

**Teachers Notes (secondary)  
by Suzanne Thwaites**

**Market Blues**

**Kirsty Murray**

ISBN 9781865082844  
Recommended for ages 13-15

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## INTRODUCTION

In *Market Blues*, Kirsty Murray gives her readers an exciting and enjoyable time-slip novel, with a very satisfying twist at the end. Sam's story also provides an opening for thought and discussion about the preoccupations and experiences of pre-teenage boys in present-day urban Australia. Comparing his life with the lives of children of 100 years ago puts a fresh perspective on our own times, and Kirsty Murray's 'grass-roots' or back-street angle on the past - she did a lot of research on newsboys' clubs, markets and theatres, for example - is a refreshing approach that brings history alive.

## POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- What do you think would be your family's/friends' reactions if you tried to tell them that you had travelled back in time the way Sam had?
- Do you think you would be able to convince your friend to go along with you in the way that Sam was able to convince Yao?
- Sam's father handed over his good-luck charm, the fob watch, to Sam at the end of the book and yet Sam had pawned it when he had gone back in time. Do you believe that it was possible for Sam to alter history e.g. give the horse racing tips to Flea, have Flea retrieve the watch? Does Kirsty Murray make it seem plausible? Discuss.
- Sam had some rather harebrained schemes, particularly the one for making lots of money on the races. Do you think he could have made it work? Why/why not? Discuss.
- Throughout the book Sam has the notion that "evil puppet kings" control all the bad things that are happening to him. Does it seem that Sam experiences more than his fair share of bad luck? Have you ever found yourself in a similar predicament? Share your experiences.
- At the end of the book, Sam wants to tell Gertie about her future and attempt to change it, but Gertie doesn't want to know about it. If you were given the option of finding out about how your life was going to turn out, do you think you would want to know? Why or why not?
- Given that *Market Blues* is a work of fiction, how accurate do you think the author needs to be in her presentation of the historical period that she has taken us to? Can a novel like this add to our knowledge about particular events or times in history?
- It is often stated that children grow up quicker and become more independent at an earlier stage these days than in the "the good old days". From what you have read in *Market Blues*, do you think this is true?
- Discuss the lifestyles of Sam's friends in 1901. Compare them with Sam's and your own lifestyles.
- Current day Australia is a multicultural nation and this is clearly evident in Sam's family, friends and the people he works with. You might like to list the various characters and their original nationality. But relationships between people of different nationalities were very different around 1900. Reread the incident on pages 83-5 and discuss what you think it conveys to the reader. Do you think Kirsty Murray's portrayal of current-day attitudes is accurate? Does it reflect the behaviour and attitudes of you and your friends and other members of your family?

## ACTIVITIES

### ENGLISH

These activities are designed to assist students in achieving a wide variety of learning outcomes in the areas of Speaking and Listening, Reading, and Writing.

#### Journal-writing

- Choose a week of Sam's life covered in the novel that includes some time back in 1900. Write his diary entries for each day of that week. At the same time, write your own diary entries for each day of your current week. Compare the activities of your week with Sam's. Which do you think sounds the more interesting/exciting? What do you think would be your reaction to Sam's diary entries if he had let you read them?
- Kirsty Murray found it difficult to find records of the lives of children around 1900. Much more has been written and preserved about adults and their ways of life. Consider putting together a selection of your "current day" diary entries and publishing them with a view to them becoming a valuable record, for researchers in the future, of the activities/lifestyle of people your age at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### Debate

- Recent media reports in Victoria have outlined potential changes that are planned for the Victoria Market and its precinct. Many people would argue that "The Victoria Market is an important landmark of Melbourne, both historically and as a tourist attraction, and its current layout and appearance need to be preserved." Use the above statement as the topic for a debate between two teams in your class.

#### Poetry

- Write a limerick about one of the main characters of the book.
- Read and discuss some appropriate poems that were written around the time of Sam's visits back to 1900. E.g. "A dream of the Melbourne Cup" by A.B. Paterson, in *The collected Verse of A.B. Paterson*.
- Banjo Paterson was a war correspondent during the Boer War and he wrote some war poems. See if you can find any of these and read them. Discuss his style and the impressions of the war that we get from his verse.

#### Cartoon

- Reread some of the exciting or humorous events in the story, such as Sam's trouble with the yo-yo on page 18, his mishap when he threw the ripe tomato on page 36 and the horrible accident that occurred when Sam and Boots wrestled with the gun on page 90. Rewrite an incident of your choice as a cartoon strip. Do a rough copy first, deciding how many frames you are going to have and what is going to happen in each frame. Perhaps you could produce the good copy on overhead projector transparencies and then present it on a wall or screen for others to view.

#### Family Tree

- Construct Sam's family tree as accurately as you are able to from the information in *Market Blues*.
- Construct your own family tree back to at least the equivalent of Sam's. Which of your ancestors would have been about the same age as Gertie, Flea, Scoot and the other kids that befriended Sam, in 1900?

## **Interview**

Interview members of your family, grandparents and great-grandparents, to find out about these ancestors' lives.

Plan questions to ask beforehand. These might include:

Please tell me your full name.

When were you born?

Where were you born? (The answer to this question may lead you off into another direction if your interviewee was born in another country. You could find out: when they came to Australia? How? Why? What were their first impressions? How do they feel that they were treated? Depending on their age when they arrived, how did they get on at school? Did they have difficulty getting a job? Where did they first live? What did they like most about Australia? What did they miss most about their homeland?)

What can you remember about your childhood? In do you think were the significant differences compared with children's lives today?

What have been significant events, both in Australia and worldwide that you have experienced? How did they affect you?

Do you remember any of your ancestors, parents or grandparents, talking about Federation?

Perhaps tape the interview if the person being interviewed doesn't mind.

Devise a way to present interview to your class.

- Invite interviewees to come to school and speak to the grade.
- As a multimedia presentation.
- As an oral presentation.

## **Newspapers**

Newspapers in 1900 were very different to those that we read today. Acquire copies of Melbourne newspapers at the end of 1900 – from the State Library. Use them for a range of activities.

- How many Melbourne newspapers were there in 1900 and what were they called?
- Compare writing styles with that of current newspapers. Look at the size and style of font, the length and formal style of sentences and the amount of detail given to articles.
- Compare layout. Look at the number of illustrations and photos used, the amount of white space, the break up into various sections e.g. news stories, sport, advertisements, birth and death notices.
- Compare audiences that the papers were targeted to. What percentage of the population could actually read? Note that Flea asks Sam "Can you read, Houdini?" (p. 149) There were very few books published and those that were were really only available to the wealthy people, so newspapers were a very popular and important source of reading material.
- Compare advertisements. Look at the different types and what they are advertising for, the wording used and how they are set out to catch the readers' attention.
- Create your own newspaper in the style of the past paper – the feature article could be the Boer War parade or the Federation celebrations.

### **Related books and films**

A number of other authors have explored significant issues and events in Australian history through time-slip novels. While *Market Blues* is fresh in your memory, you might like to read some of the books listed below and compare them with Kirsty's story. Look at how the time travel occurs, the historical period covered in the story, the events and issues that seem important to the author and how plausibly you think the author presents the scenario. Which ones do you enjoy more and why do you think that is the case?

Park, Ruth.

*Playing Beattie Bow.*

Penguin, Melbourne, 1980

Book and film.

French, Jackie.

*Daughter of the Regiment.*

Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1998

French, Jackie.

*Somewhere around the Corner*

HarperCollins, Sydney, 1994

Barron, Antonia.

*Jeremy Jeremiah.*

Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995

Broome, Errol.

*Splashback: a great greasy journey.*

Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1996

Arthy, Judith

*The Children of Mirrabooka*

Penguin, Melbourne, 1997

Holland, Julia

*Through the Doorway.*

University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1997

Dubosarsky, Ursula.

*Zizzy Zing*

Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1992

Pulman, Felicity

*Ghost Boy*

Scholastic Australia, Gosford, 1995

### **SOSE**

The following activities are designed to further learning outcomes in the areas of History and Geography that include looking at the importance of studying history and the evidence available for historical analysis; the exploration of a particular period of Australian history; and changes that occur to environments over time, through people's use.

### Timeline

- Explore CD-ROMs, including “One destiny: the federation story”, “People, place and Time: family photographs as history” and “Australia the multimedia experience” and search the Internet - a good starting point might be, <http://www.1901centre.uts.edu.au/>, to find out more about events that were happening in Australia around the time of the book’s setting – emphasis on Federation and the Boer War.
- From your findings, construct a timeline; say for the 10-year period between 1895 and 1905, showing significant events and changes occurring in Australia. For example: start and end dates of the Boer War; when Australia first sent troops; dates of Federal conventions and referendums; any significant sporting achievements; any important events that you can find that affected children’s lives.

### Federation

100 years on from a very significant event in shaping the Australia that we live in today, *Market Blues* provides an exciting springboard for us to research and learn about the Federation of Australia. Use your findings from the above activity and the many other resources that have been produced about, and events that are taking place to celebrate the centenary of this event, to extend your knowledge and understanding about this important milestone in our history. (There have been many articles in newspapers, e.g. the *Age* and *Australian Geographic* has a very comprehensive article in its October-December 2000 issue). Look at the events leading up to Federation, the key people who played important roles in moving it along to fruition and the celebrations that occurred in 1901. Compare them with the celebrations taking place in 2001.

### Boer War

- The Boer War is said today to be the last of the “gentlemen’s wars”, the “last Colonial war” and the “forgotten war”. What do you know about it? When was it? Where was it fought? Which countries were involved, and why? What was the cause of the war and what was the result at the end of it? Research the Boer War – a good starting place might be the website <http://users.netconnect.com.au/~ianmac/> - to find the answers to these questions and then discuss whether you agree or disagree with the opening statement and why or why not.
- In the “Author’s Note” at the end of *Market Blues*, Kirsty tells the reader that “The parade of returned soldiers from the Boer War is based on fact...” Reread her description of the event on page 184. Can you find any report or information relating to this event?

### Melbourne society in 1900

Choose a group of people from the Melbourne that Sam went back to, e.g. the market sellers, the newspaper boys, families in Gertie’s economic circumstance, doctors, police. Research their lifestyle around 1900. Kirsty draws attention to the differences in clothing (p.53); housing (Gertie’s house p. 133,134) – but how does this compare with houses of wealthy people; occupations – the doctor, the police, the newspaper boys and others; sewerage, or rather the lack thereof!, (p.65); health and hygiene, (p.141, where Flea comments “Strawberry, vanilla or microbe, eh?”) What effect did this have on the death rate?

Research one or more topic of particular interest to you. – **or** you might like to explore the differences between lifestyles of children then with your lifestyle now.

How many children went to school? At what age did they leave? How much freedom did they have? How many children in their families? etc.

Use a variety of ways to present your findings e.g. a diorama, as a multimedia presentation, as an oral report, as a poster. You could dress cutout figures to demonstrate the various styles of clothing.

### **Mapping**

- The face of Melbourne's CBD has changed incredibly over 100 years and yet we read about places that Sam visited on his journeys back through time, including Chinatown and the Princess Theatre, that still form part of current-day Melbourne. Draw two maps of Melbourne's CBD. On one map put in the buildings and other landmarks – cemetery, markets, etc. - identified in *Market Blues* as part of 1900 Melbourne. On the other map mark the same sites with the buildings, etc., as they are today. Make a display so that others can see and compare the two maps.
- Choose any two of the landmarks from the 1900 map and research their histories. Present them as part of the display.

### **Excursion**

If you are fortunate enough to attend school within reasonable distance of Melbourne's CBD, you could explore this area and the landmarks on foot. If possible, take your two maps with you to assist you in locating and identifying specific sites. Can you find Batman's monument and the grey stone sculpture called "Passages" (p.127)?

If you live in another city or town, you could explore whatever market is nearest to you.