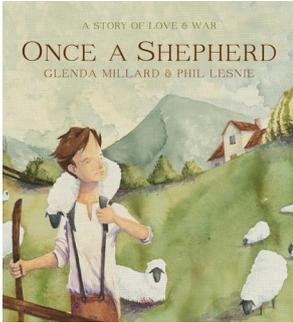




Walker Books Classroom Ideas



Once a Shepherd

Author: Glenda Millard
Illustrator: Phil Lesnie
ISBN: 9781921720628
ARRP: \$27.95
NZRRP: \$29.99
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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Outline:

Once there was a shepherd, a very special coat – and hope.

Author/Illustrator Information:

Glenda Millard was born in the Goldfields region of Central Victoria and has lived in the area all her life. It wasn't until Glenda's four children became teenagers that she began to write in her spare time. She has been writing full-time since 1999 and has published several books for children. Her first book with Walker Books Australia, *Isabella's Garden*, was awarded Honour Book in the Picture Book of the Year category in the 2010 Children's Book Council of Australia Awards, and won the Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year Award, Best Book for Language Development, Lower Primary Category (5-8 years), 2010; and short-listed for the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards Children's Book – Mary Ryan Award, 2010.

Phil Lesnie is a Sydney-based illustrator, and is very new at this. He is so new that he still blushes when people look at his pictures or read words he's written. In fact, just this moment, in a place very far from you, he has suddenly begun to blush and has no idea why. *Once a Shepherd* (written by Glenda Millard) is his 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.

These notes are for:

- Primary years 1-5
- Ages 5+

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Picture book

Themes/Ideas:

- War
- Love
- Loss/grief
- Hope

National Curriculum Focus:*

English content descriptions include:

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
ACELA1787	ACELA1460	ACELA1478	ACELA1490	ACELA1502
ACELA1447	ACELA1462	ACELA1483	ACELT1602	ACELA1504
ACELA1451	ACELA1469	ACELA1484	ACELT1603	ACELT1608
ACELT1581	ACELT1587	ACELT1594	ACELT1605	ACELT1609
ACELT1582	ACELT1589	ACELT1600	ACELY1689	ACELT1795
ACELT1584	ACELT1591	ACELY1677	ACELY1691	ACELT1611
ACELY1657	ACELT1593	ACELY1678		ACELY1700
	ACELY1665			
	ACELY1668			

*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.



Walker Books Classroom Ideas

Glenda Millard on *Once a Shepherd*

In 2005 I was the recipient of a May Gibbs Fellowship in South Australia. As part of the fellowship I agreed to work with the Grade 5 girls at Seymour College in Adelaide. Mary Clark was the Teacher Librarian at the time and we communicated for several months before I arrived in Adelaide, as to how to best use my time with the students.

I wanted to take the girls through a process that I sometimes use when I'm looking for an idea for a new story and suggested an off-campus excursion to a number of different locations around the city of Adelaide, including the Adelaide fresh foods market, a Japanese garden and a St Vincent de Paul charity shop. Mary was very supportive and made all the necessary arrangements for transport and permissions, etc.

I prepared questionnaires for each of the locations we visited, so the girls would have notes to bring back to the classroom. The idea was to find something that would stimulate our curiosity and then use a questioning technique I provided – to discover more about it. The desired outcome was that our chosen items and the questions we would ask ourselves about them would, over the weeks of my visit, lead to the framework of our stories.

To demonstrate to the students in a practical way that this could be achieved, I volunteered to do the same. The object I chose was an old military coat at St Vinnie's. Over the four weeks that I was at Seymour, the girls and I – and their teacher Mary Clark – all worked to construct a story around our own chosen subject. My story, of course, evolved into *Once a Shepherd*.

In conjunction with the project undertaken at Seymour, there are a few things which I think also contributed to my story. I am very fond of second-hand items and hand-me-down treasures, especially from people I love. Often, the stories behind these items and the people they belonged to previously are as much the attraction as the items themselves. My mother used to make soft toys for my sister and I when we were little girls. I did the same for my daughter when she was young.

And finally, to you Phil, a huge thank-you for the beautiful art work. What a fabulous first book! You are to be congratulated on the perseverance and diligence that I am sure went into making your illustrations just right. I hope you get lots of commissions for other picture books once this one is out in the big wide world!

Phil Lesnie on *Once a Shepherd*

By and large, Glenda's books make me cry, and unsurprisingly I cried when I read her text for *Once a Shepherd*. I also panicked, because I was already a very big fan of hers, and it's pretty terrifying to be asked to illustrate a book for one of your heroes. What if I blew it?

And to begin with, I was blowing it. The initial storyboard sketches I submitted were a disaster. My great, grand idea was that Tom Shepherd would go mad in the trenches, and would see both allied and enemy soldiers as lambs. The initial draft of the two page spread in the trenches was actually populated by sheep in uniforms. At the time I thought this was terribly clever – soldiers both innocent as lambs and lambs to the slaughter – but my amazing editors steered me very gently off this path and onto the far more empathetic book as it exists now. I'd been striving for commentary, but Glenda's story is about empathy and forgiveness and grief and healing – it seems obvious now, but I hadn't realised the possibility and importance of an anti-war statement that doesn't disrespect the memory of the people caught up in that terrible machine. That's something I thought about a lot over the year it took to paint this book, and became a guiding principle – to paint from a place of human understanding.

Of tremendous inspiration to me while I was painting were the WWI comics of Jaques Tardi, as well as Pat Mills and Joe Colquhoun's *Charley's War* comics. Their research was impeccable, but it was Tardi's haunted and gaunt faces in the trenches that always inspired me to try harder and strive for greater empathy. Meanwhile, when I was drawing the scenes set in and around Tom and Cherry's home, I must confess with a little embarrassment that my greatest ally was a television show called *Edwardian Farm*. I'd begin to draw, say, a gravel path for Tom and Cherry's wedding, and then a mad thought would occur to me: "Did they actually have gravel back then?" It's a silly question, but when I was drawing everyday things from another part of history, I suddenly didn't know anything for certain, and of all things, *Edwardian Farm* always seemed to have the answer.





Walker Books Classroom Ideas

Discussion Questions and Activities

Before reading *Once a Shepherd*, view the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:

- The title of the book
- The author
- The illustrator
- The publisher
- The blurb.

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? Revisit your answer after reading the book. Were you correct or incorrect? Discuss the phrase “don’t judge a book by its cover”.

Read the book aloud in class. After the first reading give students the opportunity to openly discuss their thoughts and feelings towards the text. Use the following questions to help prompt the discussion:

- What is this story about?
- Where is this story set?
- Who are the characters in this book?
- Is there a message in the text?
- Why do you think the author would write a story like this?
- How does this story make you feel? Write a list of words to describe your emotions.

What is a shepherd? What does a shepherd do?

When and where is this story set? Using visual cues, discuss the place and time.

Grief is a major theme in *Once a Shepherd*. What does grief mean? When do people feel grief?

Glenda Millard uses a number of literary devices in *Once a Shepherd* such as simile and metaphor. Find examples of each in the book and discuss how this use of the device adds to the text.

Examine the illustrations on the first three spreads. What mood has Phil Lesnie tried to convey with his choice of colours and composition? Compare this with the fourth spread where Cherry is sewing Tom’s greatcoat. How is the mood different in this spread? What impact does this change in mood have on the story?

What is the significance of Tom helping an enemy in the middle of a battlefield? What does that say about his character?

Who is the enemy Tom and his army mates are fighting? Examine the helmet on the seventh spread for a clue.

“Tom knelt to help an enemy and fell, no more to rise.” Discuss Glenda Millard’s choice of words to describe Tom’s death. How would this spread be different if she had simply said “Tom was killed while helping an enemy”?

Based on the illustration on the eighth spread, what do you think happened to the stranger? Why does he go to visit Tom’s wife? What is he taking to her?

What is the significance of Cherry making a toy lamb for her son? What did she make it out of?

Examine the facial expressions on the following spreads and make a list of words for how each character is feeling:

- Tom’s face on spread 1
- Cherry’s face on spread 4
- Tom’s face on spread 6
- Cherry’s face on spread 9
- Cherry’s face on spread 10.

Discuss the following with students:

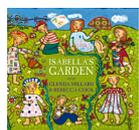
- Who would be most likely to read this book and why?
- Who would you recommend read this book and why?

Write a review for *Once a Shepherd*. Remember to include a description of the story and your personal feelings/thoughts about the book.

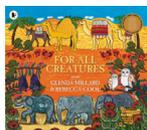
Visit your school library and find other books about war or grief. Present one of these books to your class, explaining the similarities and differences to *Once a Shepherd*.

Although *Once a Shepherd* is a fictional story, there were many men, similar to Tom Shepherd, who lost their lives in WWI while fighting for Australia and New Zealand. Discuss the meaning of Anzac Day and why we commemorate these fallen soldiers on this day.

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Rebecca Cool
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