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MEMORIAL TEACHERS' GUIDE

Memorial Gary Crew and Shaun Tan

Introduction

Students at primary and secondary levels will get a great deal from this brilliant picture book. It is both moving and poignant, and will engage the reader and involve a wide range of different abilities to interpret the illustrations and the texts. There is much to interest and engross pupils. There are also many issues to look at, so curriculum material across several Key Learning Areas can be dealt with by using Memorial.

Introductory Activities

- Before reading, hold up the book and show the class the outside cover. Ask students about the title and what they think the book is about.
- After reading:
 - The title, Memorial, has a stark impact. What does it refer to? Could you think of a different solution from the one portrayed in the story?
 - Go to the last line of the book. Look at the importance of memories. Have a class discussion about memories.

Studies of Society and the Environment

Families

- Gary Crew portrays his characters as a particular type of folk by the way they speak, what they say and how they behave. Make a study of this and also look at the wisdom of the older people who have experienced so much.
- Look at the way in which things are handed down from generation to generation — in this instance a family gathering and discussion about subjects that involve all of them. Through reminiscing, memories and experiences are related, and the younger generation has a sense of belonging, as well as a sense of place. Look at the text as an example of oral history. Examine this in more detail.
- *Collective memory*. What things are handed down through families — how do children learn? What wisdom of their own do they have? The narrator shows he can interpret comments by the older folk that mean something different from what is being said. Give some examples of this.
- How many generations of the narrator's family are present in the story? We are told the names of only one of the characters — yet we learn a great deal about all of them. What do we know about the various members of the family? Do a short biography of each of them.
- Make a *family tree* for the story. Pupils can make one for their own family.

Setting

- Where is this book set? How do you know?

History

- How many wars were the narrator's family involved in? Which members of the family were involved in which wars?
- Make a chart with time lines indicating when each war took place — there are clues in the book.

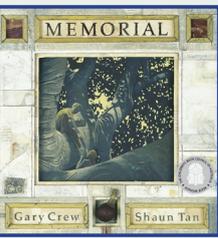
Research

- Find out about how soldiers were enlisted and went to the First World War.
- Did the same conditions apply in the Second World War? What about Vietnam?
- What is the significance of: 'There's some things you don't want to remember, son'? Why

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doesn't the narrator's father ever talk about Vietnam?

- Why was there such a contrast between the first two wars and Vietnam? Listen to the thought-provoking songs of Eric Bogle, which will give more background and insight into some of the things referred to in the story. *The Diggers' Legacy; I Was Only Nineteen; And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda; All the Fine Young Men; Dedication Day* are examples of his songs which expand our knowledge of these events.
- Another source of the reality and conditions endured in the First World War are the war poems of Wilfred Owen.
- Reveille. Last post. Have you heard these? When? Why? What is their origin?

Geography

- Find out where Ypres is. What happened there during World War One?

Issues

- What is this story about? What are the arguments for and against? What do you think? Arrange a debate on the subject.
- Other things arising from the story that can be discussed are: old age, war, progress, council decisions and what you can do about them. Have a look at comments made on this subject — even if you don't succeed — what is it that makes it worthwhile to have done something? Do you agree with this comment? Give reasons to support your answer.
- Further subjects which can be discussed are: history and tradition and, as people, how we have a sense of belonging and place.
- Make a list of other issues that arise throughout the book.

Environmental Studies

- What type of tree is the one featured in the story? Find out more about these trees. How long do they live? What is established in the story about the tree? What use was the tree? What purposes did it serve?

Visual Literacy

- An enormous amount can be gleaned by 'reading the pictures'.
- Make a special study of this story as told through the illustrations, for example the ominous sequence where we realise the tree has been cut down. Look at the impact of this mode of communication. Write what you learned from the pictures.
- Look at the use of symbols in this book — for example seeds, birds, bits of cloth. What does each of these convey? Can you find other instances of the use of symbols?

Art

Illustrations — The brilliant pictures by Shaun Tan reflect the simplicity of the country town atmosphere.

- Make a detailed study of the illustrations — sepia pictures, text contained in frames, juxtaposed with the contrast of expansive double page spreads. What is the effect of each of these?
- What medium is used for the illustrations?

Design

- Encourage pupils to make comments on the front cover and the end papers.
- Make a close study of the illustrations, and the way in which they are laid out.

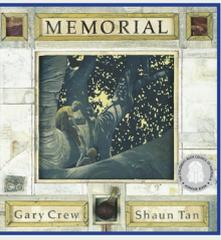
Human Development

- Aspects of ageing can be dealt with using *Memorial* as a springboard. Men's behaviour can be touched on in that the author indicates it is hard for them to show their real emotions; for example great-grandpa covers up his tears and makes excuses for them.

Language and Literacy

- Who is telling the story? How old do you think the narrator is? Give reasons for your conclusions.
- What is this story about?
- Write a short piece, in your own words, about what you learned from this story.
- The text is complex and challenging, yet simple — how is this achieved?
- Background information — look at the way in which casual remarks lead to our overall knowledge.
- Look at examples of unwritten text in this story.
- Write a short piece entitled ‘Memories’.

Teachers notes written by Nancy Mortimer.



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