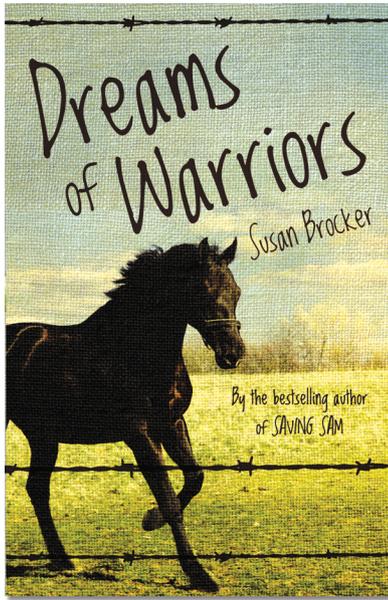


# Dreams of Warriors by Susan Brocker



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*Dreams of Warriors* is Susan Brocker's fourth novel for young readers and follows her very successful books, *Restless Spirit*, *Saving Sam*, and *Brave Bess and the ANZAC Horses*. This book continues to demonstrate the author's understanding of and compassion for animals, and her understanding of how people who care about animals can grow from the relationships. Set in New Zealand during World War Two, the story has a gritty reality about how tough life was for those women left on the land to continue farming, with husbands, fathers and sons abroad fighting. It also encompasses some important events in our war-time history, such as the riot at the Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in Featherston, rationing, swaggermen and the impact of the arrival of the American troops in New Zealand. These topics alone would provide for stimulating discussion and debate, but become real when woven into the story of Bella, her family, friends and a horse called Gypsy. Bella, the hero of the novel, not only has to contend with running the family's small dairy farm on her own but has to do so with a lame leg, the result of polio when younger. Through her relationship with the racehorse Gypsy, both grow in strength and trust, and the book culminates in an exciting race with everything to win and lose. This is a gripping story, with plenty of historical content about a time that today's students will find fascinating. *Dreams of Warriors* would be best suited to middle primary and junior secondary students.

## Story synopsis

Bella lives on a small dairy farm, once part of the larger family farm now belonging to the unlikable Mr Bloodsworth. It is during World War Two and Bella's father is away fighting as a pilot, so Bella alone looks after the cows before and after school. Her sister has a job and her mother is not strong enough for farm work. Bella also has to care for Gypsy Moth, a 'mad' racehorse that her father dreams will be a winner. Bella had polio as a small child, so has a lame leg, which makes it even harder for her when she has to deal with Gypsy, of whom she is terrified. After an earthquake which damages their cottage and milk separator, Gypsy bolts and goes missing. The family receives news that Bella's father is missing in action, later found to be a prisoner of war. China Joe, a swaggerman friend, tells Bella that Gypsy is under the care of Nick, an apprentice jockey for Bloodsworth. Nick has been secretly caring for Gypsy, whose leg was injured when she bolted. On seeing Bloodsworth, her previous owner, Gypsy reacts violently. Nick agrees to help Bella turn Gypsy into the racehorse her father dreams of. In spite of treating Gypsy kindly, the training is not very successful, until Yoshi, a Japanese prisoner-of-war tells Bella that Gypsy is deaf, the result of a beating. Yoshi gives Bella advice on training Gypsy, and Nick is eventually able to ride her without a bridle and saddle. Together they train her for the Spring Race; however, Bloodsworth will only let Nick ride Gypsy if Bella's mother agrees to accompany him to the ball in honour of visiting American troops. Nick and Bella go to the ball, along with her sister Sylvia and her American boyfriend, Jack. During the race, just as Gypsy looks like beating Bloodsworth's horse, Silver Arrow, he raises his cane and scares Gypsy. Nick falls badly, breaking his leg. During a dinner to farewell Jack, Gypsy alerts them to a huge flood rushing down the river. With the help of the marines and the Japanese prisoners of war, most of the cattle are rescued. China Joe shows Bella the cause of the flood — a dam built by Bloodsworth has burst. Bloodsworth wants their farm. Bella decides to leave school so she can restore the paddocks. Yoshi suggests she does this with Gypsy in harness as a plough horse. Then Bella has to overcome her fear and ride Gypsy so the cattle can be grazed on the grass verges. Bloodsworth comes to claim Gypsy (her father had never had the ownership papers signed). Bella's mother tells Bloodsworth if Silver Arrow can beat Gypsy he can have the farm, but if Gypsy wins then they keep her, get Silver Arrow and a thousand pounds. Bella has to ride as Nick is still injured. Bella and Gypsy win the exciting race, and she decides to use the money to set up a racing stable with the help of Nick as trainer. With the war over, her father will be home from war soon. Yoshi will return to Japan to the daughter Bella has encouraged him to contact.

## Motivational and pre-reading activities

- Tell students that, while the story of Bella is fictional, many of the events in the story are based on true events. Divide students into groups and have students research the following topics and report back to the class on the following:
  - *wartime rationing*  
[www.nzine.co.nz/features/guinz25-50\\_part15.html](http://www.nzine.co.nz/features/guinz25-50_part15.html)
  - *the riot at the Featherston internment camp*  
[www.nzhistory.net.nz/classroom/incident-at-featherston](http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/classroom/incident-at-featherston)
  - *the visit to New Zealand by American forces*  
[www.nzhistory.net.nz/tags/american-forces](http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/tags/american-forces)
- Bella is required to run the family dairy farm, while still at school. Invite a dairy farmer to talk to the class about what is involved on a daily basis when running a dairy herd. Alternatively, have students carry out research on:  
[www.getfresh.co.nz/what-to-expect/working-on-a-farm](http://www.getfresh.co.nz/what-to-expect/working-on-a-farm)
- Using an atlas, and Google Earth, find the places mentioned in the story:
  - Featherston
  - Castlepoint
  - Tauherenikau.

## During and post-reading activities

- Bella has had polio. What do students know about this disease and how it can be prevented? Research at [www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/immunisation-diseasesandvaccines-polio](http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/immunisation-diseasesandvaccines-polio)
- Have students list the different characters who helped Bella throughout the story. Identify the roles they played to assist Bella with the farm and with training Gypsy.
- China Joe is a swaggerman: from the book, prepare a report of what life would be like living as a swagger. Research further on [www.library.mstn.govt.nz/history/russianjack.html](http://www.library.mstn.govt.nz/history/russianjack.html) Students may have older family members who can recall swaggermen — share stories.
- Ask students to list the daily tasks that Bella did, before and after school. How does this compare this with a list of tasks that the students carry out at home?
- Have students write and present a live radio commentary of the final exciting race. Include descriptions of the setting, the crowd, and the horses with their riders in the commentary.