHOOL YEAR | RRP | QUANTITY | TOTAL |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| Meet Nancy Bird Walton | Grace Atwood | 9780857983879 | K-4 | \$24.99 | | |
| Meet Ned Kelly | Janeen Brian | 9781742757186 | K-4 | \$19.99 | | |
| Meet Mary MacKillop | Sally Murphy | 9781742757216 | K-4 | \$19.99 | | |
| Meet Captain Cook | Rae Murdie | 9780857980175 | K-4 | \$19.99 | | |
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