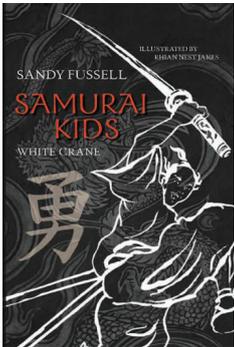


# Walker Books Classroom Ideas



## Samurai Kids Book 1: White Crane

Author: Sandy Fussell  
Illustrator: Rhian Nest James  
ISBN: 9781921150203  
ARRP: \$15.95  
NZRRP: \$17.99

\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

Walker Books Australia  
Locked Bag 22  
Newtown, N.S.W., 2042

Ph +61 2 9517 9577  
Fax +61 2 9517 9997

These notes were created by Sue Whiting.  
For enquiries please contact:  
educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au

Notes © 2012 Walker Books Australia Pty. Ltd.  
All Rights Reserved

## Outline:

Niya Moto is the only one-legged samurai kid in Japan, famous for falling flat on his face in the dirt. None of the samurai schools will teach Niya, until a letter of offer arrives from the legendary samurai warrior Ki-Yaga, Sensei of the Cockroach Ryu. Niya joins the four other students of the Cockroach Ryu, all with challenges to overcome, and as they learn traditional samurai skills they become firm friends. Sensei knows appearance is not a measure of strength: "Cockroaches are only small, but they are very hard to kill," he teaches and the Cockroaches soon discover that differences can sometimes be advantages.

## Author/Illustrator Information:

**Sandy Fussell** lives south of Sydney with her husband and two sons. She studied mathematics at university, is intensely interested in history and now works in IT. From the moment she could read, Sandy loved books and always wanted to be a writer. In school, she wrote what she refers to as "booklets" and "terrible plays that the teacher made the class perform". After school, Sandy forgot about writing for a long time and started a family. She came back to writing after one of her children stopped reading and she suggested that they write a book together. *Samurai Kids: White Crane* is Sandy's first children's novel.

**Rhian Nest James** spent most of her school years avoiding the Maths and P.E. teachers by taking refuge in the Art room. So it was a most natural progression, upon leaving school, that she should attend the local Art college in Cardiff (Wales); and then go on to study illustration at Exeter College of Art (England). Rhian has been a freelance illustrator since 1986 and has illustrated for all sorts of publications, including many children's books. She now lives with her husband in Sydney, Australia.

## 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.

### These notes are for:

- Primary years 5 & 6
- Secondary year 7

### Key Learning Areas:

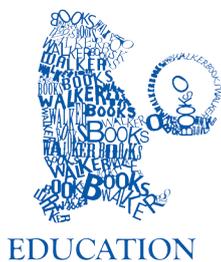
- English
- HSIE/SOSE
  - Art
  - ICT

### Example of:

- Junior/ Illustrated Fiction
- Historical Fiction
- Cultural Diversity

### Themes/ Ideas:

- Friendship & Teamwork
- Disability/ Ability
- Discipline
- Bullying



# Walker Books Classroom Ideas

## Sandy Fussell's inspiration for *Samurai Kids*

"In the beginning there was one sentence. It came from nowhere but it stuck in my brain.

*My name is Niya Moto and I'm the only one-legged samurai kid in Japan.*

And then I started to think what it would be like to be Niya. I practised a few flying leaps, one-legged, in the back yard. So I quickly discovered the next line – Famous for falling flat on my face – And that was the last of my input because from then on the characters dictated to me and I just followed. But behind all that is a love of Japanese history and culture. I've never been to Japan but one day..."

## Discussion Questions and Activities

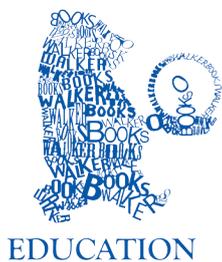
### Talking and Listening Activities

- Questions to discuss about characterisation:
  - » Why do you think the book is called *White Crane*?
  - » How, in Japan, does the crane symbolise hope, honour and loyalty, happiness and 'wholeness'?
  - » How and why do you think Niya identifies with the crane – physically and spiritually?
  - » What makes each character 'different'? How do these differences contribute to each character's strengths?
  - » How does one character's strength compensate for another's weakness?
  - » Yoshi will not fight, even to win a team point at the games – is this right?
  - » Why do you think Sensei believes that some of the old ways need to change?
  - » Which character do you like the best? Why?
- Debate topics:
  - » *White Crane* is not a story about disability. It is about ability.
  - » Ki-Yaga is a great teacher.
- *White Crane* is an historical novel. The time, place and activities e.g. sword making, are real. The children and the Games are not. How much of an historical novel should be factual? Discuss.

- Discuss the similarities and differences between the Cockroach Ryu and the Dragon Ryu. Is one better than the other? Why / Why not?
- Students assume a character and field questions from the class, answering how they think the character would answer.

### Reading Activities

- The author researched feudal Japan and the life of a samurai thoroughly before writing *White Crane*. Identify aspects of the book that reflect this research.
- Create a character profile for each of the samurai kids and Ki-Yaga. Note each character's appearance, strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, personality traits etc.
- Ki-Yaga has many wise sayings; for example, "A cracked bowl can hold water. There is nothing wrong with the bowl. It just needs to be held properly" (p14/15). Collect other similar sayings and then try to explain what they mean.
- What are the skills that the samurai kids must learn and practise for the Samurai Trainee Games? Divide the class into small groups, giving each group a different skill to research and then present to the class. (e.g. archery, sword fighting, haiku etc.)
- There is a glossary of "Useful Words" at the back of the book. Choose some other "useful" or "interesting" words from the book to add to the glossary. Pool ideas and create a class glossary for *White Crane*.



# Walker Books Classroom Ideas

- The Japanese kanji symbols at the beginning of each chapter represent the seven virtues of bushido. Find in the book where these virtues are listed, then find the dictionary meaning for each virtue.
- Each samurai kid has a spirit totem. Create a chart as per the example below.

Kid	Totem	Why this totem suits the character
Niya	White Crane	
Yoshi		
Taji		

## Writing Activities

- Writing haiku poetry is one of the skills taught at the Ryu. Study examples of haiku and list the special features of this form of poetry. Write a haiku poem about one of the characters from *White Crane*.
- The author has used some wonderful imagery in *White Crane*, often employing elements of Japan in this imagery, e.g. 'noodle balls of nostril hair' and 'eyebrows raised like pagoda rooftops'. Collect other examples, then as a class create some more, using these as models.
- Read the scene in Chapter 5 where the Sword Master is making a sword. List the steps involved, then write a procedural (method) text for sword making.
- The samurai kids take a dangerous journey to the Games (Chapters 9 and 10). Write a recount of this journey.
- Sensei's story of the Dragon and the Cockroach is based on Aesop's fable – The Lion and the Mouse. Read The Lion and the Mouse and other examples of fables. Discuss fables and their features. As a class, try to adapt the text of a different fable to create a new one.

## Cross-curricular Activities HSIE/SOSE Activities

- Divide the class into small groups. Each group is given one topic relating to the historical and cultural background of *White Crane* to research then present to the class.

Possible topics:

- The Samurai
- Bushido
- Clothing
- Food
- Geography of Japan
- Kanji
- Weapons
- Gembuku
- The Komusu
- Animals - crane, bat, tiger, snow monkey, wolf, long-tailed rat, striped gecko
- Language
- Customs
- Shakuhachi flute

- How was life different for a child in feudal Japan compared to today? How was it the same? Make a list of differences and similarities. Decide when you would have preferred to live and describe why.

## Art Activities

- Origami is one of the skills taught to the samurai Kids. Read some origami instruction books and follow the instructions to create origami figures. See [www.origami-club.com/en/](http://www.origami-club.com/en/) for some examples, ranging from very easy to more challenging. Draw your own Japanese inspired design on a square of paper and use it as origami paper.

## Samurai Kids Series

- Book 1: White Crane 9781921150203
- Book 2: Owl Ninja 9781921150371
- Book 3: Shaolin Tiger 9781921150906
- Book 4: Monkey Fist 9781921150913
- Book 5: Fire Lizard 9781921529467
- Book 6: Golden Bat 9781921529474
- Book 7: Red Fox 9781922077509
- Book 8: Black Tengu 9781922077622

