

A FORTUNATE LIFE FOR YOUNGER READERS

A.B. FACEY

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YEAR LEVEL: Y5–9

ABOUT THE BOOK

Bert Facey saw himself as an ordinary man, but his remarkable story reveals an extraordinary life lived to the full. Bert Facey was a battler, ever optimistic and hopeful despite the hardships of his life. A true classic of Australian literature, his simply written autobiography is an inspiration. This edition has been specially adapted for young readers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A.B. Facey was born in 1894 and grew up on the Kalgoorlie goldfields and in the wheatbelt of Western Australia. His father died before he was two and he was deserted by his mother soon afterwards. He was looked after by his grandmother until he was eight years old, when he went out to work.

His many jobs included droving, hammering spikes on the railway line from Merredin to Wickopin and boxing in a travelling troupe. He was in the Eleventh Battalion at the Gallipoli landing; after the war, he became a farmer under the Soldier Settlement Scheme but was forced off the land during the Depression. He joined the tramways and was active in the Tramways Union.

A.B. Facey, who had no formal education, taught himself to read and write. He made the first notes on his life soon after World War I, and filled notebooks with his accounts of his experiences. Finally, on his children's urging, he submitted the handwritten manuscript to Fremantle Press. He died in 1982, nine months after *A Fortunate Life* had been published to wide acclaim.

THEMES

- Australian life in the early 1900s
- Rural Australia
- World Wars I and II
- The Anzacs
- Childhood
- Family
- Courage
- Resilience

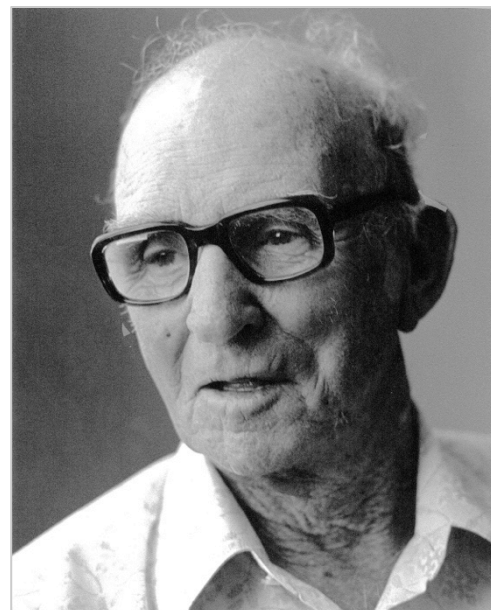
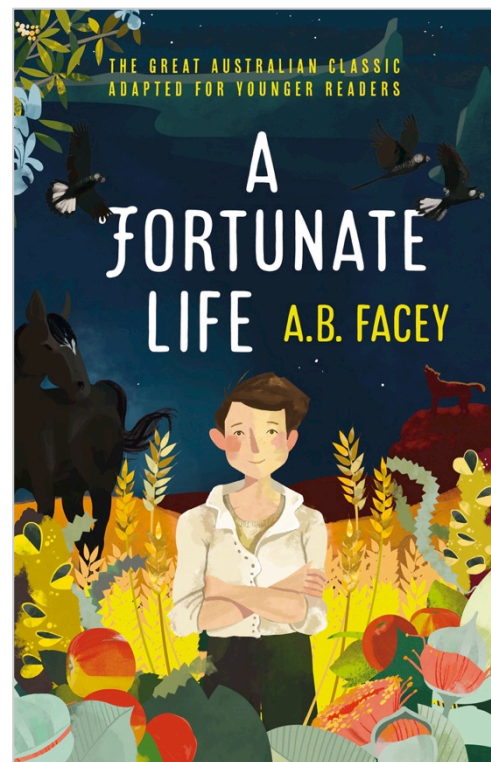
AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y5–9 English

Y5–9 History

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Australian War Memorial: www.awm.gov.au
- National Museum of Australia: www.nma.gov.au
- Anzac Day: www.army.gov.au/our-history/traditions/anzac-day



CLASSROOM IDEAS

Discussion questions

1. What is the significance of the title? How did the author respond to the suggestion that he had a 'sad' life? Do you think he had a fortunate life? What things are you fortunate to have in your life?
2. A.B. Facey confronted many challenges, both physical and mental. What does it mean to be resilient? When have you demonstrated resilience?
3. Facey is seen by many as an Australian hero. In your opinion, what constitutes a hero? Who inspires you and why?
4. How are the themes of courage, resilience, loyalty and love portrayed throughout this story? What other themes stood out to you?
5. *A strange experience – here we were, mixing with our enemies, exchanging smiles and cigarettes, when a day before we had been tearing each other to pieces.* What does this suggest about the soldiers participating in wars? What does it suggest about the nature of war itself?
6. Do you have any family members who currently serve or have served in the armed forces? What have their experiences been like?
7. What was your favourite part of the book and why?

Creative writing and Visual art






1. Facey uses direct, simple language to address his readers, as if 'having a yarn' with them, and the first-person narration conveys a strong sense of character. How would you describe the narrator's personality? Provide examples, e.g. he is resourceful, as demonstrated when _____, he is hard-working, as demonstrated when _____.
2. What does the phrase 'spinning yarns' mean? Do you know anyone who is great at spinning yarns? What makes their stories engaging?
3. Autobiographies are based on an individual's memory, and are therefore highly subjective. What does this mean? What is memory? What are facts? What is truth?
4. Write an autobiographical account of an incident from your childhood. Write as honestly as possible, then swap with a partner and discuss. Reflect: Did I exaggerate anything in my retelling? Did I omit any details?
5. Create a free-verse poem exploring the theme of courage, fear, mateship or resilience.
6. Write a diary entry from the point of view of a soldier in the trenches at Gallipoli. Describe the living conditions as well as the soldier's thoughts and feelings.
7. Illustrate your favourite passage that describes a setting in the Western Australian wheatbelt or bush where Facey lived and worked for much of his life.

History

1. In groups, research one of the following areas of settler life during the early 1900s and present your findings to the class: medical care; food, water and shelter; climate; education; transport and communication.
2. Compare Australia in the early twentieth century with Australia today, using quotes from the book to support your answer. Consider areas such as technology (communications, travel, transportation, farming methods, weapons) and society (jobs, urban development, gender roles, recognition of Indigenous Australians).
3. What were some of the reasons for the outbreak of World War I?
4. What does the acronym ANZAC stand for? What role did the Anzacs play in World War I?
5. Facey was a member of the Eleventh Battalion. Visit the Australian War Memorial website to learn more about this battalion. On a map of the world, chart its journey from Australia to Gallipoli.
6. On leaving Gallipoli, Facey claims *All of us on the ship thought that the whole Gallipoli Campaign was a terrible, unnecessary loss of life.* What might have led him to this conclusion?
7. How is Anzac Day commemorated in Australia today?

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