

SECOND FLEET BABY

NADIA RHOOK

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YEAR LEVEL: Y4–9

ABOUT THE BOOK

Second Fleet Baby examines birth and motherhood, with a consciousness that spans centuries. This poetry draws on the playful energies and powers of eighteenth and nineteenth century convict women, including Rhook's own ancestor who was transported from England to Eora land on the *Lady Juliana* as part of the notorious 1789 Second Fleet. In these poems, intergenerational connections are traced through the soft flesh of the body to write experiences of parenthood in lavishly personal ways. Through experiences and imaginings of childhood, of ancestors, and of nurturing new life during a pandemic, maternal power can be seen, unsettled, savoured. Ships appear 'the likeliest of cradles', the poet writes, while 'mother' is less an identity than a process of becoming 'through the force of a long beginning', a living relation with pearls and oysters, follicles and midwives, gardens, anchors, and bodies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nadia Rhook is a non-Indigenous historian and poet, born in Naarm (Melbourne) and currently living in Boorloo (Perth). She has a PhD in History from La Trobe University and lectures in History and Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia. Her poetry appears in various journals and anthologies including *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Peril Magazine*, *Mascara Literary Review*, *Westerly Magazine*, *The Enchanting Verses Literary Review*, *Portside Review* and *What We Carry: Poetry on Childbearing* (Recent Work Press). *Second Fleet Baby* is her second poetry collection.

THEMES

- History
- Imagination
- Fleet Lives
- Australian Identity
- Colonial Violence
- Migration
- Belonging
- Class and Gender
- Race

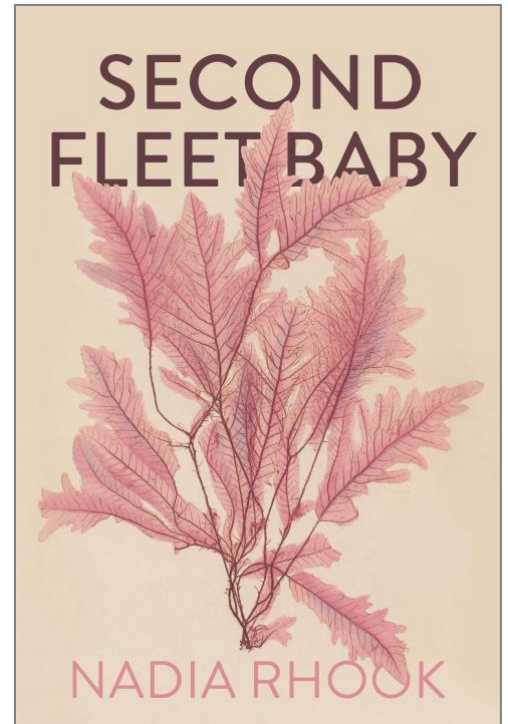
AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Years 10 –12 English and Literature [General and ATAR]

Although this teaching resource was written for students in Years 10 to 12 in mind, with modifications the activities in this guide for the first two sections of the collection 'Susannah of the Sea' and 'Settler Dawns' are also accessible to younger students.

CURRICULUM MAPPING

Poetry, Australian Literature, Cultural, Social and Gender Perspectives (English)



GENERAL CAPABILITIES

Critical and creative thinking, personal and social literacy, intercultural understanding, ethics, ICT.

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Twitter: @NadiaRhook

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Context

1. In pairs or small groups, outline your current understanding of convict colonisation, both on the east and west coasts of Australia.
2. In small groups, explore each person's understanding of their own cultural heritages and/or national identities.
3. Discuss the significance of the title *Second Fleet Baby*.
4. Predict the themes and subjects you might expect to find in this collection.

Many Australians are familiar with the story of the First Fleet, a group of eleven ships carrying convicts from England to Australia and arriving in January 1788 to establish a British Penal Colony in New South Wales. Less well-known is the story of the Second Fleet, six ships that arrived in Sydney Cove in June 1790 that included the *Lady Juliana*, an all-female transport ship. The Second Fleet was known as the 'death fleet' because of the high mortality rate caused by poor living conditions onboard. The First Fleet had been a well-organised but expensive government exercise, whereas the Second Fleet voyage was contracted out to the private slave trading company Camden, Calvert and King. The mortality rate for the first fleet was 5.4%, a small number compared to the twenty-five per cent death rate of male convicts who died en route to Australia. The *Lady Juliana*, however, lost only five of the 226 female convicts due to better management of and care for the prisoners.

- Female Convicts – National Library of Australia nla.gov.au/research-guides/convicts/female-convicts
- Second Fleet Convicts – State Library NSW guides.sl.nsw.gov.au/convicts-bound-for-australia/second_fleet
- 'Convict Descendants – The Voyage', Australian Maritime Museum youtu.be/b32DkxmHeds

Themes

1. Develop a working definition for the word 'theme'.
2. Pay attention to how the collection has been collated and note the themes in each of the five sections of this collection.
3. Chart the movement of the themes across the poems, and through the history of settlement and generations.
4. Make a list of the recurrent themes and compare this list to the one you made earlier in your pre-reading prediction activity.
5. In pairs or small groups compare lists and write a paragraph summarising the themes of this collection.

Creating and Collating a Poetry Anthology

(Teachers to decide whether this is to be an individual or small group activity)

Part A

1. Student selects at least two poems from *Second Fleet Baby* that are similar in some way, e.g. they might experiment with white space, share the same theme, mood, setting, voice, form, etc.
2. Search for at least one other poem by different poet that shares the same features.
3. Create at least two of a student's poems that will fit within the micro collection.
4. Compile the collection.
5. Create a cover and title.
6. Present the collection either in hard copy or an online format. Students may consider recording the poems as spoken word.

Part B

Students to write a 500-word rationale explaining their creative decisions, i.e. explain what unifies the collection, why they have chosen a specific theme or style, and how their own work is positioned within the collection.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The following is a starting list of some terms you will need in order to talk or write about poetry:

- Genre
- Poetic persona / poetic voice
- Stanza
- Poetic form
- Metre
- Rhyme
- Free verse
- Enjambement
- Imagery
- Metaphor and simile
- Personification
- Sound devices – alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia
- Cliché
- Voice
- Style
- Tone
- Irony
- Allusion
- Repetition
- Paradox
- Oxymoron
- Parody
- Black humour
- Caricature
- Satire

How to introduce critical and close reading of a poem to students unfamiliar with the process:

1. Read the poem a few times to gain a sense of meaning, language, narrative, point of view, rhyme and rhythm.
2. Who is the speaker in the poem?
3. What is the subject of the poem and the speaker's attitude towards this subject?

Poetry is often ambiguous, and the reader has to pay close attention and 'read between the lines'. Readers can ask: what ideas is the poet wanting readers to engage with? Does it connect to anything in their own world?

1. Clarify words and phrases. What images and sounds is the poet trying to evoke?
2. Identify and clarify the intertextual references.
3. Identify poetic devices used in the piece.
4. Pay attention to the physical layout of the poem on the page. What is the relationship between content and form?
5. Identify and clarify the intertextual references. Look up the ones that you are not familiar with.
6. How would you describe this poet's voice and style?

Poems and ideas to discuss:

1. In her author note, the poet writes 'Many of these poems are based on archival and published research. This collection presents versions of history that carry truth but are neither final nor definitive. I have used informed imagination to connect with the past, mediated by records, places, intuition, conversations, and the body, as well as by my learnt knowledge of colonial processes and structures.' Discuss how this collection interacts with 'history' (both the general

- narrative of Australian colonisation and the poet's own). Discuss it in the context of poems 'Footnote' and 'movements beyond history'
2. How is a drier historical rendering of the Second Fleet represented in the poem 'fleet lives'? What is the power of a poem to awaken history? In your discussion, you may wish to examine how the poem speaks to and mirrors the etymology of the word 'fleet'.
 3. What is the relationship between women, their bodies and the ocean in the poem 'in one corner of her mind'?
 4. Examine the ways in the author has employed poetic conventions in the poem 'settler dawns' to explore settler colonialism from a female perspective. In what ways is the footnote part of this poem?
 5. Discuss the relationship between poems 'These women are the great, great grandmothers of thousands of Australians today.', 'origins' and 'Federation pains (c.1901)'.
 6. In 'It is not a woman', the author reimagines the first speech made by Senator Dorothy Tagney, the first woman elected to the Australian senate. Consider how the stylistic choices made by the author suggests the ways in which citizenship and political subjectivity are gendered.
 7. Oysters are a recurring motif in this collection. Discuss how this motif has been used in the poem 'in the sea closest to where I was born' and one other poem to support or challenge existing ideas around ecological destruction and colonial violence.
 8. Discuss intergenerational motherhood in poems 'the likeliest of cradles' and 'lullabies'
 9. Discuss how the author links the history of IVF to the history of eugenics in 'the prettiest'.
 10. What are the tensions and intersections between conception, science and lived experience in the poems 'spectres of history', 'woman, womb, fire' and others?

OTHER SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Multi-Modal Poetry

Part A

Poetry is a multi-sensorial experience. Transform a poem from *Second Fleet Baby* into audio-visual text, one which captures the mood, tone and voice of the poem, using appropriate images. A voice recording of the poem must be evident. Teachers may stipulate for students not to include the full text of the poem.

Part B

Write a 500-word rationale explaining your creative decisions, i.e. explain choice of images background music, tone of voice, sound effects, etc.

Panel Discussions

Teachers may choose to create a panel discussion in which students demonstrate their understanding of the key concepts and themes, or the application of these to the role of poetry in the students' own lives. Panel discussions do not necessarily have to be a formal assessment task but can be an opportunity for students to reinforce and synthesise knowledge and skills gained from other lessons.

These ideas can also be adapted for essay questions as required.

Ideas for panel discussion:

1. Debate how our responses to the poems in this collection are mediated by our own sociocultural understandings and how they might alter over time. Refer to at least two poems in the collection.
2. Examine the ways in which poetic conventions have been used to illustrate a picture of settler colonialism in at least two poems in this collection.
3. With reference to at least two poems, explore how intertextuality or allusion enables the idea of birth as biopolitical and ecological to resonate across place or time.
4. With reference to at least two poems from the collection, discuss how poetry is a multi-sensorial experience.
5. Discuss how the poems in *Second Fleet Baby* speak to the silences and gaps in our national history.
6. Discuss how history and cultural inheritance are always present in the present.