

Australia's Great War: 1917

By
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It is October 1916, and the effects of The Great War are being felt across Australia. Ordinary families are all affected, each in their own way, and Maggie and her big brother Alex are no exception. Having left his job as a mechanic with Melbourne Tramways, Alex (Ace) has enlisted in the Australian Flying Corps and now lives at Point Cook Air Base tending to the planes he has loved since he was small. For Maggie, the differences in her daily life are not yet so obvious, but 1917 is approaching and will bring with it challenges, opportunities and dangers that Maggie and Ace will struggle to face.

RECOMMENDED READING LEVEL: Lower to Mid Secondary

TEACHER NOTES

- Ace and Maggie's family are pacifists. What does it mean to be a pacifist? What did it mean in 1917? As a class, discuss what set of beliefs would define someone as a pacifist.
- Ace was in a protected occupation as a mechanic on the Melbourne Tramways. What was a protected occupation and what did it mean to be in one? Research protected occupations during WWI. Make a list of several and hypothesise as to why they were

important. Choose one to research in greater depth and write a brief report outlining both why it was protected and the potential consequences to Australia as a whole if there were no people available to work in that role.

- Why did the Women's Peace Army come into existence? What were they promoting, and why? Design and create a flyer that you think would be appropriate for a WPA member to hand out to passers-by.
- From the discussions in the novel, what do you think are some of the arguments that people in 1917 were making both in support of the war and against it? As a class, discuss these arguments. Why did so many Australians see it as important for Australia to participate in a war that was precipitated by European politics? What do you think the response to a similar situation today would be, and why?
- When Ace leaves for England, his family all respond in different ways. In small groups, discuss the various responses that his parents and siblings had. Why do you think they reacted as they did?
- What happened to Australian citizens of German descent living in Australia in WWI? Is Mrs Bennet's story typical? As a class, discuss why this happened. Do you think it was a good and sensible policy for the government to follow? Why/why not? Write a short story from the point of view of one of Mrs Bennet's younger sons describing the impact of the war on his family.
- In chapter 16, Len tells Ace that he had to pretend to be Maori in order to enlist. As a class, discuss this enlistment policy. What does this tell us about Australian society and laws at the time? What (aside from the obvious of being able to enlist or not) do you think the emotional impact of such a policy was on the general population, and on Indigenous Australians? What messages was the government sending by creating and allowing such a policy?