My Name is Lizzie Flynn - A Story of the Rajah Quilt
by Claire Saxby
Illustrated by Lizzy Newcomb
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Outline:

Based on the true story of a quilt made by convict women on board the Rajah, bound for Australia. Lizzie Flynn has nothing but her name when she boards the Rajah, which is bound for the penal colony of Australia. On board the Rajah the convict women were given a “useful bag” containing among other things fabric and needle and thread. The women were taught to sew and together they made the Rajah quilt which is currently housed in the National Library.

Author/Illustrator Information:

Claire Saxby was born in Melbourne and grew up in Newcastle. She’s lived in more houses than she can remember, and attended many schools. Claire is the author of many books including There Was an Old Sailor, illustrated by Cassandra Allen, which won the Crystal Kite Member Choice Award, Australia and New Zealand Division, Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators, 2011.

As a child, Lizzy Newcomb would sit and watch her dad draw and hand-colour his architectural plans; this inspired her love of art. Sydney-born and raised, she spent most of her childhood exploring the bushland near her home and began a love affair with nature. Lizzy has studied nursing, travelled throughout Europe and Scandinavia, and run a business producing handmade ceramic pieces. In 2006 her first solo exhibition sold out and she has held an exhibition each year since. My Name is Lizzie Flynn (written by Claire Saxby) is her first book.

How to use these notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

National Curriculum Focus:*
Exploring The Text

The subtitle of this book is “A Story of the Rajah Quilt”. What is a quilt? What is the Rajah Quilt? Research it online.

Why do you think the author chose to name the book My Name is Lizzie Flynn? How does this title connect the reader to the main character over other characters in the story?

The women were given useful bags on boarding containing the following: (Source: Patchwork Prisoners by Trudie Cowley and Dianne Snowdon)

- One Bible
- One hessian apron
- One black stuff apron
- One black cotton cap
- One large hessian bag (to keep her clothes in)
- One small bag containing:
  - One piece of tape
  - One ounce of pins
  - One hundred needles
  - Four balls of white sewing cotton
  - One ball each of black, blue and red sewing cotton
  - Two balls of black worsted, half an ounce each
  - Twenty-four hands of coloured thread
- One cloth bag with eight darning needles, one small bodkin fastened on it
- Two stay-laces
- One thimble
- One pair of scissors
- One pair of spectacles, when required
- Two pounds of patch-work pieces
- One comb
- One small comb
- Knife and fork to each mess (of 12)
- Ball of string to each mess

Why were the women given these bags? Why would the authorities want the women to sew a quilt? Research any of these items you are familiar with.

If you were making up a “useful bag” today, what would you include? In what circumstances would a useful bag be useful? e.g. Could your school back pack be considered a “useful bag” for every day?

Visit your school library to find other books about convicts being transported to Australia. After reading them, have a class discussion to compare and contrast how different authors and illustrators may have handled the same subject differently.

Lizzie and Molly become friends aboard the Rajah. How does this friendship help Lizzie through such a difficult time? How does Molly’s death affect Lizzie?

Research the author, Claire Saxby. What other books has she written? Which of these books can you find in your school library? Choose your favourite and present it to the class using persuasive language to encourage others to read it. Read more about Claire at www.clairesaxby.com

“…her stitches, neat and tiny like a baby’s eyelashes.” The author has used a simile in this quote. What is a simile? How does it add richness to the text? Find other examples of similes in the book. Write five similes of your own.

Martha is dragged away to the brig. What is a brig? Why was she taken there?

“The past is a misted memory. The future has no shape.” How does this quote show how Lizzie is feeling at this point in the story?

“A lifetime later the hatches are thrown wide…” The author is using an exaggeration in this line. Why do you think she chose to write it this way? Write a list of exaggerations that you use regularly.

This story is historical fiction. What does that mean? How could the book be different if it was purely non-fiction?

Write a journal from Lizzie’s perspective from before she stole the shawl, through her journey on the Rajah to landing at Van Diemen’s Land. Include how she might be feeling and how her relationships develop with other characters in the story.

How would you feel if you were taken from your family and sent to the other side of the world?

How long did it take to make the journey from England to Australia? How long does it take now? Investigate different forms of transport and estimate the travel time. Which way would you choose to travel? Think about the benefits and challenges in each.

History

Lizzie states that the Rajah is bound for Van Diemen’s Land. Where is that? What is it known as today?

The Rajah Quilt is now housed in the National Gallery of Australia. Why do you think this quilt is significant enough to be held in a museum? What does the quilt symbolise about the women who were transported on the Rajah?

Use your school library or the Internet to research the Rajah. When did it leave London? Where did it land? Plot the ship’s journey on a globe or world map. Why did the ship carry just women convicts?
Look at the clothes worn by the characters in the book. How are these clothes different to the clothes people wear today?

Can you name some early Australians? How many of them are male and how many are female? Research some early Australian women and the reasons they are remembered. Why were men recognised more often than women? Is this different today? Is it still changing?

Illustration

Examine the illustration on the first spread and take note how the illustrator has represented these characters. What emotions do you think they’re feeling? Are they rich or poor? What do you think they might be thinking about? What might they be leaving behind and what may they be facing in the future?

Discuss the use of colour in the illustrations, particularly in the sky. What are the predominant colours in the first half of the book and what are the predominant colours in the second half of the book? What do these colours symbolise? What might the illustrator be trying to make the reader feel by using these colours?

If you were illustrating the story, which pictures (if any) would you do differently? Why? Choose one passage from the book and create your own illustration to accompany it.

Visual Arts

Quilts are made by laying out different fabrics in different patterns which are then pieced together. Using coloured paper, cut triangles of different sizes and piece them together to make patterns. Make a small ‘quilt’ using triangles and A4 paper.