



Alexander the Great: Reckless Conqueror by Carole Wilkinson

The Drum series, black dog books

Teacher Notes prepared by Joy Lawn, Children's Literature Consultant

Readership: Upper primary, junior to mid secondary)

Genre: Factual; with fictional chapter introductions told as recounts

About Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great was born in the northern Greek kingdom of Macedonia in 356 BC, to Philip II and his wife Olympias. Alexander was educated by the philosopher Aristotle. Following his father's assassination in 336 BC, he inherited a powerful yet volatile kingdom, which he had to secure — along with the rest of the Greek city states — before he could set out to conquer the massive Persian Empire, in revenge for Persia's earlier attempts to conquer Greece.

Against overwhelming odds, he led his army to victories across the Persian territories of Asia Minor, Syria

and Egypt. With his greatest victory at the Battle of Gaugamela, in what is now northern Iraq, in 331 BC, the young king of Macedonia, leader of the Greeks, Overlord of Asia Minor and Pharaoh of Egypt also became Great King of Persia at the age of 25.

Over the next eight years, in his capacity as king, commander, politician, scholar and explorer, Alexander led his army a further 11,000 miles, founding over 70 cities and creating an empire that stretched across three continents and covered some two million square miles.

The entire area from Greece in the west, north to the Danube, south into Egypt and as far east as the Indian Punjab, was linked together in a vast international network of trade and commerce. This was united by a common Greek language and culture, whilst the king himself adopted foreign customs in order to rule his millions of ethnically diverse subjects.

Primarily a soldier, Alexander was an acknowledged military genius who always led by example, although his belief in his own indestructibility meant he was often reckless with his own life and that of those he expected to follow him. The fact that his army only refused to do so once, in the 13 years of a reign during which there was constant fighting, indicates the loyalty he inspired.

Following his death in 323 BC at the age of only 32, his empire was torn apart in the power struggles of his successors. Yet Alexander's mythical status rapidly reached epic proportions and inspired individuals as diverse as Julius Caesar, Cleopatra, Louis XIV and Napoleon.

The history of Alexander the Great is very one-sided. There is no written account of the Persians' side of the story. He is remembered there not as "the Great" but as "the accursed". Alexander is revered as a great soldier and world conquerer, but his conquest came at a great cost. Hundreds of thousands of people died for his cause—some in the battles, some from starvation after his army had stripped the countryside of food. He destroyed towns, cities and empires and didn't set in place strong government after their defeat. His empire was short-lived and disintegrated after his death. He built military garrisons not palaces and temples. There are few traces of Alexander in the world today.

About the author

Carole Wilkinson is an award-winning author of books for children. She has a longstanding fascination with dragons and is interested in the history of everything. Carole is a meticulous researcher who finds it difficult to stop researching and begin writing. She once searched for weeks to find out whether there were daffodils in Han Dynasty China. Carole is married, has a daughter, and lives in inner-city Melbourne.

Teaching Applications

KEY LEARNING AREAS

SOSE/HSIE

Ancient History

- Primary sources such as coins and quotes from ancient historians are used by the author to piece together the facts about Alexander the Great. Some of these have been included in the book to bring ancient times alive. In pairs or trios, select a photograph or quote that tells you something new or interesting about the ancient world. Present to the class and explain why you have chosen this primary source and what you have learned.

- Ancient Greece Read chapters 1 and 2 to gain a thumbnail sketch of Ancient Greece. Use this book as part of a study of Ancient Greece.

- Alexander as man and conqueror

1. Write a character profile of Alexander as either man or conqueror.

2. Pictorially represent the time-line of important events in Alexander's life. See page 173. Suggested method: print some of the events in large font and design an accompanying logo for each. Example: Alexander's death – the logo could be a picture of a gold cup with a red cross drawn through it. A red question mark could be next to the cup.

- Military Campaigns Alexander's military campaigns are described throughout the book, beginning on pages 14, 15 and 26. In groups, select a campaign. Represent concretely. Suggested method: Use coloured counters (or equivalent) to represent Alexander's fighting forces. Use another colour to represent his opponents. Place on a horizontal board or cardboard, which has the topography or other details sketched on. Present to the other groups. Compare Alexander's warfare with subsequent invasions, such as those by Napoleon in the 1800s and Operation Desert Storm in Iraq. See page 143.

- Discussion Text Type After reading about Alexander's maintenance of his empire, discuss: How should Alexander have maintained his empire?

- Group Research Select one of the following topics and research.

1. Hanging Gardens of Babylon See page 9

2. Sport Alexander's soldiers played sphaira, a violent game similar to rugby. See page 69. Research and demonstrate (using mock, rather than physical, contact; or use models).

3. The Gordian Knot See pages 55-56

4. The Illiad by Homer See pages 49-51

5. The city of Alexandria See page 86

6. The Great Terrace in Persepolis See page 101.

7. Armour

Democracy Contrast Aristotle's model of democracy, on page 13, with that of modern-day Australia (particularly as part of a unit of work on Democracy and Government).

Bias After reading about the biased, or one-sided account, by the Greeks of Alexander's conquests on page 169, write a one-sided account of a current war or political event. Either take the aggressor or winner's point of view, or write from the underdog's position.

SCIENCE / ENGLISH

Communication Communication was much slower and less efficient in the past. Alexander and Darius had to rely on men on horseback and in sailing ships. Due to their communication lines, they both misinterpreted where the other's forces were. See pages 66 and 67. How would this situation have differed with modern communication? Discover other methods of communication used in the ancient world.

ENGLISH

Reading

- The author asks questions about Alexander on page 3, 'What sort of a boy grows up to be a world conqueror? What urges drove Alexander to achieve such feats? What exactly was it that made Alexander so great?' Consider these questions while reading the book and write your findings as a 3-columned table.
- Mythology Alexander believed he was descended from the gods, including Heracles (Hercules). See page 54. Research Heracles, Zeus, Achilles or another Greek god. Present the information as a poster and speech, while dressed as the god.

Writing

- The Alexander Romance is described on pages 167-168. Alexander's adventures have been exaggerated and changed by storytellers over time. They have even been set in different countries such as India, and Alexander has possibly been referred to in the Bible and Qur'an. Select one of Alexander's escapades or campaigns, set it in Australia and elaborate and romanticise the account in written form. Do this by making Alexander into more of a hero than he was and by adding Australian details. Suggested focus: portray him as a leader (Prime Minister or Premier) of Australia, an entrepreneur, bushranger or explorer.

- Research Carole Wilkinson, the author, is renowned for her thorough research. She is careful to balance the researched facts with interesting writing. Read a chapter with this in mind. Then, either do some research on a topic from Ancient History or use some other recent research you have completed on this or another topic. Now, imagine you are writing for young children. Transform the facts you have found into a page of interesting writing for children. If you can, read them to students in a younger class and see if 1. they seem interested, 2. they can tell you what the research was about.

- Creative writing Continue writing Alexander's account after crossing the river, before reading ahead to see what happened. See pages 138-142

Speaking and Listening

Exposition Text Type Argue or debate, 'Alexander should have retreated after conquering Persia.'

PHILOSOPHY

- Aristotle After reading pages 12 and 13, discover some of Aristotle's beliefs from other sources. Write (individually or in small groups) in bold inside speech bubbles and make a class montage, with the speech bubbles coming from a large-scaled diagram of Aristotle with open mouth. Discuss whether you agree or disagree with each.

VISUAL LITERACY

Book design and layout The design of Alexander the Great is 1. aesthetically pleasing (attractive), and 2. assists synthesis (processing and understanding) of information. Identify and analyse these attributes in the following features. Record your findings in 2 columns.

- illustrations
- subheadings
- break-out boxes For example, page 102 'Altogether Alexander collected around 180 000 talents in Persia – equivalent to 468 tonnes of gold.'
- maps pages 16, 122
- tables pages 38-9, 43, 93
- photos

CREATIVE ARTS

Craft

- Jewellery Read pages 28 to 32 for details about jewellery. Make a piece of costume jewellery based on this description. Hint: Use modelling clay and wire, or other materials.

Visual Arts — Design

- Trousers Read the description of the Persian trousers on page 114. Sketch an outline on a piece of fabric, cut out, and design a pattern using permanent markers or fabric pens.
- Purple Purple dye was made from a sea snail in Alexander's times. It was very expensive. Find other names for shades of purple, such as mauve. Mix paints to create different shades and tones of purple. Paint a royal cloak, using darker colours in the folds.