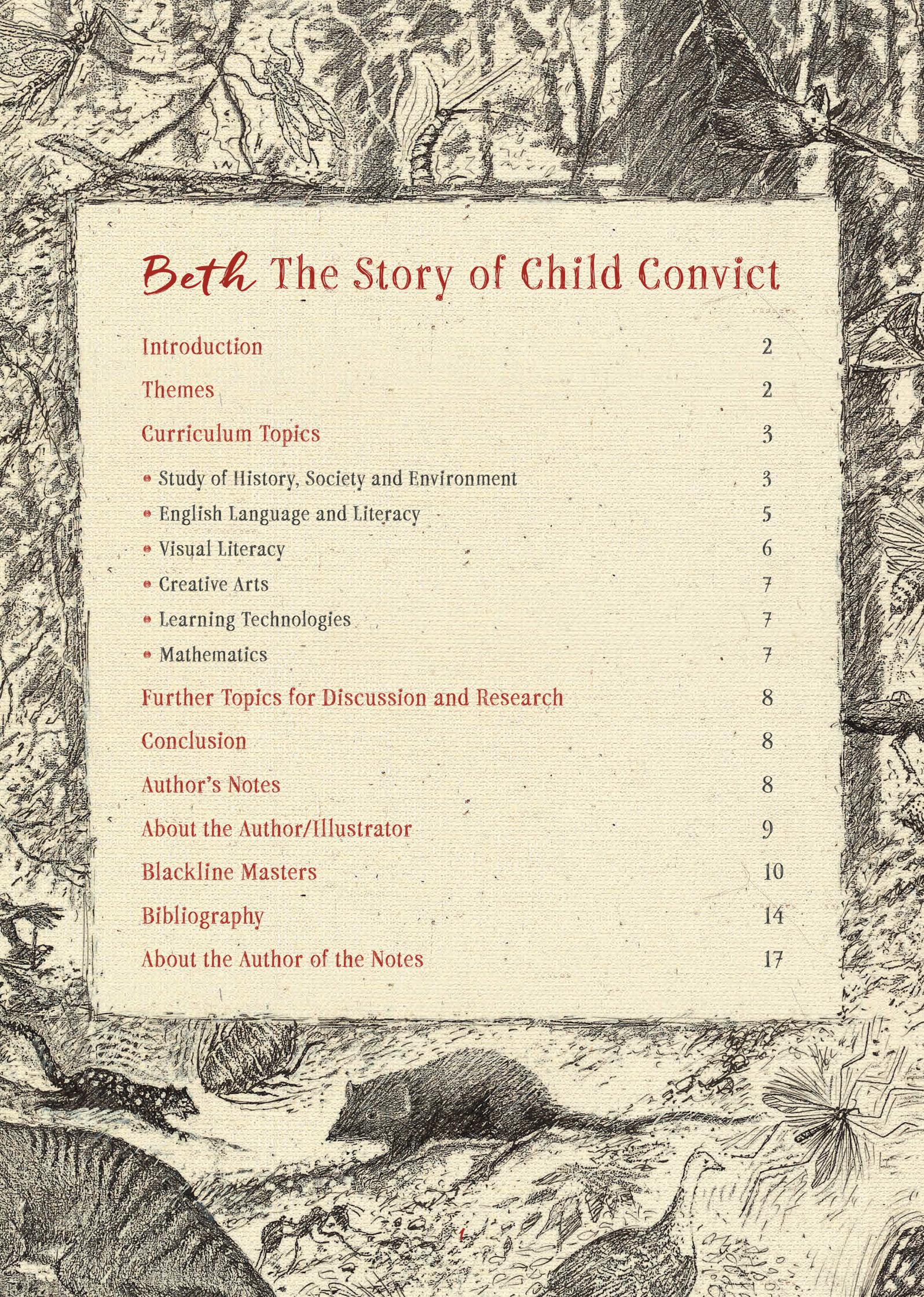
A painting of a harbor scene. In the foreground, a woman with long, wavy blonde hair and a white dress with a blue sash stands next to a young child with blonde hair, both looking out over the water. The woman is holding a small bouquet of flowers. In the background, several large wooden sailing ships are docked at a pier. A small boat with people is visible in the water. The sky is a mix of yellow and purple, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall style is impressionistic with visible brushstrokes.

Teachers notes
by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

Beth

The Story of a
Child Convict

MARK WILSON



Beth The Story of Child Convict

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Introduction

‘How could it have come to this? All I did was to steal a dress and a bonnet.’

Beth arrives in Australia in 1788 as a convict on the *Lady Penrhyn*, one of the ships which were part of the First Fleet, and befriends an orphaned girl, called Molly, whose convict mother has died on board. Molly becomes a reason for Beth to survive. They are both taken as servants to a surgeon named Mr Brady who writes a diary of the first dreadful weeks in the colony, as food supplies dwindle, and efforts to grow food fail. Encounters with the ‘Natives’ also create an air of uncertainty and trepidation in the colony. Beth works with Molly in the surgeon’s garden, until she grows ill and dies in the arms of Beth, her protector.

This may be one of the worst moments in Beth’s life or perhaps a moment which inspires her to live and prosper in memory of those she has cared for.

For this is a story of survival and a story of the bonds which we develop with others even in the direst of circumstances.

This beautifully illustrated picture book was inspired by the experiences of Elizabeth Hayward, the youngest female convict on the First Fleet. Mark Wilson’s luminous artwork contains photo-realistic detail which make these two characters very ‘present’ for the reader. This is a work of historical fiction enriched by the vibrancy of the visual text and emotional impact of the written text. It is a moving account of the life of these often forgotten people who contributed to the forging of our nation.

Themes

Several themes are covered in this book which might be related to other curriculum areas.

These include:

Convict Life and the Australian Colonial Era

Activity: The brutality of life aboard ship and the treatment of convicts in the development of the early colony is one of the themes of this book. [See SOSE below for topics to be covered in relation to this theme.]

Indigenous Culture and White Settlement/Invasion of Australia

Activity: ‘The area surrounding Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour) was home to several Aboriginal tribes. The “Eora people” are the coastal Aborigines of the Sydney district. The name *Eora* simply means “here” or “from this place”, and was used by local Aboriginal people to describe to the British where they came from. The Cadigal band are the traditional owners of the Sydney CBD area, and their territory south of

Port Jackson stretches from South Head to Petersham.'

'History of Sydney' *Wikipedia* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Sydney>

This book subtly reveals the lack of understanding between these tribal groups and white arrivals, and the lack of respect shown by white arrivals towards the knowledge of the first inhabitants, which resulted in their dispossession and ongoing tensions and lack of reconciliation to this day. [See **SOSE** below for topics to be covered in this theme.]

Friendship, Compassion and Survival

Discussion Point: This is a story of Beth's survival and Molly's death. It shows the fortitude gained from love and friendship, and how survivors often develop enormous reserves of resilience from even fleeting relationships such as the one shared by these two young girls. Beth has lost her first friend but will always gain strength from her memory.

Curriculum Topics

This picture book touches on the themes above and might be used in conjunction with curriculum topics (for primary or secondary school students) in the following areas:

- **Study of History, Society and Environment**

SOSE topics relative to colonial life and Australia's Indigenous inhabitants include:

Convicts in Early Australia

Activity: The First Fleet left Portsmouth, England on 13 May 1787, led by Captain Arthur Phillip, and arrived in what was named Sydney Cove in Port Jackson on 26 January 1788. The *Lady Penrhyn*, the convict ship on which Beth and Molly sailed was one of eleven ships. 'The Fleet consisted of two Royal Navy escort ships, HMS *Sirius* and HMS *Supply*. They accompanied six convict transports, the *Alexander*, *Charlotte*, *Friendship*, *Lady Penrhyn*, *Prince of Wales* and the *Scarborough*, and three store ships, the *Borrowdale*, *Fishburn* and *Golden Grove*.' 'The First Fleet' *State Library of New South Wales* <http://www2.sl.nsw.gov.au/archive/discover_collections/history_nation/terra_australis/firstfleet.html> Research the journey and the hazards experienced on board these ships online, or in texts such as John Nicholson's *The First Fleet* (Allen & Unwin, 1997).

Discussion Point: The convicts who arrived in Australia were not all hardened thieves or murderers. Many were, like Beth and Molly, victims of poverty and circumstance. Research the convict era and the political background to both the decision to send convicts to Australia and the individual backgrounds of some of these arrivals. [See **Bibliography**.]

Activity: There is some debate amongst historians as to whether the majority of convicts were innocent victims or criminals. Research the historical evidence on this question.

Activity: The treatment of convicts was careless and often very cruel and violent. The two children initially sleep outside with rats running over them at night, and are made to do heavy work. Adults were often whipped mercilessly or driven to an early grave by brutal work. Research this topic further in texts such as John Nicholson's *Australia Locked Up* (Allen & Unwin, 2006.).

Activity: This story is inspired by the life of Elizabeth Hayward, the youngest female convict in the First Fleet. Research her life further: 'Elizabeth Hayward' <<http://firstfleetfellowship.org.au/convicts/elizabeth-haywood/>>

Activity: Read accounts of child convicts. [See **Bibliography.**]

Activity: Research the lives of some well-known convicts who contributed to the colony's development in a tangible way.

Activity: Wilson mentions Arthur Bowes Smyth, surgeon and artist from the *Lady Penrhyn* and naval officer William Bradley as inspirations for this book. Read and research their diaries and records further. [See **Bibliography.**]

Activity: Read Goldie Alexander's fictional work *Surviving Sydney Cove: the Diary of Elizabeth Harvey, Sydney, 1790: My Story* (Scholastic, 2000). Write your own diary entry as if written by a fictional convict child, in this style.

Activity: Compare this picture book to other works about the era, such as Jackie French's *Tom Appleby: Convict Boy* (HarperCollins, 2004) [See **Bibliography.**]

Colonial Life

Activity: Research the food shortage in colonial times. Mr Brady writes in his diary that the soil 'is nothing more than thick black sand'. How much were these early struggles caused by ignorance? Were the settlers unaware of the foods available in this new country? Were their crops and agricultural and hunting methods inappropriate to this new environment?

Activity: The colonial government, led first by Governor Phillip, had rudimentary resources with which to establish a colony or to develop law and order. The Food Rations which appear in this book are one evidence of their intervention in the development of the colony. Research colonial government further.

Discussion Point: What role did the soldiers and naval officers play in the administration of justice in early colonial times?

Discussion Point: How were women and children treated in colonial times? E.g. Beth is not happy that rations for men are larger than those for women and children.

Indigenous People and Culture

Activity: The book mentions that the ship was greeted by ‘Natives’ and details further encounters with Aboriginal people. It is clear from Mr Brady’s diary that there was little understanding of these people, or their feelings regarding the arrival of people who then set about destroying much of the landscape in order to plant and herd introduced species. Frontier conflicts erupted because of these simmering tensions over land ownership and usage. Research this topic further.

Activity: What foods would Aboriginal people have grown, collected or hunted?

Activity: Mr Brady mentions the natural remedies he has observed Indigenous people using. Research such herbal remedies.

Activity: ‘We managed to swap a looking-glass for the berries, two fish and a war club’ writes Mr Brady, April 22, 1788. Early exchanges between Indigenous people and white settlers followed centuries of trading amongst the Aboriginal people themselves. Research this further in texts such as John Nicholson’s *Songlines and Stone Axes* (Allen & Unwin, 2007).

Activity: Many Aboriginal people died not only in conflicts, but also from introduced illnesses, and from the fact that their traditional sources of food were destroyed by European people. Research this topic further.

Values

Discussion Point: Discuss the **values** conveyed in this text.

Discussion Point: One of the first things Beth does is to give her toy doll to Molly. This is an act of sacrifice, for neither has anything to remind them of home. Although Beth has little to celebrate, she finds solace in caring for this younger child, and even some moments of joy and happiness.

• English Language and Literacy

The text of this book might be studied in relation to the following aspects:

Activity: This story opens in first person past tense, and then moves to first person present tense, as Beth arrives in Australia on a convict ship. How might the story have changed had it been recounted, for example, in third person, or from another point of view? Invite students to create a short text illustrating such changes.

Discussion Point: Included in the text, as well, are excerpts from the fictional diary of Mr Brady, the surgeon who employs the two girls, from 1788 to 1789. A list of Food Rations issued by Governor Phillip is also included in the text. How do these documents enhance the meaning of the narrative?

Activity: Test your students’ comprehension by asking them questions about the written text. [See also **Blackline Master 2.**]

Activity: Study convict songs such as 'Botany Bay' [See John Anthony King's *Farewell to old England Forever* (Collins, 1984)] and poems about convict or colonial life such as 'Convict Maid' *AllDownUnder.com* <<http://alldownunder.com/australian-music-songs/convict-maid.htm>> or 'The Wild Colonial Boy'. [See also **Creative Arts 5** below.] Write a song about Beth and Molly's experiences in the style of these convict songs and ballads.

Activity: Read picture books which explore the experiences outlined in this book, such as John Anthony King's *An Uncommonly Fine Day* (Collins, 1987) or *My Place* by Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins (Walker Books, 2008, 1987) and compare to this one.

• Visual Literacy

The visual text of a book combines with the written text to tell the story using the various parts of the book's design and illustrations, as explored below:

Activity: The **cover** of a book is an important part of its message. The two children are at the ship's rail as it sails into harbour with red-coated marines behind them. The totally untouched landscape is suddenly visited by these strangers who bring big changes with them. The starkness of the bush lies in contrast to the fever of new activity.

Discussion Point: The front **endpapers** depict a beautiful landscape of the ships arriving. The **back endpapers** contain sketches of the colony in the style of early diarists and artists; with the inset image which also appears on the title page. These images explore several of the themes explored in this novel.

Discussion Point: The **title page** depicts an inset picture of Beth standing on a headland, watching as ships sail away. What feeling does this image convey?

Discussion Point: The **format** of the book is square in a large size (approx 31 x 28cm) which enhances the dramatic impact of Beth's responses to this foreign landscape.

Activity: The **medium or style** employed is **super realism in acrylic painting on canvas**. [See also Mark Wilson's note on **Illustration Technique** in his **Author's Notes**.] Invite students to use such techniques to create their own images of Beth and Molly in Mr Brady's garden or being ordered over the side of the ship. [See also **Blackline Master 1**.]

Discussion Point: The **colours** generally used in this book comprise a muted, hazy, pastel palette with some black and white images. They convey a sense of nostalgia and sadness, and evoke the suffering and loneliness of these two children transported so far from what they have known.



Activity: Students might be encouraged to use **critical literacy skills** to unearth meaning in this text. For example, on April 22, 1788 Mr Brady's diary entry laments the decision to settle in this place, with its poor soil, lack of timber and enormous ants. But the images on this double page show a landscape abundant with wildlife and depict Aboriginal people spearing some animals for food. The image tells a different story to the pessimistic one detailed in his diary entry. Encourage students to examine each spread in the book, and how the words and images work together to tell a more complex story.

Activity: Create a graphic novel/comic version of a scene in this book. Read other such books as a guide to style and approach. [See **Bibliography**.] [See also **Blackline Master 4**.]

• Creative Arts

There are many creative activities suggested by this text. Students might:

1. Create a **classroom mural** which tells the story in a series of frames designed and executed by students.

2. **Write, direct and act a play scene** based on any incident in this book.

3. **Design a book trailer based on this book.** Visit sites such as: 'Book Trailers' *Insideadog* <<http://www.insideadog.com.au/teachers/book-trailers>> for advice>.

4. **Listen to some convict songs and ballads** sung by contemporary artists or watch them on videos. e.g. 'Moreton Bay – Convict Australia' *YouTube* October 13, 2009 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJEawKILe_> or

'307. Convict Maid (Traditional Australian)' *YouTube* October 11, 2007 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DzGHYQdJ-cc>>

5. **Organise a classroom display** featuring some of the writing and illustration students have done for this unit with books or texts they have researched as a group.

• Learning Technologies

Activity: Study any of the topics suggested by this book and notes online. [See **Bibliography**.]

• Mathematics

Activity: Statistics relating to convict numbers and to the growth in European population after their arrival in Australia might be compared to estimated decline in Aboriginal population after settlement/invasion. [See also **Blackline Master 3**.]

Further Topics for Discussion and Research

- **Research the work** of Mark Wilson. Compare his other books to this one
- Research this work by reading non-fiction books such as those listed in the **Bibliography**.
- **Conduct a debate** about one of the issues explored in these notes.
- **Watch a video of Episode 23 'Waruwi' My Place for Teachers'**
<http://www.myplace.edu.au/teaching_activities/1878_-_before_time/1788/1/the_encounter.html> Discuss the Aboriginal attitude to these 'white ghosts'.

Conclusion

This masterful work of historical fiction is a rich addition to Mark Wilson's body of works which deal with significant moments in Australian history. The fact that he often tells these stories from the viewpoint of children or teenagers engaged in these 'moments' make his works highly pertinent educational resources for teachers and students. His books give them empathy with these characters and encourage further investigation.

Author's Notes

Mark Wilson

Illustration technique

There was an incredible amount of research to do on convict children with the First Fleet, especially clothing and hair. Then there were the ships, soldiers, weapons, shelter, tools, etc. I also wanted to represent the Aboriginal people as accurately as I could. I take the advice author Jackie French gave me a few years ago: 'Check your research three times from different sources, then once again for luck.'

I actually used two models for the characters of Beth and Molly. My granddaughter Lily was the model for Beth, and her friend Eliza from school was the model for Molly. I bought old clothes to match the convict clothes of the First Fleet – from the Salvation Army shop in Frankston. Using real people as models allows me to capture more detail, especially features such as eyes and hands. I can get flesh tones more accurately than from photos, so the illustrations appear more real than if I use photos alone. So photos are mainly for reference. Although some paintings look like photos, they are not; they are a form of 'super realism', which I used to emphasise important moments in the story.

All my artwork in this book started with line drawings, sketched in pencil, with as much detail as I can manage. I then use permanent markers, ink, oil pastel, watercolour and/or acrylic paint – and just about anything else lying around; each picture dictates the technique.

I rarely use paintbrushes, dipping very sharp pencils in the paint to do detail.

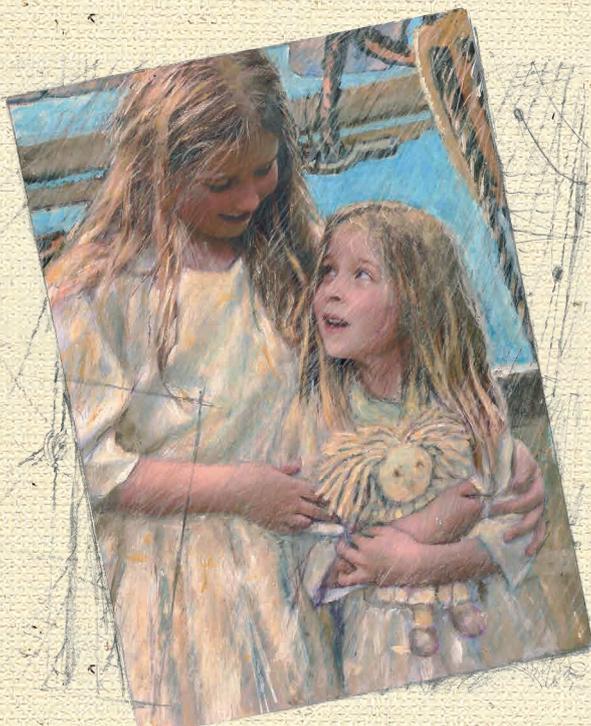
The full-colour illustrations throughout are mainly acrylic paint on canvas, but I often overlay parts of these with simple black and white drawings. The back endpapers are just a copy of my prelim sketches. I use whatever is best for the page, but also what appeals most to me. I love sketching, painting in acrylics, doing washes in inks or oils, and generally working with new and different materials to add contrast and variety to the illustrations where needed.

About the Author/Illustrator

Mark Wilson was born in Brunswick, Victoria. He took to drawing from a very early age, and also loved comics. He went on to spend most of his teenage years performing as a singer and drummer in a rock band. He studied mural design and painting at the Canberra Institute of Technology (now Monash, Caulfield Campus). He also did national service with Training Command, followed by a Diploma of Education. In the early seventies, he became a designer and illustrator for *The Education Magazine* and *Pursuit Magazine*, and also started illustrating for various publishers including Penguin, Rigby, Brooks Waterloo and Houghton & Mifflin in the USA. In 1981 he held his first solo exhibition of paintings and drawings. Recently, he has focused on writing and illustrating children's books, and also picture book presentations in schools and at literature festivals. His award-winning books include *The Last Tree* (2007 Whitley Award for Children's Literature); *Journey of the Sea*

Turtle (2011 Whitley Award); *My Mother's Eyes* (2009); *Angel of Kokoda* (2010); the *Ben and Gracie's Art Adventure* series, *Inside the World of Tom Roberts* (shortlisted in the 2013 Aurealis Awards); *A Day to Remember: The Story of the Anzacs* with Jackie French (shortlisted in the 2013 CBCA Awards); *Vietnam Diary* (2013), *Migaloo, the White Whale* (2015); *Afghanistan Pup* (2014); *The Horse Soldier* (2014); and *Digger, the Dog who Went to War* (2015).

For more information about Mark visit: <<http://www.markwilson.com.au/>>



Blackline Masters

BM 1 COLLAGE IMAGE

Create a collage by drawing a scene around this image of Beth and Molly and then applying materials such as fabric, cardboard, fur, etc. Students may wish to enlarge this to A3 to allow more room for work on the image.



BM 2 QUIZ

These questions can all be answered by reading or interpreting the text of this picture book.

1. What ship do Beth and Molly arrive on?
2. Who employs the girls?
3. What work are they asked to do?
4. Where did Governor Phillip send the HMS Sirius and why?
5. When the crops fail the girls are ordered to collect wild food. What two foods are mentioned?
6. What illnesses does Mr Brady report breaking out in the colony?
7. How many 'cows, sheep horses, pigs, geese and chickens' did the first Fleet arrive with?
8. What Aboriginal cures/medicines are mentioned in the text?
9. Who inspired this story?
10. Where did the person referred to in 9. eventually live?

Answers: 1. *Lady Penrhyn*. 2. Mr Brady, the surgeon. 3. Collecting wood, and making garden beds. 4. To the Cape of Good Hope for food. 5. Mussels and berries. 6. Dysentery, scurvy and smallpox. 7. Five hundred. 8. Local berries or sarsaparilla vine leaves boiled in water. 9. Elizabeth Hayward. 10. Van Diemen's Land.



The First Fleet

BM 3 CLOZE ACTIVITY

Invite students to finish the sentences below.

1. Aboriginal people are the ? inhabitants of this country.
2. When Europeans arrived in 1788 they caused the ? of Aboriginal population in the areas where they settled.
3. Aboriginal people often knew how to grow and find ? whereas Europeans struggled to propagate crops or to breed from introduced animals and other wildlife.
4. Conflicts arose due to the fact that Europeans often settled on ? which Aboriginal people had regarded as theirs for thousands of years.
5. Introduced illnesses included dysentery, ? and smallpox.

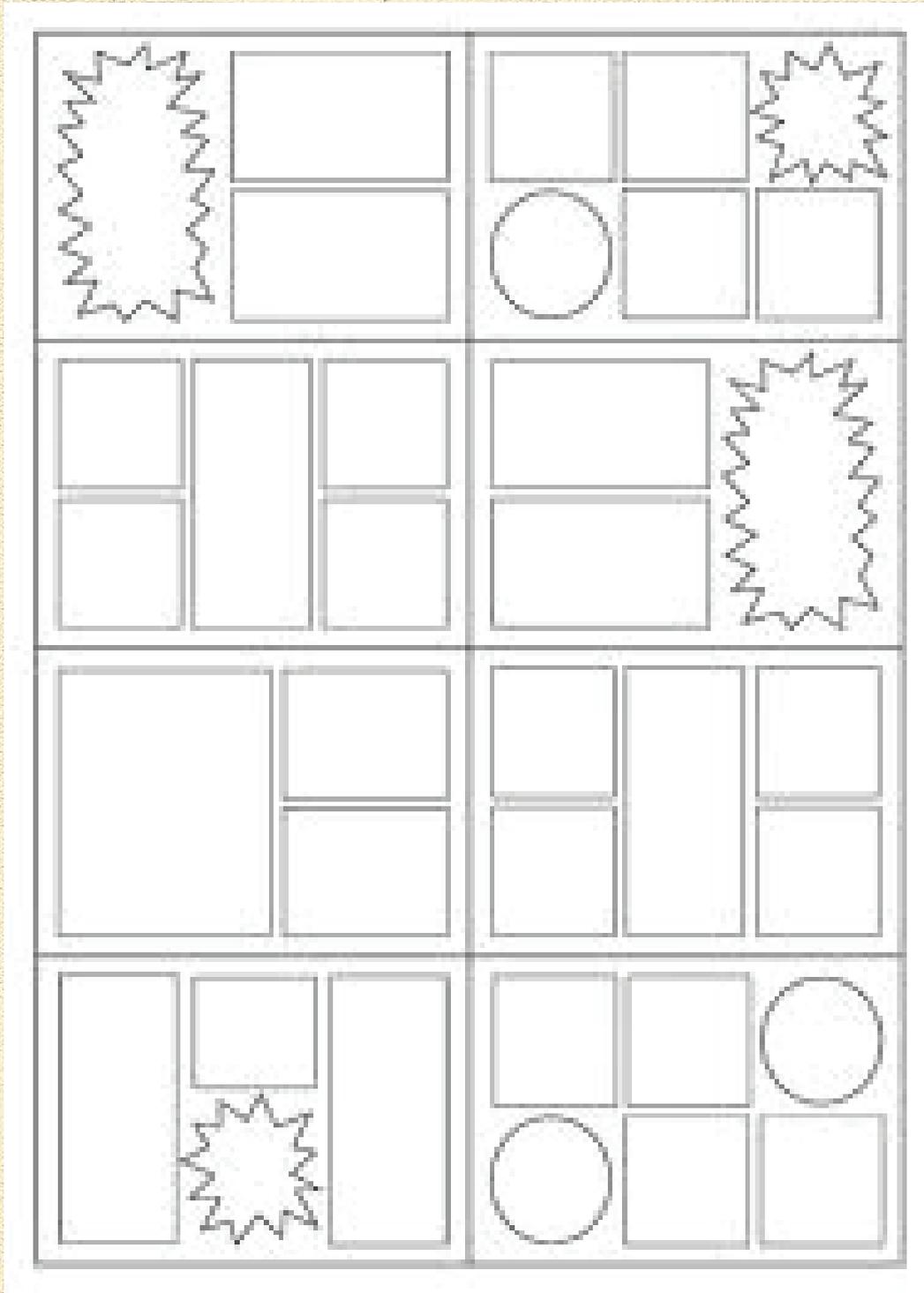


A view in Port Jackson taken from Sirius Island; the Sirius lying of [sic] the entrance of Sydney Cove, 1788/possibly by William Bradley. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

Answers: 1. First/original. 2. Decline/depletion. 3. Food. 4. Land. 5. Scurvy.

BM 4 GRAPHIC STORYTELLING

Create a graphic novel/comic interpretation of one of the scenes in this book. Use any of the layouts below as the storyboard for your comic. Enlarge on a photocopier to give you more space.



Layouts taken from Comic Book Guide

<http://comicbookguide.wordpress.com/tag/drawings/page/2/>

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About the Author of the Notes

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award.



April 22, 1788
This initially seemed an ideal place for a settlement. The soil seemed good for growing crops, but on closer inspection is nothing more than thick black sand. The trees are not good for timber and the ground is covered in enormous black and red ants.
Some natives came near to us this morn. They brought us some wild berries. They carried long spears which they use to catch fish. We managed to swap a looking-glass for the berries, two fish and a war club.
My servants, Beth and Molly, are still sleeping outside at night, as all the tents are full. Molly complained that a rat ran across her legs last night.
There are many wildflowers growing
and in the the and a pla