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EDWARD BRITTON TEACHERS' GUIDE

Edward Britton Gary Crew and Philip Neilsen

Teacher's Notes

Edward Britton is a novel aimed at readers of Year 8 to Year 12. It is based on the lives of the convict boys of Point Puer, an extra-ordinary penal establishment constructed as an extension to the notorious Port Arthur prison for adult male convicts. The boys of Point Puer were aged from 10 to 18 years. They were kept completely separate from, and treated differently to, their counterparts at Port Arthur. Instead of a life of incarceration, torment and flogging, the boys were taught reading, writing and worthwhile trades in a program based on Parkhurst, the British Model Prison for Adolescent Boys on the Isle of Wight.

Point Puer operated from the mid 1830s until the 1840s when it was closed, being considered to be economically non-viable. It was, however, socially successful. Several thousand boys moved through the institution, and were so well integrated into main-stream Australian Society as tradesmen, forgetting their convict origins, that little historical evidence remains of their sordid backgrounds.

Because of the state of decay of its buildings, (hardly more than their foundations remain) the site of Point Puer is closed to the general public. Gary Crew and Philip Neilsen were privileged to enter this site in the company of a Port Arthur Historical Site Archaeologist. It was from this experience, and extensive research, that Edward Britton was written.

Research Activities

1. Find out all you can about the convict transportation system especially in relation to child convicts.
2. What were the minimum ages of such children?
3. What were some of their crimes?
4. Helpful texts are: Robert Holden's *Orphans of History: The Forgotten Children of the First Fleet*. [Text, Melbourne, 1999] and *The Fatal Shore* by Robert Hughes.
5. Find references to Point Puer [boy convicts] in Marcus Clarke's novel *For The Term of His Natural Life*
6. There was not one, but many Irish potato famines. Research their causes and effects on that nation and the attitudes of the Irish (even today) towards the British.
7. What roles did boys play in English theatre, going back to the days of Shakespeare?
8. What occupations would have been open to Susan and Edward in mid-nineteenth century Britain?
9. What is 'melodrama'? Do such performances still exist today - on both stage and television?
10. Define the terms 'hero' and 'anti-hero'

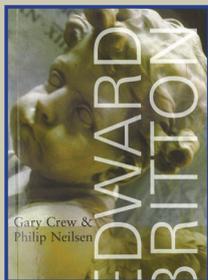
Debate/Discussion Topics

1. DEBATE: Izod Wolfe is the true hero of the novel Edward Britton.
2. DEBATE: In any prison system, punishment is more important than rehabilitation
3. DISCUSSION; Each author chose a character to develop. Who do you think wrote the chapters in Izod's voice, who the 'Edward' chapters - Crew or Neilsen?
4. DISCUSSION; Why do you think the authors chose to divide the writing of the book this way?
5. DISCUSSION Who would have written the Susan Buckridge Diary entries? Crew or Neilsen? Why?
6. DISCUSSION What use is made of the symbolism of the 'tiger wolves' or the theme of the

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'monster' throughout the novel and why is either one significant.

7. DEBATE 'People are animalistic and cruel by nature'.
8. DEBATE: 'Mrs Buckridge is more ignorant than an intentional villain'.
9. DISCUSSION: What characteristics of a hero does Susan demonstrate?

Writing Tasks

1. Presuming that Izod Wolfe did learn to write (as well as read) to whom would he have written and on what topic? Write such a letter by a 'literate' Izod.
2. Susan Buckridge left a best friend called Harriet Downes in England. Write a letter from Susan to Harriet telling of her problems at Point Puer.
3. In formal prose, write a report in Commandant Booth's voice, telling of the death of Buckridge, the escape of Edward Britton and the 'hanging' of Izod Wolfe.
4. Write a brief narrative telling what became of Hecht and Mrs Buckridge.
5. The story tells of the fate of the Thylacine or Tasmanian tiger. Write a non-fiction account [magazine article] examining of extinction of this creature for a magazine entitled Lost Species of Australia.
6. In the role of a radical feminist, write a critique of the role played by females in the novel for the magazine entitled NEW WOMAN.

Viewing

1. Based on information in the book (and perhaps maps of Port Arthur) draw a map of the Point Puer Boys' Prison, noting all relevant sites as they occur in the story.
2. Based on information in the book, draw the back drop/sets for Edward's melodrama.