

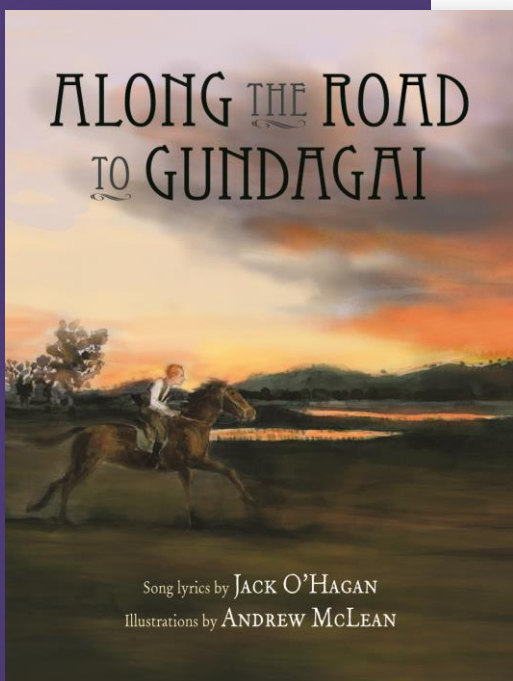
Teachers' Notes

Along the Road to Gundagai

Jack O'Hagan

Illustrated by Andrew McLean

Teachers' Notes by Rae Carlyle



OMNIBUS BOOKS

Category	Picture Book
Title	Along the Road to Gundagai
Author	Jack O'Hagan
Illustrator	Andrew McLean
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Introduction

Along the Road to Gundagai takes a classic Australian song and presents it as a picture book in the context in which it was written – amid the horrors of the First World War. Easily interpreted by the modern listener as a cheery tribute to childhood nostalgia, Andrew McLean’s stunning and evocative illustrations bring to alive the daily life the singer is longing to return to, as well as the war they are wishing to leave. The juxtaposition of the two very different series of events imbues the words with an extra level of heartfelt yearning.

About the Author

John Francis (Jack) O'Hagan was one of Australia’s most prolific writers of popular songs. Over a 50-year career, he wrote over 600 songs, including ‘Dog on the Tuckerbox’ and ‘Our Don Bradman’. He wrote ‘Along the Road to Gundagai’ in 1922, and it was an instant success, selling some 40,000 to 50,000 copies in the first three months of its release.

About the Illustrator

Andrew McLean is one of Australia’s leading illustrators, having won many awards for his work. Recent books include *Show Day* and *A Year on Our Farm* by Penny Matthews and *My Country* by Dorothea Mackellar. *Along the Road to Gundagai* is Andrew’s first venture into the world of digital art.

Andrew McLean’s iPad experience with *Along the Road to Gundagai*

‘I had lunch with an artist friend who showed us his iPad. I had immediate iPad envy and went out and bought one the next day. I purchased a few different art apps and played around with them. The one that suited me best was Sketch Club because it is simple to use and has the option of high resolution. Unfortunately there is no manual to go with it so I had to learn by “fooling around” with it. There are still functions on it that I haven’t the foggiest about. The appealing thing about the iPad is that you are doing what artists have done for centuries – this is marking on a surface. In the case of the iPad it is a hard glass surface. Although it is not a “true” touch-sensitive screen it mimics enough through the control of

transparency and speed of brush stroke – and also the different brush characteristics that make it look as though it is touch sensitive. It's very easy and natural to use – even a child could pick it up without much instruction. I've tried using Photoshop and Illustrator but I found them too difficult to learn and use. I was never satisfied with the generic look that they rendered. Neither program offers the same opportunity for “mark making” that the iPad does; they don't have the same immediacy either.

'I thought the iPad had the potential to be used as a sketch book and perhaps for simple picture books. *Along the Road to Gundagai* sort of happened by accident. I was going to send a few roughs I had done on layout paper in charcoal, coloured pencil and scant watercolour. I thought I would have a go at adding a little more colour with the iPad and was astonished at how quickly all my roughs could be transformed into something more substantial and approaching finished artwork. Omnibus liked the look of them and undertook some test printing to find out how they would translate from RGB digital files to CMYK prints. The result was good, so *Along the Road to Gundagai* was done on my iPad.'

Activities

English

Taken in isolation outside of the context of the time in which it was written, and without any illustration or explanation, *Along the Road to Gundagai* can easily be interpreted as a happy and positive song narrated by someone who is thinking nostalgically of their childhood. There is, however, a more emotionally powerful element to the yearning for home, which is presented clearly in the illustrations.

- 1) Read *Along the Road to Gundagai* to the class without showing the illustrations. Discuss the poem as read.
 - Speculate about what the author was feeling when he wrote it, how he envisioned his homecoming, and where he was at the time of writing?
- 2) Read *Along the Road to Gundagai* again, this time showing the illustrations. Discuss how the illustrations change the readers' understanding of the author's words and strengthen the emotional impact.

- 3) In the lyrics, the author describes scenes from his childhood that are important to him.
- List the natural features mentioned (e.g. gums, bluebells, river). List the manmade features (track, house). List the people mentioned.
 - The writer uses a variety of adjectives and verbs to describe the scenes that he is envisioning. Some of the words used are:
flowing growing playing
swaying sunny
 - What do these words have in common? Why do they help create a mental image of happiness and peace? Make a list of other words that might evoke a similar feeling if used to describe a journey home.
 - If you were writing a poem or song about returning to your home, what features, scenes and people would you want to include? Make a list of the three or four most important things that you would include. What words would you use to describe them?

The time, place and social context in which a poem, story or song is written affects how people are likely to interpret it.

- 4) How would the people hearing this song at the time when it was written have been likely to interpret it – what assumptions would they have made about the narrator? Would Andrew McLean’s illustrations have been likely to make a difference to their interpretation? Why/why not?
- 5) Read today, the book clearly has a dual narrative where many of the pictures tell a different story than those told by the words. Picture books often contain a dual narrative like this; sometimes there is an extra story contained in the illustrations, and sometimes the illustrations make it clear that the story is very different from that which the written narrative by itself would suggest.
- Visit the school library and see how many examples of dual-narrative picture books with contrasting written/visual plotlines you can find.

- Discuss the types of books you found. Can you categorise them by intended audience, age level, plotline, theme or type of protagonist? Are there any commonalities or differences between them?

All the illustrations are in the same style, but the illustrator has clearly chosen two very distinct colour palettes for the explicit and implied facets of the story.

- 6) Make two lists of words that could be used to describe the two colour palettes used by the illustrator.
 - Look at the lists of words. How many of them can also be used to describe emotional states?
 - Think of other words that can be used to describe pictures/imagery/scenes as well as describing emotional states.
- 7) The use of concrete words to also describe abstract concepts, such as 'I'm feeling blue' is an example of a metaphorical relationship. Think of other conceptual metaphors that we use every day to describe how we feel about things? (e.g. hot/cold and up/down– 'gave him the cold shoulder', 'hot under the collar', 'hot-tempered', 'cold-blooded' and 'I'm feeling down', 'you're in an upbeat mood', 'that is depressing', 'cheer up!')

History and Geography

When Andrew McLean researched the history of the song, he was reminded of his own father who served in the Australian armed services during the First World War. Even for families who didn't have a member fighting, the war made a huge difference in their daily lives in a lot of ways.

- 8) Research the First World War. How many Australians went overseas to fight in the war? How many were killed? How many were injured? What kinds of people became soldiers, and how old were they?
- 9) Write a short story from the point of view of an Australian child your age during the First World War.

- 10) How long did the First World War last? If you were alive and the same age as you are now in 1914, how old would you be at the end of the war? Write a short paragraph discussing the effect that you think growing up during a time like that would have on you.
- 11) Anzac Day and Remembrance Day are both days when we remember and honour Australians and New Zealanders who have fought in their country's service.
- What dates are they celebrated on?
 - What is the significance of the dates?
- 12) Compare a pre-First World War map of the world to one from the 1920s. What differences can you see between them? Compare them to a modern map. What other differences are there? Research and list some of the world events that have caused changes in the maps in the last 100 years. Use a blank map to show how some of the countries have shifted borders and changed name since 1914.

Science and Technology

The illustrations for *Along the Road to Gundagai* were done using an iPad. As little as ten years ago this would not have been possible.

- 13) What other technological changes have happened in the last 10 years? How have these changes affected the way we do things? Write a short paragraph discussing one technological change that has happened this century and how it influences people's daily lives.
- 14) If you have access to a drawing program or app, use an item of modern technology such as a desktop computer, iPad/tablet, or laptop to create an illustration for one of your favourite poems.

At the time of the First World War (1914), it took a lot longer to travel what we now consider to be relatively short distances.

- 15) Think of a trip that you and your family make on a fairly frequent basis that takes between 15 minutes and an hour.
 - How do you travel there?
 - How would people have travelled the same distance in 1914 and how long would it have taken?
 - Would you and your family travel there as frequently as you do now if you had to walk or travel by horse?
 - Make a poster showing the places that you travel to each week, how you get there, how long it takes, and how people in 1914 would have travelled there and how long it would have taken.

- 16) Choose one method of transportation depicted in the illustrations.
 - Does this method of transportation still exist? Why/why not?
 - If it still exists, how has it changed in both form and usage?
 - What methods of transportation exist nowadays that did not exist in 1914?
 - Design a method of transportation that you think might be common in 2114. Draw a poster showing your design and write a description of its features and common usage.

Creative Activities

- 1) Paint or draw a familiar scene using a subdued and dark palette. Paint or draw the same scene using a bright and cheerful palette.
- 2) Write a poem about returning to your home.
- 3) Choose a favourite song and illustrate some of the lyrics.
- 4) Create a crossword where the clues are concrete words (colours/temperature/direction or distance etc.) and the answers are emotions.

- 5) Most towns in Australia have some sort of war memorial nearby. If it is close enough visit yours and make a crayon rubbing and take a photograph of any plaque. If it is too far away to visit, find a photo of it online or in a book.
 - What are the different elements it has? (statue/plinth/plaque/wall etc.) Why does it have these elements and what do the various different ones symbolise? Design a new element such as a garden bed, statue, bench etc. to complement the existing war memorial.
- 6) Find a version of *Along the Road to Gundagai* and listen to the song. As a class create an instrumental/percussion accompaniment to the song that reflects the darkness and horror of the First World War.
- 7) Make a diorama of the 'old bush home' mentioned in the song, where possible using small pieces of native vegetation found near your school.

Health

Being homesick is something that most of us feel at some point in our lives.

- 1) Discuss what it is about being far from home that can make us feel sad.
 - If a friend is homesick, what are some of the things we can do to help them?
 - What are some of the things we can do to help ourselves when we are homesick?
 - What are some things we can do when we know we are going to be away from our families to make it easier for us?