

His Own War: The Story of Archibald Baxter

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Overview

“His Own War” is a biography of Archie Baxter, a New Zealander who refused to join up and fight in the First World War. His objection to fighting was based on strongly held convictions, and he paid dearly for them. The text deals with complex themes of community versus individual responsibility, conscience, endurance, punishment, and courage. Students are challenged to consider the meaning of concepts such as cowardice and courage as they evaluate and synthesise information and ideas to understand the importance of Baxter’s personal qualities – and those of the army authorities.

Students could read this article within a context of learning about New Zealand’s role in international wars, with a focus on personal and national responsibilities. The article provides opportunities to discuss moral conflicts and supports the key competency of participating and contributing. The article includes a series of powerful paintings by Bob Kerr, including one on the cover of the Journal that is not used in the article itself. The paintings give visual depth to the themes and lend themselves to exploration.

Texts related by theme “Silas the Stretcher-bearer” SJ L3 Feb 2012 | “Boy Soldiers” SJ 4.3.08

Text characteristics from the year 8 reading standard

sentences that vary in length, including long, complex sentences that contain a lot of information

words and phrases with multiple meanings that require students to know and use effective word-solving strategies to retain their focus on meaning

metaphor, analogy, and connotative language that is open to interpretation

Although Archie was a very good boxer and marksman – and he had practical skills that would have made him a great soldier – something happened in 1900 that was to change his life. When he was nineteen, Archie heard the local MP and lawyer, Alfred Barclay, speaking against war. The speech influenced Archie a great deal, and he went on to read all that he could about pacifism. He decided that war was wrong – that it was wrong to kill, no matter what the circumstances.

Most of the men who were conscripted obeyed their orders – but a small number appealed on grounds of conscience. This meant that for religious, political, or personal reasons they refused to fight. These men were known as conscientious objectors.

New Zealand soldiers leaving for the First World War

Military Conscription
The First World War lasted from 4 August 1914 to 11 November 1918. In the first week alone, around 14 000 New Zealand men volunteered, and by the end of the first year of war, there were over 23 000 men in uniform. But the reality of war soon leaked home, and healthy men able – and willing – to fight were becoming harder to find. In August 1916, the government introduced military conscription. All able-bodied men between the ages of twenty and forty-five were considered eligible soldiers. Men randomly chosen each month were required by law to join the army.

Military Service Act, 1916. ENROLMENT OF EXPEDITIONARY FORCE RESERVE

REMEMBER! IT IS YOUR DUTY TO OBEY.

REMEMBER! YOU MUST DO YOUR DUTY.

RESERVISTS' OBLIGATIONS.

EMPLOYERS' OBLIGATIONS.

ONUS OF PROOF in every case IS ON THE DEFENDANT.

Call at nearest post-office For cards, forms, information, and assistance. (By Order) MALCOLM FRASER, Government Printer, Wellington.

Defiance and Punishment
In 1916, at the age of thirty-five, Archie was called up for military service, but he refused to be conscripted because of his beliefs. After an appeal was denied, Archie was transported to Trentham Military Camp near Wellington, where he refused to wear a uniform, salute officers, or obey commands. He was court-martialled and sentenced to eighty-four days in prison, where he spent much of the time in solitary confinement on a bread-and-water diet. Back at Trentham, Archie again refused to wear a uniform, so he spent more time in solitary confinement.

Then one morning in July 1917, Archie was ordered from his bed. Along with his brothers Jack and Sandy and eleven other conscientious objectors, Archie was frogmarched to the Wellington wharf and onto the troopship *Waitanata*. The dissenters were confined to small cabins under armed guard and kept apart from the other soldiers.

“Many years before the war of 1914–18, I had reached the point of view that war – all war – was wrong, futile, and destructive alike to victor and vanquished.”
– Archibald Baxter, from *We Will Not Cease*

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs, containing main ideas that relate to the text’s content

academic and content-specific vocabulary

Possible curriculum contexts

SOCIAL SCIENCES (Social Studies)

LEVEL 4 – Understand how people participate individually and collectively in response to community challenges.

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 4 – Ideas: Show an increasing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 4 – Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

Possible reading purposes

- To consider different perspectives of war
- To gain an understanding of a person who endured great hardship for his beliefs
- To make connections between different kinds of war stories
- To consider the ways people respond to community challenges.

Possible writing purposes

- To develop and present their own perspective on a controversial issue
- To respond to the article and/or art work in a poetic or dramatic form.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, including “defend”, “entirely”, “perspective”, “cowards”, “resented”, “endurance”, “thinning turnips”, “herding”, “marksman”, “MP”, “influenced”, “pacifism”, “enlist”, “military conscription”, “volunteered”, “able-bodied”, “eligible”, “randomly”, “conscripted”, “grounds of conscience”, “conscientious objectors”, “defiance”, “beliefs”, “appeal”, “court-martialled”, “sentenced”, “solitary confinement”, “bread-and-water diet”, “dissenters”, “confined”, “authorities”, “memoir”, “circulation”, “congested”, “excruciating”, “mental effect”, “surrender”, “numb”, “front line”, “Regiment”, “acknowledge”, “ammunition dump”, “shells”, “aimlessly”, “consciousness”, “underclothes”, “shell shock”, “eventually”, “regained”, “diagnosed”, “confusional insanity”, “verdict”, “desertion”, “berthed”, “subjected to”
- Words used with figurative meanings, including “erupted”, “under any circumstances”, “dragged on”, “leaked”, “called up”, “cycle”, “inner reserves”
- Colloquial language, including “mates”, “do their bit”, “frogmarched”
- Connotations of the word “coward”.

Possible supporting strategies

Identify vocabulary and concepts that your students will find challenging. Select several of these words or concepts and provide a definition and/or a context for each example. Give these to pairs of students and ask them to discuss the words and what they think they mean. Share their thinking with the group, clarifying and correcting any misunderstandings. This text includes a variety of sentence structures and vocabulary, as well as a lot of information and sophisticated concepts. English language learners will need support with the vocabulary before reading. As well as the activity described above, you could construct a simple glossary for students to use and add to.

While there may be words that are very low frequency and are important for understanding this text, these words are probably not a high priority for students to learn. Prioritise, and help your students to prioritise, vocabulary that they are likely to use in many contexts.

After reading, discuss words that have been used with colloquial, figurative, or connotative meanings, checking to ensure students understand their meanings and how they can change in different contexts. English language learners may benefit from exploring examples of colloquial, figurative, or connotative meanings in their first language.

The *English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has some useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Knowledge of New Zealand’s involvement in the First World War
- Knowledge of the reasons why people join the army or other forces and go to war
- Understanding of the ways people with different opinions (such as protesters) may be treated in a community – especially in times of stress
- Understanding of the concept of “conscience” and how it influences our behaviour
- Knowledge of defence force procedures for the enforcement of rules.

Possible supporting strategies

Read this text in the context of a broader study of related ideas to support the students to understand New Zealand’s contributions to world wars and the concept of conscription.

Students can discuss specific questions (“Why do some people believe it’s wrong to kill people, even in a war?”, “Is it right to send soldiers to wars overseas?”) to start exploring why people fight in wars.

As well as the density and complexity of the text, there are also complex concepts. It would be very helpful if English language learners could explore some of these concepts and information in their first language before reading.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Use of headings to mark themes and sequence of events
- The use of foreshadowing at the end of the second paragraph on page 25
- The use of time and sequencing language
- Glossary
- Descriptive and figurative language, for example, “the reality of war soon leaked home”
- A wide variety of complex sentences
- Pull-out quotes that highlight key ideas or events.

Possible supporting strategies

Remind the students of other biographies they have read, sharing and listing some common features. Note that biographies often have a specific focus rather than the person’s whole life.

Read the full title aloud and ask the students to discuss what they expect to read about in this article.

Support the students to use the photographs and illustrations to help them understand events from the past. Where necessary, make links between words in the text and ideas expressed in the illustrations.

Instructional focus – Reading

Social Sciences (Social studies – Level 4: Understand how people participate individually and collectively in response to community challenges.)

English (Level 4 – Ideas: Show an increasing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.)

Text excerpts from “His Own War”

Students (what they might do)

At first, these men were mostly seen as cowards. But as the war dragged on and soldiers were desperately needed, men who refused to fight were deeply resented – and severely punished. Archibald Baxter was one of these men. He fought a war of his own, which required the courage and endurance of a soldier – the soldier he refused to be ...

*Students relate the first appearance of “these men” to the preceding paragraph and understand that the words refer to the men who thought war was wrong. They then **make connections** between the repetition of the words “these men” and the phrase “men who refused to fight”.*

*Students **ask questions** to understand why the men were resented and why they would be punished. They **make connections** between their understanding of the words “cowards” and “courage” and their use in the same paragraph to **infer** whether or not Archie was a coward.*

*Students use their knowledge of foreshadowing from other reading (including fiction) to **make inferences** from the last sentence.*

In 1916, at the age of thirty-five, Archie was called up for military service, but he refused to be conscripted ... Archie again refused to wear a uniform, and he spent more time in solitary confinement.

*Students **make connections** between the text and their knowledge of military rules to **infer** that his actions were taken very seriously. They **evaluate** the actions of Archie and of the military and **form hypotheses** about people who are prepared to face punishment for their beliefs.*

Archie was sent home on the troopship *Marama*, which berthed in Wellington in September 1918. He faced a grilling from the Minister of Defence, who ... some farmers refused to employ him because of his history.

*Students **synthesise** information across the text to consider why Archie was not believed and to understand why some farmers would not employ him. They **synthesise** what they know of other people who have suffered for their beliefs as they **ask and answer questions** with what they know about why some people are prepared to do this. They **evaluate** Archie’s story in the context of what they know about the different ways people respond to community challenges and draw conclusions about how personal decisions, such as Archie’s, would be viewed in today’s world.*

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

ASK QUESTIONS to help the students clarify their understanding.

- Who does “these men” refer to? How did you work that out?
- Why do you think more men were “desperately needed”?

Some students, especially English language learners, may benefit from exploring the links between the nouns and pronouns referring to men in the first and second paragraphs.

“many New Zealanders” – “Some” – “their” – “others”
“group of men” – “who” – “They” – “these men” – “men” – “one of these men”

“Archibald Baxter” – “one of these men” – “He” – “his”

These links are essential to understanding the paragraphs and to their cohesion. You could explore these by using an enlarged copy of the paragraphs and drawing boxes and lines between the linked items.

PROMPT the students to ask questions as they read. For example:

- What does “coward” actually mean? What are its connotations?
- What does “courage” mean?
- Why would men who refused to fight be resented? Who by?

MODEL your questions and inferences as you read the last sentence.

- I linked the last sentence to the title and wondered what the author means by “a war of his own”. If Archie wasn’t going to fight, why would he need courage and endurance? I also wondered why the author used the word “soldier” twice in that sentence. I inferred that the author wanted to stress the contrast between what Baxter didn’t want to be and what he experienced.

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students as they evaluate actions and events.

- Archie chose not to join the army when it was voluntary, but by refusing conscription, he was making a stand against the rules and laws of society. Was he right to do so? What does it say about his beliefs?
- Why is it important for soldiers to obey orders? Do you think the army’s response to Archie’s refusals was fair? What are your reasons?

PROMPT the students to consider and explain both sides of this story. If they need further support to gain understanding, encourage them to reread earlier parts of the text before they consider their responses.

- Why was Archie so determined not to give in to the army’s demands? What do you think about his reasons?
- Why did the army punish Archie so harshly and then not believe him?
- What have you learnt about the kinds of people who are prepared to sacrifice so much for their beliefs?
- Is there a moral or message we can take from Archie’s story? If so, what?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You’ve developed the chain of events Archie set off when he ... Talk with your partner about how this process helped you to see the link between cause and effect.
- Looking at both sides helped you come to a decision that Archie was a person of great integrity. What led you to that decision?

METACOGNITION

- Work with a partner. Use one page or a spread from the article and work through it together, explaining the questions you asked to meet your purpose for reading and how you answered them.
- Explain to your partner what you had already learnt about the First World War that helped you to understand and evaluate Archie’s story.

 Reading standard: by the end of year 8

 The Literacy Learning Progressions

 Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Social Sciences (Social studies – Level 4: Understand how people participate individually and collectively in response to community challenges.)

English (Level 4 – Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.)

Text excerpts from “His Own War”	Examples of text characteristics	Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)
<p>Although Archie was a very good boxer and marksman – and he had practical skills that would have made him a great soldier – something happened in 1900 that was to change his life.</p>	<p>COMPLEX SENTENCES</p> <p><i>Complex sentences have one or more subordinate clauses. A subordinate clause (“Although Archie was ... marksman”) is always attached to a main clause and cannot stand alone. A conjunction (such as “although”, “after”, or “because”) often marks the start of a subordinate clause.</i></p>	<p>PROMPT the students as they develop and edit drafts of their writing. If necessary, support them to consider ways they can make their sentences interesting and concise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there a simpler way you could express this idea?• How do you make sure the meaning of a complex sentence is clear for your readers?• Have you read this sentence aloud to make sure the conjunctions are correct for your purpose? <p>Complex sentences: see <i>Exploring Language</i>, pages 80–86.</p> <p>To begin using complex sentences in their writing, many students may need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• explicit explanations of example sentences with different types of conjunctions (it’s generally useful to work on groups of conjunctions with similar meanings)• models of how to use the conjunctions and complex sentence structures in other sentences• opportunities to co-construct sentences using new language• opportunities to complete cloze sentences by selecting the correct words and/or by using writing frames or sentence starters as scaffolding for creating sentences with these words• prompting and guidance on using complex sentences in their writing• feedback on their use of complex sentences.
<p>Most of the men who were conscripted obeyed their orders – but a small number appealed on grounds of conscience. This meant that for religious, political, or personal reasons they refused to fight. These men were known as conscientious objectors.</p>	<p>SUBJECT-SPECIFIC VOCABULARY</p> <p><i>Writers use subject-specific vocabulary to add precision to their writing. They may explain terms that readers may not know. One way to do this is to use a glossary. Readers can check the glossary if they are not sure of the word’s meaning.</i></p> <p><i>Another way is to explain or define the terms within the text. This method makes sure that readers are clear about the meaning because the example is part of the main text.</i></p>	<p>Ask questions to review each other’s writing and identify any words or expressions that need further explanation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you expect your target audience to understand the subject-specific vocabulary you’ve used? If not, will you use simpler words or provide support for your readers?• What kind of vocabulary will best meet your writing purpose? <p>See the note above about helping students to use complex sentences. The same applies for acquiring new vocabulary.</p>
<p>With his feet unable to touch the ground (which was against army rules), Archie experienced excruciating pain, but he held off groaning in case the guards heard him. “The mental effect,” he wrote, “was almost as frightful as the physical. I felt I was going mad.”</p>	<p>CREATING AN IMPACT</p> <p><i>Powerful experiences and feelings can be conveyed through words (including direct quotes) and/or through evocative photos or illustrations. These can have a strong impact and help readers to visualise and understand an experience or idea more deeply.</i></p>	<p>Discuss the ways that students can present their ideas to achieve a writing purpose. Ask students to share their ideas, using examples from their writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where do your ideas and information come from? What impact did they have on you and how have you conveyed that to your readers?• How have you tried to help your readers understand a complex moral issue?• What criteria have you used to select the most effective details?• How can illustrations help you to achieve your purpose?
<p>METACOGNITION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did you decide which aspects of Mandela’s story to highlight in order to meet your purpose?• What did you ask your buddy to focus on when reviewing your writing? How did the feedback help you?• Now that you’ve finished, what planning and revising strategies would you use next time? Why?		<p>GIVE FEEDBACK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proofreading and checking have made your writing much clearer. Getting the grammar right was important, especially in those complex sentences.• Your buddy had trouble with the unfamiliar vocabulary you used, and you’ve now included supportive explanations and definitions. Now your readers will be able to follow your writing.