

Midnight

Author: Mark Greenwood
 Illustrator: Frané Lessac
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Summary

"A foal is born at midnight, on a cattle ranch in Australia. Coal black. Star ablaze. Moonlight in her eyes."

On October 31, 1917, two Australian Light Horse regiments took part in one of the last great cavalry charges in history. Among the first to leap the enemy trenches was Lieutenant Guy Haydon riding his beloved mare, Midnight. This is their story.

About the author/illustrator

Mark Greenwood, who has a passion for history and legends, is the author of many books for children, published in both the United States and his native Australia. He says, "Frané and I traveled to Beersheba in Israel and visited the places where Guy and Midnight camped in the days leading up to the famous cavalry charge. For me, going to the setting I'm writing about is one of the crucial stages in bringing history to life."

Frané Lessac is the creator of more than forty children's books published throughout the world. She was born in the United States and lived on the Caribbean island of Montserrat and in London before moving to Australia. She says, "My challenge with this book was to capture the devoted bond between Midnight and Guy. I always wanted a horse when I was growing up, and Midnight became that horse."

How to use these notes

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide range of ages and abilities. Please select accordingly.

These notes are for:

- Grades K–4
- Ages 5–9

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- History
- Art

Example of:

- Picture book
- Narrative nonfiction

Themes/Ideas:

- Heroes
- Animals in war
 - Bravery
 - Courage
- Friendship

Background information

This book was inspired by the folklore of the Haydon family, who bred horses on their ranch in New South Wales. In 1915, twenty-five-year-old Guy Haydon and his beloved mare, Midnight, enlisted with the 12th Light Horse Regiment.

Lieutenant Haydon was parted from his horse when he was sent to Gallipoli. When he returned to Egypt he was allocated another, but no horse could replace Midnight. Lt. Haydon searched for weeks among the thousands of army horses until he found Midnight with another regiment. Negotiations between the commanding officers of both regiments to swap horses eventually reunited the soldier and his horse.

During the battle for Gaza, Midnight remained continuously under saddle for seven days and nights—a testament to the endurance of this wonderful horse, as well as to the care she received from Guy Haydon. The lieutenant and Midnight served together until sunset on October 31, 1917, when the 4th and 12th Regiments of the Australian Light Horse charged the Turkish stronghold of Beersheba. Riding Midnight, Lieutenant Haydon was one of the first to leap the enemy trenches.

Mark Greenwood on *Midnight*

The spark to write about the Light Horse Regiment and the charge at Beersheba came from a visit to a school in Queensland, where I saw the famous photograph of the charge hanging in the school hall. I was instantly intrigued by the photo and the controversy surrounding it. I began reading many books about the light horses with a view to writing a story that would bring this moment in our history to life.

I'm drawn to little-known slices of history where themes like courage and friendship play an important role in defining our past. So I began a search for a story within the story. I was searching for a tale of one horse and one rider among those brave 800, a story that would give readers a sense of atmosphere, participation, and excitement about that historic event. And that's how Midnight's story found me!

I visited the Haydons' Bloomfield homestead in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales, where Midnight was born. I was graciously granted access to Guy's letters from the trenches at Gallipoli and throughout the campaign in Palestine. Then Frané and I traveled to the scene of the famous charge and retraced the places where Guy and Midnight camped in their last few days there. For me, visiting the scene where the historical event actually occurred is one of the crucial stages in bringing history to life. It is a fascinating part of the process of writing about the past.

In the safety of stories like *Midnight*, readers can imagine the past and understand events and struggles. They can experience war and conflict and suffering and despair on imaginative journeys that provide opportunities for thinking critically and making judgments about the tragedy that war is capable of inflicting on individuals, families, and nations.

Frané Lessac on *Midnight*

Creating *Midnight* had many highlights, from visiting the Haydon homestead in Australia where Midnight was born to walking on the battlefields in Beersheba where the last charge of the light horse took place. My challenge was to capture the devoted bond between Midnight and Guy. I always wanted a horse when I was growing up, and Midnight became that horse.

Discussion questions and activities

Before Reading

- Look closely at the front cover of the book. As a class, discuss your expectations of the book. What do you think the story will be about? Where and when might it be set? What genre do you think it will be (e.g., fantasy, suspense, comedy, nonfiction)? Provide reasons for your responses.
- Look at the title page. What information does it give the reader about the story?
- Listen to the story being read aloud without looking at the illustrations. Then, read or listen to the story again, this time looking at the illustrations. How did the illustrations add to or change the meaning of the story? Did they look as you expected them to, or were there significant differences between the way you imagined the story and the way Lessac presented it?

Language And Literacy

- The story is told in the third person, allowing distance from the subject of the narrative. How might Guy Haydon have told the story in first person narrative voice?
- Read other picture books about war, conflicts, and military animals. Discuss and compare them.
- Write an acrostic poem using the letters in the name "Midnight" to describe Guy's beloved mare.
- "Weary riders dismount on the outskirts of an ancient city." Research the history of Beersheba and the fabled seven wells of water that the enemy entrenched there were defending.
- Where are the "dunes of Sinai"?
- Research Guy Haydon's unit, the 12th Light Horse Regiment, B Squadron. When did they arrive at Gallipoli? When did they leave?
- Why were the light horsemen called the "Kings of the Feathers"?
- Who was the Australian general who commanded the light horse?
- Research other horse and rider stories from the light horse. What happened to the horses? Did they ever return to Australia?
- Riding Midnight, Guy Haydon joined the advance into Palestine, surviving the battles of Romani and Gaza. In the text, Mark Greenwood writes: "In battle, Midnight works hard for her praise." What is the author referring to here?

- Research the famous light horse battles prior to the charge at Beersheba.
- Where is Beersheba and what is it officially known as today?
- Imagine you are a rider in the desert column, slowly snaking across the wilderness toward the enemy garrison. Describe your thoughts and feelings.
- In the story, Mark Greenwood writes that Guy "shares a secret between horse and rider." What do you think that secret might be?
- Follow Guy's journey on a map or globe. Discuss how he might have traveled to these places in 1915 and how that might be different today.
 - Hunter Valley, New South Wales (the homestead)
 - Gallipoli
 - Giza
 - Sinai
 - Beersheba
 - Cairo (Australian General Hospital)
- What is the significance of Guy sharing his water with Midnight? What does it show about the relationship between Guy and his horse?
- *Midnight* is narrative nonfiction. List the parts of the story that are historical fact and those that may be the author's creative interpretation. How would the story be different if it were purely nonfiction?
- Discuss the use of descriptive language in the passage, "Coal black. Star ablaze. Moonlight in her eyes." How is this more effective than if the author had simply written, "Midnight was black and had a star shape on her head"?
- What extra feelings or ideas does this imagery conjure up for the reader? Can you locate any other examples of imagery in the book? Why do you think the author has included them?
- *Midnight* is the story of a man's special bond with his horse. Write a story about a special bond you have with an animal. This could be a true story about a pet or another animal, or it could be an imaginary story. Describe the animal in a similar style to Mark Greenwood's description of Midnight on the first spread.
- Write a letter to Mark Greenwood and Frané Lessac giving your thoughts on the book. What did you like about it? What did it teach you? Edit your letter, then send it to Candlewick Press to pass on to Mark and Frané!

Visual Literacy

- Discuss the layout and design of the book, including the individual double page spreads and information page. How do they affect the reading of the book and complement the text?
- Why are some lines written in a different font? What effect does this have on the way you read the text?
- The title page contains a picture of a young boy and his horse. What does this image suggest? What feelings or themes does it evoke?
- Read for the subtext and observe how the pictures and the text work together; how images illuminate meaning within the text.
- The artist's images are created in gouache. Discuss the artist's choice of mediums and create a picture in the same style.
- What colors are particularly emphasized in this book?
- How does Frané Lessac convey emotions in her illustrations?
- If you were illustrating the story, which pictures (if any) would you do differently? Why? Choose one passage from the book and create your own illustration to accompany it.
- Read the information page and then discuss the double meaning of the line: "moonlight in her eyes."
- Midnight was born on October 31, 1905. What is the relevance of that date in the story?
- Look at the clothes worn by the crowd during the farewell parade. How are these clothes different from the clothes people wear today?

- Look at Guy's expression and body language as Midnight is unloaded from the ship. List words that describe how he is feeling on this page. Why would he be feeling this way?

World War I

- Have a class discussion about the battle of Gallipoli. As a class, brainstorm what students already know about the battle. What date did the Anzacs (soldiers from Australia and New Zealand) land on Gallipoli? How do Australia and New Zealand commemorate this historic battle?
- In World War I, all Australian soldiers were volunteers. Why do you think so many young men volunteered to go to war? Why do you think Guy enlisted in the army? What did he hope would be the outcome of enlisting?
- Study the illustrations depicting the conflict at Gallipoli. In small groups, brainstorm the difficulties the soldiers may have been experiencing. Imagine you are a soldier and write a letter home discussing the difficulties during the first few days of the landing.
- What do we learn about the lives of World War I soldiers from this book? Do some additional research, then write a series of journal entries from the point of view of a soldier fighting in the war. Some useful websites include:
 - www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/launch_vt_wwone_trench.shtml (You can take a virtual tour of the trenches on this site.)
 - www.anzacday.org.au/history/ww1/overview/west.html
- As a class, discuss some things you can do in your school on Veterans Day or Memorial Day so that people remember and pay respect to the soldiers who died in past wars.



Creative Arts

- Locate a recording of Australian-based folksinger Eric Bogle's song "As If He Knows." Then create your own dramatized retelling of *Midnight* in a range of creative arts such as acting, improvisation, music, and dance. For example:
 - Reenact scenes in the book (i.e., where Guy Haydon whispers into Midnight's ears a secret before the charge of Beersheba).
 - Choose pieces of music that might be suggestive of feelings and the conflict about to unfold.
 - Create a class mural with different panels telling Midnight's story.
 - As a class, brainstorm a list of emotions or feelings Guy might have experienced during the story, such as fear, sadness, confusion, determination, and hope. Find your own space in the room. As the teacher says each emotion, use your whole body to express this idea. Next, try to reveal this emotion just through one part of the body, for instance, the hands or face. Transform these different emotions into a dance symbolizing Guy's journey.

Themes and Values

Heroes

- Research, discuss, and then debate with your class the topic of heroes with reference to both Guy Haydon and Midnight.
- What defines a hero? Is it bravery, or is it a combination of other qualities such as kindness, nobility, or intelligence?

Conclusion – A Note from Mark Greenwood

This story ends on a solemn note, but Midnight is a hero and her inspiring story is one that I hope many young people will read.

History is about listening and sharing stories. The writer's task is to search for ones that resonate and make us want to understand. I hope our *Midnight* will encourage readers to think critically about the tragedy of war. I hope the story will linger in the reader's memory long after the book is closed.

Bravery

- Bravery is often narrowly defined as a willingness to go into battle and risk one's life. Can animals demonstrate bravery? Give examples. In particular, look for examples of animals in wartime who have demonstrated bravery.
- What brave things have you witnessed? Are there any brave people in your family? Why do you think they are brave?

Story Starters

- On the information page the author states that Guy wrote a letter to his mother. Imagine you are Guy Haydon in the hospital and write a letter describing the charge at Beersheba in detail.

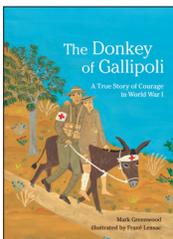
- Write a letter by Guy describing the first time he saw Midnight.

Story Starter:

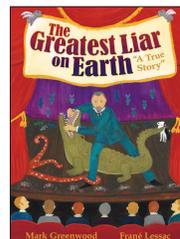
There she stood, black like the night. On her forehead was a white star. I knew then . . .

- Write an account describing the bond between a soldier and his horse, starting with "A horse was your friend . . ."
- While training in the Egyptian desert, Guy and Midnight were chosen to represent Australia in a friendly equestrian competition against the British cavalry. Midnight, the "Bloomfield Mare," won the sprint race and flag race. Write a story about this event and how it might have helped the soldiers cope.

Other books by Mark Greenwood and Frané Lessac



The Donkey of Gallipoli
HC: 978-0-7636-3913-6
\$16.99 (\$18.50 CAN)



The Greatest Liar on Earth
HC: 978-0-7636-6155-7
\$16.99 (\$20.00 CAN)