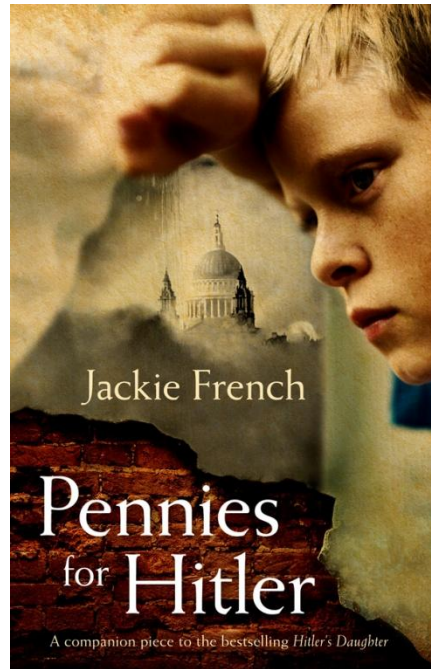


***Pennies for Hitler***



**TEACHERS' NOTES**

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## **Contents**

- **Introduction**
- **About the author/illustrator**
- **Author/illustrator inspiration**
- **Study notes on themes and curriculum topics:**

### CHARACTERS

- The Significance of Character
- Major Characters
- Minor Characters
- Character Arcs

### THEMES

### KEY QUOTES

### CURRICULUM TOPICS

- Language and Literacy
- SOSE
- **Questions for reading and discussion**

### **Author inspiration**

- **Bibliography**
- **About the author of the notes**

## Introduction

*Yet part of him was glad too, despite the change. Australia's hatred had turned from the Germans to the Japanese now. The cowardly Japanese who had struck without warning; the treacherous Japanese, who had bombed before declaring war. Hatred had run through the town like the row of pennies the soldier had shown him, all falling down almost together. Georg could share the hatred of this enemy. This enemy wasn't him. (p 240)*

Georg has seen at firsthand what unreasonable hatred and prejudice can do to an individual and to a society. He's been indoctrinated at school into the belief that only those of pure Aryan stock are worthy to live in Hitler's Germany. He has witnessed his father being brutally murdered by violent and irrational members of the Hitler youth. He's been horrified to learn that far from being Aryan he has a Jewish ancestor which makes him one of the despised 'Juden'. He's been separated from his mother with no idea whether she has survived the camps of Europe. He's been spirited away secretly to England in a suitcase, where he's hidden in the flat of his kindly aunt Miriam. He's experienced the terrifyingly destructive early war time bombing of London and the death of a girl he admired. And he's travelled alone with a group of other child evacuees to Australia.

There, his foster family the Peaslakes offer him a family life and a home which is comfortingly safe. He finds a friend in Mud, the Peaslakes' niece who lives on a neighbouring farm, and begins to adapt to the ways of Australian kids and to enjoy this rural idyll. However, war begins to encroach on their quiet country life as well, and local people not only find themselves facing privations such as food rationing in order to support the war effort, but also the need to devise forms of protection for themselves. Mrs Peaslake's brother and Mud's dad enlist, just as her brothers Ken and Len and the Peaslakes' only son Alan already have.

Even the kids begin to mobilise, in forming the Bellagong Junior Volunteer Defence Corps (p 263) under the forceful leadership of Mud. And Georg becomes increasingly aware that here, too, he is an enemy alien, and that if local people knew the truth, they might well despise him as well.

Jackie French writes in her notes that 'This is a book about hatred.' (p 323) Her novel certainly shows the damage done to individuals, families, communities and nations by such hatred. But it also shows that people can love and be kind to each other ... despite all efforts to engender hatred.

## About the author

**Jackie French** is a multiple award winning, very prolific and very diverse writer. Of her books she says on her website that:

*'There were 132 at last count, slightly more than we have varieties of apples. If something is worth doing you may as well go heart and soul and boot leather ... I write for kids and adults, fiction, history, gardening, pests control, chooks and some that must be a nightmare for book shops to work out what genre they are. Have a look at 'which book?' for a probably not quite up to date list of what is where and for whom.'*

Her website offers further detailed and fascinating insights into her life and work.

<http://www.jackiefrench.com.au> [See also articles listed in **Bibliography** below.]

## Study notes on themes and curriculum topics

### CHARACTERS

- **The Significance of Character:** Characters are the heart of any narrative, the catalysts for action, and the central core around which all other narrative aspects must revolve and work. In this novel there are several major characters (some of whom figure briefly in the action) and some minor ones. *Discussion Point:* Discuss the idealistic character of Papa: 'I tried to get your father to leave Germany. I told him what might happen, but he wouldn't listen. He was lost in the past with his precious Goethe, just as he has always been. He never saw things as they really are, never even wanted to see them —' (p 52) Contrast him to Mutti.
- **Major Characters:** Georg; Aunt Miriam; Mr and Mrs Peaslake; Mud; Mutti and Papa; Alan Peaslake. *Discussion Point:* Apart from Georg, which other character(s) did you consider to be central to the novel's plot and themes, and why? Which of the main characters did you find least appealing, and why?
- **Minor Characters:** Mrs Huntley, Elizabeth, Jamie Mallory, Mrs Rose, Mud's parents,. *Discussion Point:* Is there a minor character who might have played a larger part? Why would you have liked to have seen more of this character? For example, Jamie the boy who Georg travels with on board ship from England was a lively and interesting companion.

- **Character Arcs** are the curve on which key events show how a character grows or develops in response to events and to interactions with other characters in the novel. *Activity:* Choose a character and trace an arc on which key events indicate some aspect of their personality or change in their behaviour. (eg Georg is the central character, whose indoctrination at school is rudely interrupted when his father is murdered by Nazi students and his mother is forced to send him away.) *Discussion Point:* How might Georg's character have developed differently? What are the key turning points in his development as a character?

## THEMES

### Hatred, Fear and Prejudice

- **This novel explores the conflicts which derive from irrational fear of others.** 'Maybe when things are bad it helps to have someone to hate.' ( p 65 ) *Discussion Point:* Discuss why people dislike each other or are suspicious of each other. Why do wars begin? Does poverty or jealousy of others contribute to such conflicts? How does such prejudice influence our own lives? Encourage students to discuss when and why they have felt hatred or mistrust and why they have had those feelings.
- **Hitler's message of Anti-Semitism and hatred of the Jews was conveyed effectively through schools which were forced to preach such prejudice.** Students were also subjected to head measurements (as Georg was in the opening pages of this novel) to test whether they were pure Aryans. (See also Author Notes p 313) . 'Papa didn't understand about the Jews. It was the Jews' fault Germany had been so poor till the Führer took control. Herr Doktor Schöner had explained it at school. The Jews controlled the banks. They poisoned the Vaterland and made it weak just by living among them. The Jews killed babies for their secret ceremonies; and they poisoned the wells in villages.' ( p 6 ) *Activity:* Research Anti-Semitism further.
- **Even in Australia, when war broke out, people who had been neighbours were suddenly regarded as the enemy, and for example, Italians, Germans and Japanese were interned.** *Discussion Point:* 'She pulled out an already grubby pamphlet. 'I found it at the Post Office. It's for school children! It says how to find a German spy.' ( p 258) Discuss Mud's campaign to find

German spies and how this might have led to Georg being rejected if their friendship hadn't been so strong. *Activity:* Read *The Divine Wind* by Garry Disher which shows how the Japanese were rejected in Broome during the war, and compare it to this novel. Read Armin Greder's picture book *The Island* which is also about prejudice towards other people.

- **Prejudice is often enforced by Propaganda or Indoctrination.** Georg is taught to despise Jews. 'They had only won the Great War because the American Jews had paid for lots of guns. But now Germany had the greatest army ever seen. One day, said Herr Doktor Schöner, Germany's Third Reich — its Third Great Empire — would take over the whole world. Every boy in every country would salute the German flag: would raise their arm and yell, 'Heil, Hitler.' This was the best time ever to be a German. (P 8) But later he begins to doubt what he's been taught: 'If the Führer were wrong about Jews perhaps he was wrong about other things. About the English being weak and cowardly, about the French being arrogant and treacherous, about Americans being ruled by Jews and bankers.' (p 58) *Discussion Point:* Is such propaganda still used to encourage war or conflict? Find examples to support your argument.
- **Propaganda wasn't confined to the Germans, but was also used by those they fought in order to enforce their own views, and often to engender distrust of other cultures as well.** *Activity:* Research the use of propaganda in Australia, which advocated certain attitudes to war. View and discuss some of the posters at Robert Lewis's 'The Homefront – World War 2' <<http://www.anzacday.org.au/history/ww2/homefront/overview.html>> How might a German person like Georg have responded to some of this propaganda?

## Hitler and Nazism in World War II

- **Read widely about Hitler's Rise to Power and the Causes and Effect of it.** *Discussion Point:* Were there other factors which contributed to war apart from his policies? Research the events which led to Hitler's rise and the key events which then led to his downfall. For example: 'Kristallnacht had been the big celebration when the Brown Shirts had risen up against the Jews, burning their houses, smashing their shops, painting the big yellow Star of David on their doors so they couldn't pretend to be like everyone else.' (p 8) This night was one of the key events during Hitler's reign of terror. Did it engender admiration or fear in Germany?

- **British Response to Hitler's Power was one of Outrage and Disbelief.** 'People say the sun never sets on the British Empire, and that's true enough.' She smiled briefly. 'Yes, it is the biggest in the world. But we don't have nearly as many soldiers as Germany. Nowhere near as many aeroplanes or ships, and certainly nothing as massive as Germany's battleship, the *Bismarck*. Germany has been preparing for this war for ten years; and England has done nothing in that time.'(p 69) *Discussion Point:* Was Britain partly to blame for its weakness in the face of German power?
- **Was Hitler a Monster?** *Discussion Point:* Aunt Miriam sighed. 'I don't suppose Germany is any more evil than any other country, though I could never say that in public. There are fools in this country too, but just now Germany has one for a leader.' 'No! The Führer isn't ...' Georg hesitated. 'The Führer is a tiny little man who wants to be a big one,' said Aunt Miriam evenly. 'And he wants to make his country bigger too. Germany was in a bad way when he came to power. And he's done good things — bringing the nation together again. But to do that he blamed all the hardships on the Jews, creating hatred and fear, to give communists and fascists and every unemployed peasant a common enemy. The Jews. Sometimes it's as though hatred spreads like the flu. One person gets it, then another and another.'(p 63) History often presents Hitler as being totally responsible for the events of WWII, but who else was culpable?
- **British Appeasement was a policy which contributed to Hitler's rise.** 'They talked of the 'Polish crisis' and of how Hitler had offered not to fight England if the English allowed him to have the part of Poland called Danzig. It had seemed so simple back in Germany. The Führer had to free the Danzig Germans from Polish rule! But here it wasn't simple at all.'(p 72) *Discussion Point:* Was appeasement an effective strategy?
- **Genocide was the most horrendous aspect of Hitler's policies.** 'The Jews in Germany were being put in places called concentration camps where they had to work to help Germany win the war. They were tortured there — whipped and beaten with sticks. Hitler himself had ordered the floggings.' (p 80) *Discussion Point:* How and why did ordinary people become involved in such widespread cruelty?

## Moral Responsibility

- **Morally correct responses to challenges are not always as simple as they might seem.** When Mutti goes to visit Tante Gudrun she is obviously not very supportive, due to a fear of being accused of assisting a Jew. Many people during this era in Germany turned a blind eye to what was happening, in fear for their own lives. And in other countries too, there was a lack of will to intervene. *Discussion Point:* What should people have done about what was happening in WWII?
- *Discussion Point:* Georg shocks himself when he saves the live of a man he believes is Japanese (p 300). Should one go to the aid of someone in an enemy force? Would you have helped this man?
- **One of the challenges of war is that it often forces people to lie or keep secrets from each other.** *Discussion Point:* 'Instead they had a German boy: a boy who lied. A boy who was the enemy who had killed their son. The enemy was him. (p 288) Is it right to tell lies in order to protect oneself?

## Hope, Strength and Resilience

- **Hope is a major theme in this novel.** Georg survives the journey out of Germany by relying on the hope of seeing his parents again. 'Maybe if he did this impossible thing it would be all right. If he could lie still and quiet the whole night then Papa would be safe again; Mutti would be free to come to England too.' (p 33) 'And yet he knew he could. He could do this: he *would* do this and it would all be all right. (p 33) *Discussion Point:* Is it always possible to maintain a sense of hope? In what situations might one give up any hope?
- **Often people make jokes or engage in happy activity in order to distract themselves from dire circumstances.** For example, when the fat lady entertains everyone in the underground railway station in London, during the bombing, 'They aren't just cheering her, thought Georg. They are cheering themselves, cheering all of us, because we sing instead of sob.'(p 102) *Discussion Point:* How much comfort does humour offer in times of trouble?



## Bravery and Heroism

- **Bravery can be a complex and ambiguous subject.** ‘A man’s life is still a life to save, enemy or not,’ said Mrs Peaslake firmly. Alan killed enemies, Georg thought. So did Mud’s brothers. It was as though Mrs Peaslake knew what he’d been thinking. ‘There’re times you have to kill things. People. Animals. What matters is that you know there’re only certain times you need to do it. What matters is that the rest of the time you’re kind. Our Alan is a hero.’ Her smile held tears, but it was a real smile too. ‘Two heroes in our family now.’ (p 304) *Discussion Point:* What makes a person a hero?
- **The people who helped smuggle Georg out of Germany were extraordinarily brave.** *Activity:* Read more about the Resistance Movement in countries like France during WWII.

## Refugees

- **Displacement is one of the major feelings experienced by those who seek refuge in other countries.** ‘Another journey, thought Georg. It was as though the world was all journeys now. There would never be any place to stop.’ (p 51) *Discussion Point:* How would you have felt, had you lost your home and endured the journeys Georg did? Georg is one of the lucky ones, who is taken in by a warm loving and understanding family. Did all the refugees who arrived in Australia at this time fare as well as Georg?
- **Legal Recognition of Refugees can be a slow process and can contribute to ongoing insecurity.** ‘George, I just don’t know what will happen. I don’t really know your status here. I haven’t had a chance to find out. I didn’t expect any of this.’(p 54) *Discussion Point:* How were refugees treated during WWII? For example, some of them were interned. *Activity:* Design a poster which encourages humane and kind treatment of refugees.

## World War II and the Homefront

- **Food Rationing is one aspect of war which is detailed in this novel.** People were given ration books (p 276) and ‘The newspaper explained how to keep chickens for eggs or rabbits for meat or plant a vegetable garden.’ (p 84) Women became very resourceful in baking without the usual supplies of things such as eggs, sugar or butter. ‘Mrs Huntley would make a fruitcake, one

of her new war recipes that used fresh plums instead of dried fruit.' (p 94) *Activity:* Research the recipes and food cooked in wartime. (Try the recipes which Jackie French includes in the back of the book.)

- **Women During WWII were often given jobs they would never have been offered in peace time.** 'Mr Menzies, the Prime Minister, called on women to take over men's jobs, so more men could join the army.' (p 224) Mrs Rose — Georg and Mud's teacher — has been invited back to teach, although married women were not allowed to retain their jobs in peacetime. *Discussion Point:* How did war effect women's lives and did these effects continue afterwards?
- **Retailers Experienced Sales Restrictions as well.** 'Clothes weren't rationed like in England, but shops could only sell three-quarters each day of what they'd sold the same day the year before. Once they'd sold that they had to shut their doors.' (p 225) *Activity:* Research the sales restrictions which came into place during war and how effective they were.
- **Evacuation of Children became commonplace in Britain where many were sent to the country.** 'They called it Operation Pied Piper in the newspaper. Over three short days three and a half million children had to leave England's cities — cities, like London and Manchester and Liverpool, that might be bombed. They were taken by train or buses or even trucks west to Wales or to villages far from the coast.' (p 75 ) During what became known as the 'phoney war' (p 88), people began to doubt that London would be bombed and brought their children home again. 'Have you seen how many children have been brought back to London? Stupidity, after all the work and upset getting them out.'(p 89) *Discussion Point:* Discuss evacuation and the effect it had on children's lives. *Activity:* Read David McRobbie's *Vinnie's War* and discuss it in relation to this topic. **Some Children (like Georg) were evacuated overseas and many would not have seen their families again.** 'As though we are parcels, thought Georg, thank-you presents for a colony what sends its army to help the English war.' (p 137) *Discussion Point:* How might you have coped with such separation from your parents or carers?
- **Air Raid Shelters and Wardens.** 'The government was giving 'Anderson' air-raid shelters to everyone in London and other cities that could be bombed. There was a photo and a diagram of the shelters, to help people work out how to put them together.'(p 68) *Discussion Point:* How effective were these strategies in protecting people in London?

## World War II Conflicts

- **Many events mentioned in this novel have become legendary but how much do you really know about them?** *Activity:* Choose an event in the novel which is a major WWII conflict and research it further. eg The fall of Singapore or the bombing of Darwin or Pearl Harbour. *Activity:* Read Churchill's famous speech (p 91) and discuss what it reveals about British foreign policy of the time.
- **The Bombing of London was a terrible shock to people as such strikes came with little warning and were devastating in their impact on ordinary people.** *Discussion Point:* 'But now, for the first time, he knew — knew with his stomach and his heart — that the planes up there were flown by the enemy: that Hitler was the enemy. For the first time he felt the taste of hate.' (p 101) This closeness of the conflict brought home to people what war really meant, and engendered hatred as well. In Germany, too, people experienced the same sort of tragedy in the bombing of Dresden etc. Discuss the effect of such domestic targeting of bombs.

## Australia's Isolation and Reliance on and Support of Foreign Powers

- **In Australia the often felt fear of Asian invasion was aroused again when Japanese ships were sighted close to various shores, and when the bombing of Broome and Darwin (p 246) occurred.** *Discussion Point:* Read the following quote and discuss what it reveals about Australian attitudes to outsiders. '*We shall hold this country and keep it as a citadel for the British-speaking race and as a place where civilisation will persist.*' (p 230)
- *Activity:* How unprotected is Australia? 'Georg supposed there wasn't enough barbed wire in Australia for every beach.' (p 256) Do we really have cause to worry?
- **Colonial Dependence on Britain led to Australia's involvement in WWII.** But Curtin challenged that alliance when he refused to send more troops overseas in order to protect the country 'For the first time an Australian Prime Minister defied the English one. Australia had to defend itself.' (p 239) *Discussion Point:* Should Curtin have done what he did?

- **At the height of war Australia turned its allegiance to the United States.** *'It is good that the Americans are coming here and that Mr Curtin can work with General Mackerther.'* (p 248)  
*Activity:* was this another form of dependency or unequal partnership? Research and discuss.

### Grief and Loss

- **This novel is full of loss and grief.** Georg witnesses his father's and later Elizabeth's death. The Peaslakes lose their son, Alan. Mud has had to cope with having her two brothers and her father away for years. 'Crying for so many things, perhaps: for her brothers in danger, just as he cried for Mutti and Papa, for the world he'd lost, for the hurt to those he loved now. It hurt more to cry together but at the same it was better too. (p 284) *Discussion Point:* Is this a sad or a hopeful novel?

### Kindness

- **One of the main themes here, is the opposite of hatred — kindness — and the fact that kindness is as contagious as hatred.** *Activity:* Invite students to think of historical examples, such as those who sheltered Anne Frank, or the endless hours of knitting and cooking people like Mrs Peaslake did during the war to send a few treats to soldiers overseas. They might then think of modern day examples where people sacrifice their time, or even their lives for others, in both small and big ways.
- **The author suggests that one person who is kind may make others do kind things too.**  
*Discussion Point:* Do you agree with this? If so, can you give examples? Do you think that living with the kindness of the Peaslakes changed Georg?
- **Alan's letters to Georg are acts of kindness too.** He's never met the boy but he goes out of his way to make him feel at home, and to entrust him with the care of his parents. *Discussion Point:* Is Alan's kindness to Georg as much about kindness to his parents as well?

## KEY QUOTES

The following quotes relate to some of the **Themes** above. You might like to present any one of them (or two related quotes) to your students as a catalyst for further discussion, or as the subject of an essay outlining how the quote reflects a theme which is central to this novel:

<p>'Could you catch being Jewish, like you caught the flu? It didn't make sense. Nothing made sense. Today was broken. His life was broken. Later the shattered pieces might come together. 'When can we see Papa? Will he be all right?' (p 25)</p>	<p>'It was funny to be dreaming again of good things that might happen, instead of just the good things that had gone. The stories had still vanished from his brain, but at least he had his dreams.' (p 95)</p>
<p>'When his body hurt this much the things he didn't want to think about, the things he had to think about, didn't hurt as much. He heard voices below him: a child called out somewhere; a baby cried. The pain had become part of him.' (p 38)</p>	<p>'Noise and hate, he thought, still staring at the students. The student executioners smiled, as though they had done good work. Their friends were already dragging a second victim towards the window.' (p 16)</p>
<p>'Sometimes the pain got bigger, like when Mr Justin the vicar gave a sermon on how Hitler had blotted out the good in all the German people and made their children loathsome.' (p 226)</p>	<p>'Ten thousand Jewish women marched through the streets of a place called Palestine to ask the English rulers to let more Jews come from Germany to Palestine. But it seemed the Führer wouldn't let them out, nor the English rulers let them in.' (p 71)</p>
<p>'If hatred was contagious, perhaps kindness was too.' (p 309)</p>	<p>'Could ... could the Führer be wrong, and Jews weren't all evil? Or was he different from other Jews, and Papa and Aunt Miriam too, because they were only a little bit Jewish, so it didn't count?' (p 58)</p>
<p>'He didn't want to read stories about a war. War threaded through his whole life. Stories were the only place that he could escape from war.' (p 86)</p>	<p>'No one said 'I love you'. No one said 'I'll miss you' or 'My world will crack when you are gone'. No one said 'I don't think I can bear this, but I will'. ' (p 77)</p>
<p>'He is one of many,' said the woman. 'We do what we can. For every one we get out of Germany a thousand are trapped here.' Georg wondered if the woman really saw him, except as a package. One of a thousand. Would she even remember his name?' (p 31)</p>	<p>'Don't tell me. If ... if I am ever caught the Gestapo might hurt me till I give them names. If I don't know your mother's name then I can't say anything that might hurt her. Do you understand?' No, thought Georg, I don't understand.' (p 46)</p>

## CURRICULUM TOPICS

### Language and Literacy

- ***This novel is a work of Historical Fiction or Faction***—a genre which relies on the author weaving together fact and fiction seamlessly. *Discussion Point:* Jackie French admits in her notes that she changed some details to suit her plot and structure. How much of this story did you know from your historical research? What new things did you discover? Discuss the writing of historical fiction with your students, with reference to some of the articles on writing such fiction in the **Bibliography** below.
- ***Poetry*** — The novel includes several poems which relate to the action. For example, Papa reads Goethe's 'Wandrer's Nachtlied II' (p 10) to Georg the morning he dies, and later that poem gives Georg hope (p 34). *Discussion Point:* What is the meaning of the poem and why does it offer solace to Georg in a time of fear? Later Mr Peaslake reads several Australian poems to Georg, including *The Wild Colonial Boy* (pp 54-7), Henry Lawson's *Andy's Gone With Cattle* (pp 215-6), Clement Moore's *The Night Before Christmas* (p 196 ), and *The Dead Stockman* as a tribute to Alan (pp 290-1). *Discussion Point:* Choose one of these poems, discuss how it is constructed, and the meaning of the poem.
- ***Narrative Structure*** — The novel follows a chronological structure. However, it does allow the various narrators to recall or to 'flashback' to incidents in the past which are significant in the background or framing narrative. *Activity:* Create a timeline of all the incidents referred to in the book.
- ***Narrative Perspective*** —The novel is told in third person, past tense, so it is not a diary account of Georg's journey. *Activity:* Re-write one section in first person from Georg's perspective. How does this change the story? *Activity:* Choose a chapter and describe the incidents from the point of view of another character. How different would the telling have been?
- ***Letters*** — The novel contains several letters which are used to add various people's stories and perspectives to the story as well. *Activity:* Choose a particular letter and discuss what it reveals about the person and their feelings. *Activity:* Read Alan's letter to his parents (pp 286-7) which

must be one of the most beautifully written and heartfelt letters to a parent ever written!  
Discuss the feelings it evokes.

- ***Opening Lines of Chapters are 'Hooks' to the Reader*** — The first line in the book is an excellent example: 'There were cream cakes for tea the afternoon they killed Georg's father.' (p 1)  
*Activity:* Read the first line in each chapter. Some begin with excerpts from letters; others are provocative or arresting statements. What other kinds of ways are there to open a chapter? Choose one opening line and re-write it in your own way. Discuss closing sentences in chapters as well
- ***The Cover of a Book is an Ideogram for the Contents and a Marketing Tool as well***— It should encapsulate the emotional import of the book and entice the reader into it. *Activity:* Create a new cover for the work drawing on either theme or incident to create the image. Use techniques such as collage. Write a blurb for the back cover of the book as well.
- ***Speeches*** — A number of famous speeches by politicians are included in the narrative. *Activity:* Locate the full text of these speeches and have the students read and discuss that they reveal about the prevailing attitudes of the time. Discuss the use of rhetoric in these speeches.
- ***Narrative Devices*** —Jackie French uses words very carefully to enhance the ideas in her fictions. *Discussion Point:* Read the following passage and discuss how a series of descriptions give insights into Georg's divided personality as both a German and an 'English boy' named George. 'He was George, who loved apple pancakes so much that Mrs Peaslake made them for him and Mud nearly every afternoon after school. He was George, learning to throw dried cow pats like discs with Mud or reading borrowed books by the fire at night, while Mr Peaslake nodded off as he listened to the wireless and Mrs Peaslake knitted khaki socks and balaclavas. But it was Georg who looked out his window one morning to see a mob of roos bounding through the winter dew, impossible animals with tails that beat the ground. It was Georg ...' (p 222) The novel also contains poetic descriptions such as the following: 'Georg got the feeling that this was a land that didn't care about people. The grass was brown and the green of the trees was faded. Every colour looked slightly wrong — even the too rich blue of the sky.' (p 160) Discuss this description of landscape.

- **Colloquialisms and Commonly Used Words of the Era Enhance a Sense of the Times.** Jackie French has said: 'After I've written a book I go over and over checking the language the characters have used to make sure I've got the rhythms correct and haven't added any anachronisms.' (Turton, 2000, p 15) *Activity:* Make a list of all the uncommon words or expressions and try to guess their meaning from the context in which they appear. eg 'bonzer' (p 226.) Then check their meanings in a dictionary.
- **Background Research** — 'People were cold in Melbourne, said the newspaper, as there wasn't enough firewood this year — with few men to cut it and not enough petrol to cart it into the city — and gas supplies ran short.' (p 225) Jackie French clearly researched the weather at that time, in order to write this description which adds detail to the story. Discuss with students the research that authors do (much of which is not obvious in a novel) to make it a credible account of a particular era.

## SOSE

- **Whose History?** — There are many versions of history as the **Themes** above would suggest. In the **Bibliography** below there are websites tracing the history of WWII from various perspectives. *Discussion Point:* How different are the German and the English accounts of the conflict? Read 'revisionist' interpretations of the conflict, for example, 'Historiography Causes of WWII' <http://www.macgregorishistory.com/english/ib/WWII/causesww.html> *Activity:* Choose an incident in the novel and read varying interpretations of its cause and effect. eg Evacuation of Dunkirk(p 90). *Activity:* Jackie French has written many historical fictions and *Hitler's Daughter* in particular covers similar terrain in examining the nature of culpability and the ambiguous relationship between victor and vanquished in any conflict. Read and compare these novels and examine for example Mark's searching response to Anna's story about Heidi, in *Hitler's Daughter* in relation to Georg's feelings about being German in *Pennies for Hitler*.
- **Nationhood and Race** —This novel is about the physical conflict between nations and also between their symbolic concepts of themselves as nations and as members of certain races or types of people. *Discussion Point:* What qualities do Australians feel they possess which distinguish them from others? (eg Mateship.) How true are such perceptions of our nation?



- **Values** —This novel is about a conflict between different sets of values. *Activity:* Create a table and list some of the values demonstrated in any of the scenes or events in this book with a corresponding quote to illustrate it.

### Questions for reading and discussion

1. Australians travelled on British passports until 1949.' (p 315) This is one of the facts Jackie French includes in the notes at the end of the novel to illustrate Australia's dependence on Britain. *Discussion Point:* What other evidences of this colonialist dependency did you find in this novel?
2. Jackie French praises John Curtin (p 320) *Discussion Point:* Research and read more about him. Was his effort in war a triumph?
3. Mud's brothers and father presumably came home to their family. But what sort of psychological and physical damage was done to men in war? *Activity:* Research and discuss. (Some students may be able to refer to the experiences of family members.)
4. This novel poses many questions. We have a brief glimpse of Mutti's possible arrival in Australia, but no idea what became of Aunt Miriam, herself a hero in this novel, who worked tirelessly for the war office , and also protected Georg by sending him to Australia. *Discussion Point:* What might have become of Aunt Miriam?
5. Jackie French wrote *Hitler's Daughter* more than a decade ago, and it has been dramatised to huge success. She has been asked by readers to write a sequel. This new novel is not a sequel but a companion about ordinary children caught up in horrendous events. *Activity:* Read and compare the interpretation of Hitler's Germany and how two very different children —Heidi and Georg — were influenced by him. Read other novels or nonfiction accounts of children involved in this conflict. [See **Bibliography** below.]

6. Georg is what is described as an 'enemy alien' but was lucky to have a British passport. During the war a group of Vienna Choir boys were stranded here and regarded as such aliens. *Activity:* Read more about their experiences. [See **Websites** below.]
7. This novel gives insights into ordinary people's experiences of war on the homefront. *Activity:* Choose some aspect of war mentioned in the novel and research it further, for example, war savings stamps, school salvage centres (p 280), or land girls.
8. 'There was a lot that no one mentioned these days, not just things that spies might pass on to the enemy but things that might hurt if said aloud.' (p 221) How difficult might it have been for people to begin trusting each other after so many years of suspicion?
9. This novel canvases many subjects and issues relating to World War Two. *Discussion Point:* What was the major idea that this novel conveyed to you as a reader about this war?
10. At its heart, this novel is about hatred. *Discussion Point:* What does it say about hatred or prejudice?

## **NOTES ON THE TEXT**

At the back of the book, there are extensive **Notes** (pp 312-323) by the author Jackie French on many of the historical and cultural issues referred to in this text. This should be an invaluable resource to teachers in using the book, in conjunction with these notes, in the classroom.

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