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Angels of Kokoda

David Mulligan

Teachers's Notes

Derek Anderson's parents are missionaries in Papua New Guinea, working as a doctor and teacher. Derek loves the lifestyle, and in particular the culture and traditions of the family of his best friend, Morso. Yet Derek's parents aren't keen on him spending too much time with Morso – they'd prefer he kept within the mission and spent his time on his schoolwork and learning about Christianity.

When it is announced that World War Two has begun Derek's mother and sister are sent back home to Sydney immediately. Derek is supposed to go with them, but that would mean losing his best friend and his home. He hides away in the jungle to avoid having to leave.

Yet the war is more horrific than Derek could have imagined. He and Morso find themselves assisting a patrol of Diggers, as their experience in the jungle means they are almost silent when walking. Derek is fighting for his life against the Japanese soldiers who are intent on taking control of Papua New Guinea, and killing anyone who stands in their way.

Told in the third person as well as through letters back to Australia, Angels of Kokoda gives an amazing insight into an area of Australia's history that has rarely been covered. A 'faction' novel, this will be a fantastic resource for students to read alongside studies of World War Two in their History and SOSE classes. In addition, Angels of Kokoda brings up a number of issues such as race, religion, friendship and humanity.

Language & writing style

Do you know what these words and phrases mean? Talk about their meanings with the rest of the class, use a dictionary or extra research to find a definition.

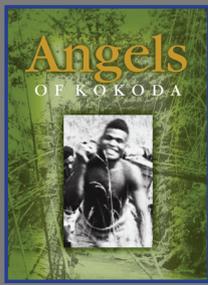
- Heathen (p.11)
- Schooner (p. 28)
- Pagan (p. 49)
- Scabies, yaws tropical ulcers, leprosy (p. 53)
- Digger

Angels of Kokoda contains many letters to Lizzie from Derek that were never sent. Why do you think the author has chosen this writing technique?

Do you think it is an effective writing tool to gain an insight into Derek's emotions?

These letters were never sent. What do you think this implies?

At one point Derek writes, 'maybe I'm writing to myself but I don't know why' (p.102). What does he mean by this? Refer to chapter 25 for the reason the letters were not sent.



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ANGELS OF KOKODA TEACHERS' GUIDE

From the book

What does it mean for Derek to be initiated as an Orakiva? (pp. 46 -7)

Some of the Australian soldiers are referred to as 'chocolate soldiers' (p. 56) What do you think this term means? (refer to p. 98 for an explanation)

The Salvos said, 'we're about Christianity with its sleeves rolled up' (p.112). What does this mean? How is this different from the Christianity taught in the mission from Reverend Redlich?

The Papua New Guinean men who carried supplies were called the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels. Why were they given this name? (see p. 141)

Issues to think about

Why did missions occur? What was the benefit of sending missionaries to underdeveloped countries?

Dr Anderson tells how he received the Japanese doll, and how he thinks that the Japanese have used this technique to gain information (p.51). Do you think the Japanese were as crafty as Dr Anderson thinks, or was he just paranoid?

Dr Anderson refers to the native people as Derek's 'darkie friends' (p. 55). Are these words that a missionary should be using?

Derek is critical of Reverend Benson continuing church services throughout the war (p. 59). What else should Reverend Benson have done? Was continuing as normal the best option?

Once war is declared, Dr Anderson says there is no longer a purpose in educating Morso (p.61). What implication can you draw from this sentiment?

A soldier tells Derek that the Diggers fighting are 'not heroes... just mates' (p.131). What do you think he means by this?

On page 164 Derek is horrified by reports he has heard of Japanese soldiers becoming cannibals. Yet later in the letter he states, 'I don't think many Japs can swim. Good'. What do you make of this statement? Has Derek lost his humanity?

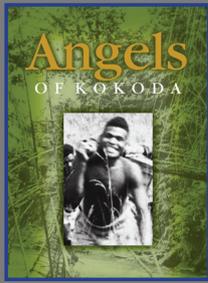
Research Tasks

The Orakiva death ritual is explained in pages 7 and 8. How do other cultures commemorate the dead? You may look at how Egyptians embalmed and built tombs for the dead, or how we bury and cremate people today.

Look up the war countries that were invaded by the Japanese on a map. Can you identify the Philippines, Singapore, Papua New Guinea and Thailand?

Some of the characters from Angels of Kokoda are real people, such as Ron Galloway, David Marsh and Bruce Kingsbury. Research who these people are and what role they played in the war.

On page 19 Derek learns how Papua New Guinea is divided by the country that owns each region. Who owns Papua New Guinea today?



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General Henry Shrapnel invented a weapon in 1803 that scattered metal fragments and caused mass killings (p. 109). Investigate the inventors of some other weapons (eg grenades, firearms) and research the story behind the invention. What were the weapons used for?

'We didn't start the war, the bloody Japs did' (Derek, p. 150)

From what you've studied about World War Two is this a fair assessment of how the war started?

About the author

David Mulligan has written a regular column, 'Sunday Ramblings', for the Macquarie group of newspapers, as well as feature articles for local, international and university magazines. His poetry is published in Australia, the United States and China and his short stories in literary magazines and anthologies have won numerous awards. His children's picture book *The Moon's Gift*, has been highly acclaimed. David now lives in Double Bay, Sydney.