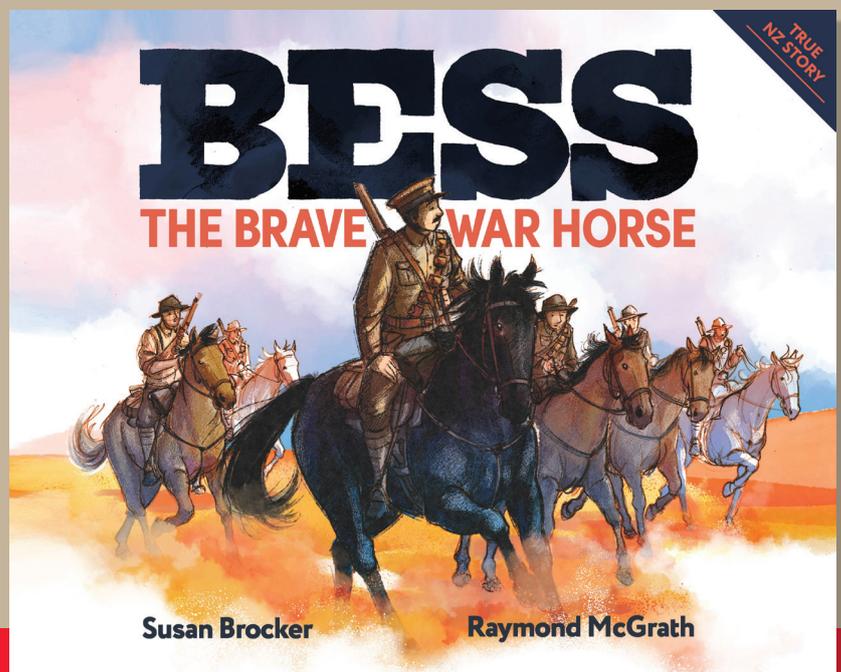


# The Brave War Horse

By Susan Brocker  
Illustrated by  
Raymond McGrath



- Reading • Writing •
- Social Studies • Art •

## Synopsis

*Bess the Brave War Horse* is a story about a young filly who grew up on an idyllic farm in Martinborough. In 1914 Captain Guy Powles chose to take Bess with him to the Great War (WWI) in North Africa. She was loaded onto a troop ship and kept below decks for seven weeks with four hundred other horses. On arrival in Egypt she had many sights and sounds to get used to while the soldiers set up camp. The heat was stifling when training in the desert and the noise of the guns terrified Bess.

Many months later Bess and the battalion trekked 50 kilometres a day until ordered to dismount. They fought in many bitter battles. During one fight, a shell exploded in front of Bess and threw her master to the ground. She stayed by his wounded body until the fighting was over. When they rode through the town of Jaffa, just after the enemy had retreated, the villagers greeted them. Captain Powles lifted a little girl onto Bess's back and she walked carefully through the narrow streets.

When the war was over the men were told they could not take their horses home. Captain Powles was determined to not leave Bess behind. He pleaded with his commander to be allowed to take her back to New Zealand, and was delighted to be given permission. Once home, she galloped in the green grass, and when her master's son rode her, she trotted gently across the peaceful green fields.

## About the Author

**Susan Brocker** has written over 50 fiction and non-fiction books for older children and teens, which have been published worldwide. She has a history degree and a great love of social history that is reflected in her books. Susan also has a close affinity with and love of animals that shines through in her writing. She lives with her husband and many pets, including horses, in a lovely old villa on a small farm near Tauranga.

## About the Illustrator

**Raymond McGrath** is an award-winning animation director, illustrator, designer and writer who has been working in children's television and advertising for around 20 years. As well as illustrating books for other authors, he has written and illustrated several books himself, including *It's Not a Monster*, *It's Me!* and two other *Monster* titles for Penguin NZ. Raymond lives in rural South Auckland with his wife, two daughters and a son – plus some cats and a schnauzer!



# Writing Style

*Bess the Brave War Horse* is a heart-warming creative non-fiction picture book, telling the tale of one of the four horses that returned to New Zealand from WWI. The story is set first on a farm in Martinborough, then in a troop ship, an Egyptian army camp ground and in North African battlefields. The author has used super-charged verbs, precise nouns, alliteration, and included different senses. The text is in the third person past tense. The author has used a range of short and long sentences, and included snippets of dialogue to give insight into the relationship between Captain Guy Powles and Bess. *Bess the Brave War Horse* has been written for the 5–8-year-old age group, but older readers, up to and including 12 years, would enjoy it as it is an important historical story.

## Shared Learning and Discussion Points

### ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the cover. When and where is this story set? How can you tell? Who or what do you think this story is about? Why do you think that?
- Before you start the story, think-pair-share what the students already know about WWI. Give students 1-5 minutes to think it through, then discuss their ideas with a partner. Thirdly, ask students to share what came up in their pair discussions about what they already know about WWI. Record some of the military/WWI words that they think they might encounter when reading the story.
- Why do you think the author has set the scene on a paddock with Bess frolicking with her friends? What does this scene represent? (pp.2-3)
- What simile has the author used to show Bess's beauty and character? Why does Captain Guy Powles think Bess will carry him 'bravely into battle' when he first meets her? What is the 'Great War'? (pp.4-5)
- When the author writes 'on a wharf shadowed by a looming troopship' what tone (feeling) is she setting for the story? State your reasoning. (pp.6-7)
- How does the author show that the journey would have been miserable for Bess? Pick out four interesting verbs (doing words) that the author has used. (pp.8-9)
- How does the author show that Bess and the other horses are excited to be on land again? How has the illustrator shown that the horses are a bit frisky? (pp.10-11)
- What were the animals that stank and made grunting noises? How do you think Bess feels about them? (pp.12-13)
- How did the horses and men get to their camp ground, and where is it? What did the men sleep in and where were the horses led to when they first arrived? (pp.14-15)
- How did the soldiers train for the battles? What discomforts did the horses have to overcome during this period? (pp.16-17)
- What did the soldiers do between trainings to help their horses relax or get further exercise? What sort of relationship do you think Captain Powles had with his horse? (pp.18-19)
- Where did Captain Powles get sent and why do you think he couldn't take Bess? Why was he sad after returning from the battle? What were the conditions like on their journey? (pp.20-21)
- Show some examples of alliteration (where words start with the same letter) on this page. The author has used the sound sense to show us what the battlefield was like. Give examples of some of these sound words. How did Bess save the horses? (pp.22-23)
- How did Bess show her loyalty on this page? And how did her master show how much he cared for the horse? (pp.24-25)
- Why were the villagers happy to see the soldiers? How did Bess show her gentle side in this scene? (pp.26-27)
- How did the men amuse themselves once the war was over? How did the men feel when they heard the horses couldn't go home? What did Captain Powles do when he heard that news, and why did he go to that trouble? (pp.28-29)
- Contrast this farm scene with some of the scenes while they were in North Africa. How are they different? How has the artist changed the colour palette to show the difference between the two places? Which place do you think Bess prefers, and why? (pp.30-31)
- The author shows us something about Bess's character when Captain Guy Powles' son rides Bess. It links us back to another scene during the war that was similar. What is that other scene and how does it show Bess's character? (pp.32)
- At the beginning of the story you predicted what the story was about. Were you right? What helped you make those connections? If you were wrong, what cues do you think you missed from the front cover?



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

# Activities

## ACTIVITY 1: HORSES FOR COURSES

Discuss with your students about why they think the horses were left overseas after WWI. What problems could have occurred if they had brought them back? Do you think New Zealand was the only country to leave their horses behind? What happened to the horses left in North Africa and Europe?

Set the students the task of finding more information about WWI war horses, recording their information in a KWL chart (below).

Students record information in the following columns: What they already **KNOW** about war horses. **WHAT** they'd like to find out. And what they **LEARNT**.

Lastly, ask them to summarise information about the war horses in three sentences.

KWL CHART ABOUT WAR HORSES		
What I already KNOW	WHAT I would like to find out	What I LEARNT
<b>Summary (3 sentences):</b>		

For help in finding this information, you could try:

- *Brave Bess and the Anzac horses* by Susan Brocker
- *1914: Riding into War* by Susan Brocker
- *Anzac Animals* by Maria Gill illustrated by Marco Ivancic.
- The National Army Museum site: [www.armymuseum.co.nz](http://www.armymuseum.co.nz)
- <https://nzhistory.govt.nz> site 'NZ's First World War horses', Page 8 – The end of the war

## ACTIVITY 2: PAYING TRIBUTE

Show the class some videos about Bess. For example:

[https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/harrowing-story-of-nz-horses-involvement-in-ww1-summed-up-song-6306041?variant=tb\\_v\\_7](https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/harrowing-story-of-nz-horses-involvement-in-ww1-summed-up-song-6306041?variant=tb_v_7)

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/video/bess-horse-great-war-story>

[www.armymuseum.co.nz](http://www.armymuseum.co.nz) Bess, the War Horse

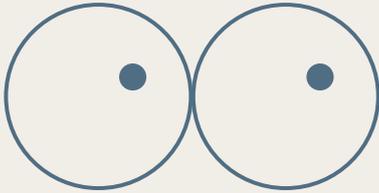
Ask the students to think about how people are now paying tribute to the war horses. Why is it important that we acknowledge their sacrifice? In groups, ask the students to plan how they will pay tribute to the horses that went to war. It could be a role play, video, song or PowerPoint presentation. Some students might like to sculpt a model that would represent the war horses. Then the students present their performance, PowerPoint, video or sculpture to the class. Students then reflect on what it felt like to pay their respect to the war horses in a journal.



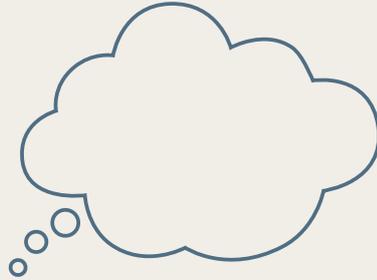
### ACTIVITY 3: I SEE ... I THINK ... I WONDER ...

Ask the students to look at one of the illustrations in the story.

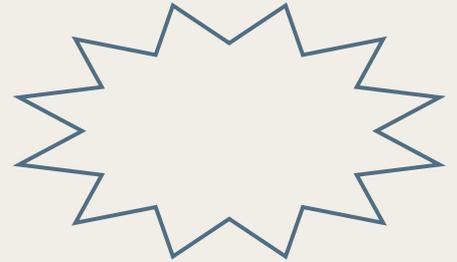
1. Ask them, 'What do you see?' and write down everything in the 'I see' circles. They might remark on what is happening in the illustration.
2. Then ask, 'What do you think?' and write about everything they noticed in the picture. They might write about the use of colour, perspective, style. Encourage them to look a little deeper at what they have noticed – is there any significance to it?
3. Lastly, ask, 'What do you wonder?' Tell them to let their imaginations go wild. Think about the setting, why has the artist set it up this way, and what are they supposed to take away from it.



**I SEE...**



**I THINK...**



**I WONDER...**

Written by Maria Gill