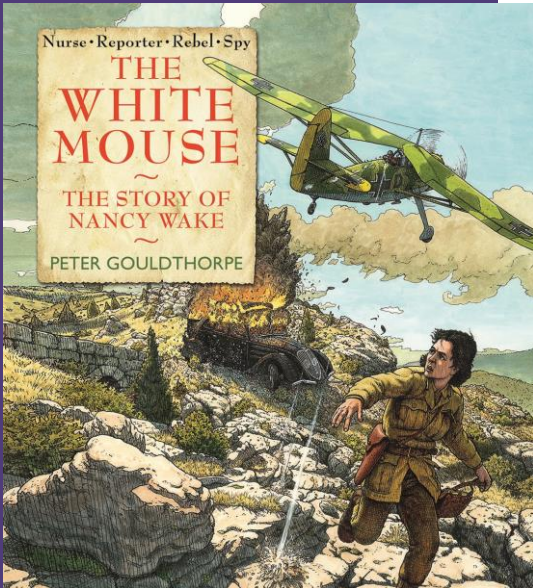


# Teachers' Notes

## The White Mouse: The Story of Nancy Wake

Written and illustrated by  
Peter Gouldthorpe

Teachers' Notes by Rae Carlyle



### OMNIBUS BOOKS

Category	Picture Book
Title	The White Mouse: The Story of Nancy Wake
Author/Illustrator	Peter Gouldthorpe
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## Introduction

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When the Second World War broke out in Europe in 1939, Nancy Wake was living in France and working as a foreign correspondent for a British newspaper. This seemingly unremarkable woman, however, would turn out to be anything but ordinary. With her adopted country under German occupation, she devoted herself to doing everything she could to help impede the German military from within occupied France. Together with her husband, Henri Fiocca, Nancy became an integral part of the French Resistance movement. Nancy Wake was the most wanted woman in wartime Europe, and the most highly decorated Australian woman ever. *The White Mouse* tells the story of Nancy's incredible bravery, and her determination to see the Nazi regime defeated.

## About the Author/Illustrator

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Peter Gouldthorpe has lived in Tasmania for over forty years and has a very varied artistic output. As well as creating award-winning books for children, he also paints landscapes, portraits, sets for film and television as well as his popular trompe l'oeil murals. His latest mural was for the Melbourne City Council in (Chrissy) Amphlett Lane. He has been a finalist in the Glover Prize, winning the People's Choice in 2010. As well as writing his own stories he has illustrated books for Paul Jennings, John Marsden, Colin Thiele and Gary Crew. His work is held in public and private collections throughout Australia. He has undertaken many Tasmanian Government Art Site projects, and one of his murals recently received heritage listing.

His first illustrated book was *Jonah and the Manly Ferry*. Since then he has illustrated many picture books, winning the CBCA Picture Book of the Year in 1994 with Gary Crew for *First Light*. Together they created his only Tasmanian story, *The Lost Diamonds of Killiecrankie*.

His most recent books are *No Return: Captain Scott's Race to the Pole* and *Ice, Wind, Rock: Douglas Mawson in the Antarctic*. Peter was awarded Honour Book in the Eve Pownall Award for Information Books in the 2014 CBCA Awards for *Ice, Wind, Rock*.

## Activities

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### English

*The White Mouse: The Story of Nancy Wake* is a non-fiction graphic novel. As a class discuss both what defines the genre of graphic novels, and the differences between non-fiction and fiction novels within the genre. Some questions that you may find useful as discussion starters include:

- 1) What is a graphic novel?
- 2) How does a graphic novel differ from a picture book?
- 3) How does a graphic novel differ from an illustrated novel?
- 4) Which features, in your opinion, are essential for a book to be considered a graphic novel, and which are common but optional? Why do you think this – what do the specific features you have identified contribute to the storytelling, and how?

One of the defining features of graphic novels is that the illustrations play a key role within the narrative structure. Unlike an illustrated novel, the visual narrative in a graphic novel will frequently convey as much, if not more, information about the main plot progression and events as does the textual narrative.

- 5) In what ways might non-fiction graphic novels differ from fictional ones? Consider the visual narrative specifically, and how it enhances and reflects the textual narrative, but also how it might differ from the textual narrative in terms of its portrayal of specific factual information as opposed to fictionalised information.
- 6) *The White Mouse* is non-fiction. This means that the textual narrative is factual, and contains only verifiable historical information, while the illustrations have been drawn and coloured by Peter Gouldthorpe.
  - What might define an illustration (and hence a visual narrative) as non-fiction, fiction, or fictionalised fact?
  - Do you think that it is possible for the illustrations in a graphic novel to be entirely non-fiction? If so, why, and how might this be done?
  - Do you think that the criteria for defining a visual narrative as non-fiction are the same as those used for defining a textual narrative? Why/why not?
  - How would you define the illustrations in *The White Mouse*? Would you define all the illustrations in the same way, or would you define some differently from others? If so, which illustrations specifically would you place in each category and why?
- 7) Nancy Wake's is a story of danger, adventure, tragedy, courage and bravery. In *The White Mouse* Peter Gouldthorpe has managed to clearly convey the dramatic nature of her wartime life with eloquence and conviction. As a class discuss the choices made by the author in regard to the differences and similarities in tone and intensity of the visual and textual narrative structures used, and how the interaction between the two enhances the story. Some points to consider in your discussion are:
  - How would you describe the tone and style of the writing in *The White Mouse*?
  - How would you describe the emotional impact and tone of the illustrations in *The White Mouse*?
  - What is the overall emotional impact and tone of *The White Mouse* – what effect do the words and illustrations have on the reader when read and viewed in conjunction with each other?

- Why do you think the author/illustrator chose to combine a dramatic visual narrative with a comparatively matter-of-fact style for the textual narrative?
  - What might be the advantages and disadvantages of this approach?
  - Would the same approach also be appropriate for a fictional graphic novel? Why/Why not?
  - Consider the two-way interaction between visual narrative and textual narrative from both directions. How do the illustrations affect your understanding of the story told in the text, and how does the written narrative influence your understanding of the visual narrative?

8) Individually or in pairs, use your answers to the previous activities to help you create a visual map of the dramatic structure of *The White Mouse*.

- Using a piece of paper in landscape orientation, draw a horizontal timeline of Nancy Wake's story.
- Mark on the timeline the events illustrated and described on each page of the book.
- Using three contrasting colours of pencil or ink, graph three lines above your timeline showing the changing levels of dramatic tension in the book. Use one colour to represent the levels depicted in the illustrations, another to represent the levels found in the text, and the third colour to show what you feel the overall levels are.
- Write a paragraph for each of the different peaks, troughs, and gradients on your timeline graph, describing the visual and textual features within the relevant pages that contributed to your assessment of the varying tension levels. Remember, your analysis of the tension-level is a personal opinion and will differ from other people's opinions; the important thing in this exercise is to provide evidence from the book that helps you justify why you have that opinion.
- Write your explanatory paragraphs on your timeline. You might wish to write them directly on the same piece of paper, or you can write them on separate pieces of paper and either attach them to the timeline or arrange them around the outside. Make your layout as clear and easily comprehensible as you can, and be sure to visually link the paragraphs to the points on your timeline graph that they are discussing.

9) *The White Mouse* is written in the present tense. As a class discuss why the author might have chosen to do this and what effect it has on the reader. What factors might have influenced Gouldthorpe's decision, and why?

## Creative Activities

10) Individually or in pairs, choose a scene or sequence of events in the book and rewrite it in a fictionalised format. You will need to include the factual events as described by Gouldthorpe and make logical assumptions based on the known facts about character motivations, feelings, and dialogue. For example, Gouldthorpe writes, *During a mission to blow up a heavily guarded armaments store, Nancy is creeping up on one of the guards.*

A fictionalised version of this might read *Nancy froze, her breath coming quickly and her heart pounding in her ears. The armaments store was just barely visible through the darkness ahead, but so was the guard. Swallowing back fear, Nancy took a slow deep breath and began to shift her weight carefully forward. Muscles quivering with tension, she crept out of cover and closer to the soldier with his rifle and bayonet.* Share your fictionalised story with the class and discuss what assumptions you had to make and why you made them, and how much of what you have written could be said to be factual.

- 11) Research Nancy Wake's life after World War Two and write a brief illustrated biography of her post-war career.
- 12) Colours that are seen as fashionable and desirable for clothing, furnishings and accessories in one era are seen as undesirable and outmoded in another. As technology changes, different dyes and materials also become available and bring with them new choices in colours used in everyday life. In addition global realities such as widespread warfare influence the colours that would be seen on a typical streetscape, as do cultural prerogatives and practices. Peter Gouldthorpe has chosen his palette carefully, and the colours used in the illustrations of *The White Mouse* are representative of the time and place he is depicting. In pairs or small groups, research the colours that were common and/or popular during at least two different decades in the last 100 years. You may wish to look at photographs in history books or old magazines in the library, or to search for images of fashions and furnishings online. Draw two similar pictures of a cafe scene, each scene set in one of the decades you researched. Use your research to guide your drawing in terms of the type and style of furniture, the clothing of the patrons, and the design of the cafe itself. Colour your scenes, choosing your palette from those colours that your research indicates are most evocative of the era.
- 13) Create an artwork using pen and ink and wash. You can choose to create a still life, a landscape, or a fictional scene based on an image you have seen or from your imagination. You can look at the illustrations in *The White Mouse* for inspiration, but choose your palette of colours carefully to suit your chosen topic.
- 14) Nancy and the Resistance fighters communicated with each other and with Britain using smuggled radios. They did not dare to simply broadcast their plans to each other, but had to use codes.
  - In pairs, research codes and how they were used by both sides during the Second World War. Some things to think about are: What is a code? How is a code different from a cipher? What makes a code difficult or easy to crack? What are some different types of codes?
  - Invent your own code and practise sending each other messages in it.
  - Swap messages with other students and see if you can crack each other's codes.
- 15) Visit the Australian War Memorial and view Nancy Wake's medals and decorations.

- 16) Design a medal to be awarded for bravery. Write a brief piece explaining the design choices that you made, the materials used to construct the medal, and what the different elements represent.
- 17) Some of the illustrations in *The White Mouse* contain complementary images within the background of the main pictures. For instance, in the illustration of the soldiers manning the Maginot fortifications, the sky contains a map of the relevant border area.
- Look at the imagery in the background of the illustrations in the book, and see how many different instances of overlaid images you can identify, and how many types of image there are.
  - Write a brief analysis of the use of background imagery within the book and comment on what you think each one represents, and how it enhances the message conveyed by the focal artwork.

## History and Geography

- 18) Compare the map inside the front cover to a modern map of the same area of Europe.
- Are there any differences that you can see between the map inside the front cover and a modern map?
  - Why do you think that the map might have changed so little?
  - Would a map of all of Europe be as little affected as the map of just France and its borders? Why do you think this?
  - Online or in the library, research the map of Europe and how it has changed over the last 100 years. Choose one area that has changed and write a brief passage sharing your findings about when and why the changes occurred.
  - What do you think that changes on a map represent for the people who live in the areas affected? Discuss the possible reasons for a map to change with your class, and hypothesise as to the fate and opinions of the people living in an area where the maps change.
- 19) Nancy's famous bike ride covered almost 500 kilometres. On a map of your local region, draw a circle around your school with a radius of 500 kilometres. If Nancy had started out from your school or home, which places could she have visited?
- 20) During their escape through the Pyrenees, the group of fugitives walked day and night to keep from freezing. Online, or in the library, research what temperatures are found in the French mountain passes. As a class discuss the effect of this sort of cold on people. If any members of the class have ever been anywhere that gets as cold as the mountains, ask them to describe what it feels like.