

# TEACHERS' NOTES

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## Aussie Heroes Series - Dame Nellie Melba

Written by Gabiann Marin, illustrated by Rae Dale

### 1.Synopsis

Six-year-old Helen Porter just wanted to sing on stage. As a child, and then a teenager, she continued to pursue her dream of being a great opera star.

Born Helen Porter Mitchell, she changed her name to reflect her Melbourne heritage. In 1887 Nellie Melba made her operatic debut. She went on to sing in all the great opera houses of Europe. During World War 1 Nellie Melba worked tirelessly holding many fundraising concerts for the war effort.

Nellie Melba was the first great Australian Diva.

### 2.Author /Illustrator Style/Medium

Gabiann has written Dame Nellie Melba as a narrative for children eight years and above. Rae Dale has added her beautiful illustrations to enhance the story and add a splash of colour to an interesting tale of a quite tenacious and talented woman.

Both Gabiann and Rae thoroughly enjoyed working on this book and learning more about Dame Nellie Melba's life.

### 3.Author/Illustrator Motivation

Dame Nellie Melba is the first book in the Aussie Heroes series. Further books in the series include Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, Fred Hollows and Mary MacKillop.

Gabiann was keen to write about female heroes. She thoroughly enjoyed researching Dame Nellie Melba's life and is currently working on her next book for the series, based on the life of Mary MacKillop.



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Rae Dale brought the time and place to life. She researched the dresses and outfits that Dame Nellie Melba wore, going through numerous old photographs taken at the time. Rae has captured the diva qualities of Dame Nellie Melba, particularly so on the front cover where she is on stage surrounded by flowers.

#### 4. Author/Illustrator Background

Gabiann Marin is a script writer and children's author. Her books include the Mad Dog the Chef series, A True Person, Little Rosie Runaway and Dame Nellie Melba. Gabiann loves writing children's books and is a big kid at heart.

Rae Dale has illustrated many books big and small with her warm friendly drawings. A graduate from Swinburne, Victoria, she is always painting and drawing. Her interests are gardens, food and books especially ones about people. It has been a treat for Rae to illustrate Dame Nellie Melba's fabulous life.

#### 5. Educational Applicability

Themes of this book include:

Courage  
Tenacity  
Ambition  
Generosity  
Music  
Opera  
WW1

#### Discussion topics

##### Before reading the book

1. Discuss the role of a woman at the time and the contrasting attitudes and beliefs. (HSIE)
2. Explore the traditions: the social and cultural aspects of the time. (Drama)
3. Discuss classical music. Has anyone listened to classical music? What are their favourite songs? Do they know what opera is? (Music)
4. Discuss significant people past and present in Australia. Were they known outside of Australia? (HSIE)
5. Discuss Australia's involvement in WW1



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### After reading the book

1. Was it hard for Nellie Melba to become an opera singer? In 1882 do you think women had a career?
2. What clothes would the men and women have worn at the time? What was expected of a young girl?
3. Have you heard of any of the songs Melba sings? What about Gilbert and Sullivan? Why do opera singers need to be trained? Why do you think Melba had to go to Europe to sing?
4. Was Melba known well outside of Australia? Why do you think Australians disliked her early on in her career?
5. What did the Red Cross do to help soldiers in WW1? How did Melba make a difference?

### Creative Arts

Role play as the great diva Dame Nellie Melba. Imagine being dressed up in petticoats and long dresses in the heat in Mackay.

Listen to some of the music Dame Nellie Melba sang:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGd7c4McSUc>

Listen to The Mikado by Gilbert and Sullivan. Sullivan famously snubbed Dame Nellie Melba saying he might be able to find her a part in the chorus of The Mikado.

Literature circles: in groups readers discuss their responses to the book. Write responses down. Each group decides how they will showcase their discussion to the rest of the class. Topics can include:

WWI  
Music and Opera  
Time and Place



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