

FRIEDA: A NEW AUSTRALIAN

MARIANNE MUSGROVE



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Frieda's lasting memories of her arrival in Adelaide would be the broad expanse of the ship groaning against the pier, the crew heaving on ropes as thick as a man's arm ... and Dr Barbary, not twenty yards away, searching in his pockets for his 'White Australia' badge.

Frieda, her mother and father arrive in Australia to look for a better life. Her father is to open a pharmacy with Frieda's uncle and they will live over the shop. But as the First World War takes hold, the family is devastated by the internment of Papi and Onkel Heinz as enemy aliens, and Frieda has her own battles to fight on the streets with the local children. But others are kind, and Frieda keeps her grandmother's advice to stay strong in the face of all these trials.

About the author: Marianne Musgrove was born in Sydney and grew up in outer suburbia. She studied English and Law at university and has worked at various jobs, including tomato picker, social worker and museum guide for kids, although writing for children is by far her favourite job. Her books for children include **The Worry Tree** and **The Beginner's Guide to Revenge**.

Study notes written by
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STUDY NOTES

- The author uses several German words throughout **Frieda**. Why do you think this is? What effect does it have on how you read Frieda's story?
- What is lead casting? How is it performed? What other forms of fortune telling do you know about? List five different forms on the board and compare them. How are they similar? How are they different?
- Frieda's family is Lutheran, but they still participate in Silvester and Oma still performs lead casting and believes in superstitions such as the *Märt*. What does this suggest to you about the interaction between 'old world' Pagan traditions and 'new world' religion in Frieda's life and European culture in general?
- The Lutheran faith is quite austere and values simple living. How is this represented throughout the book? How is Frieda shaped by her Lutheran upbringing?
- When did Australia change from the Imperial measurement system and currency to the metric, decimal system?
- 'Your fortune is your fortune, Liebschen, my dear, but do not despair. Nothing is all good or all bad. Think of the spider. Yes, her web is easily torn down, but see how she rebuilds her home after a fallen branch or a servant's broom. A spider never gives up.' (p 6) How do Oma's words shape



Frieda's character and her actions throughout the story?

- Do some further research into the migration of German (or 'Prussian', as they were sometimes known) migration to Australia, particularly South Australia (<http://thegermanclub.com.au/about/german-history-sa/> is a good place to start). What led so many immigrants from Germany to settle in Adelaide and the rural regions surrounding it? What impact did they have on the culture and history of South Australia? How different was the experience of Germans and other non-British European settlers in Australia to that of British-descent settlers? Why do you think this was the case?
- Torrens Island housed the main quarantine station for incoming travellers bound for Adelaide and South Australia from the 1880s to the 1960s. Unlike some other quarantine stations in Australia, the Torrens Island facility was reputed to be a humane place where residents were well-cared for. Read more about the facility here: <http://www.weekendnotes.com/torrens-island-quarantine-station/>. Imagine you were an inbound traveller who had been quarantined with your family at the quarantine station. Write a letter to family members back home, telling of your experience.
- What was the White Australia Club? Who founded it? What did the club believe in? How long did Australia support a White Australia policy? Can you think of any modern political philosophies that might share some of the beliefs of the White Australia Club? Write a report on the club, detailing its history and its ethos.
- What prompts Frieda to drop Dr Barbary's badge into the river? Later, she protects Midge, who is

hiding in the backyard, even though she does not know the girl at all. How do these episodes illustrate what sort of person Frieda is?

- Dr Barbary is Australian, but he expounds on the greatness of the English. How was the Australian identity intricately bound to English identity at the turn of the 20th century, when this novel is set?
- Find some images of Heidelberg and Adelaide in the early 20th Century and compare the two landscapes. How are they different? Imagine you are Frieda and write a poem for Oma, back in Heidelberg, describing the Adelaide landscape.
- 'He made it sound as if her nationality were a dress she could take off and discard for a new one.' (p 29) To what extent is our nationality a fluid identity? Who determines what nationality or nationalities we all are? Are we defined by our national identity/ies? If so, how?
- 'They had been in the country two weeks, and each day she learned a new sound. It was as if Australia played in a different key from Germany, and she loved learning its music.' (p 35) Over the course of a fortnight, pay specific attention to and record the sounds of your neighbourhood. How do these familiar sounds combine to create your own neighbourhood's music? How would you describe that music to someone who has never been to your neighbourhood before?
- Do you think Mutti is really ill after the family arrives in Adelaide? How much of her health is a manifestation of how she feels in her new home?



- How does Frieda struggle between what is expected of her by her mother and the German expat community, and the wider world of possibility that Adelaide and Della's group represents?
- Mutti wants Frieda to attend the Lutheran school, where she will mix only with other German expats and speak German in class. Papi wants Frieda to attend the local primary school and learn how to assimilate into Australian culture. Do you think this is a common tension within migrant families and communities? How might a family compromise to accommodate both points-of-view? Divide the class into two groups, one representing Mutti's point-of-view, and the other representing Papi's. Hold a class debate, arguing the pros and cons of each position. Can the class come to a suitable compromise?
- 'She loved the idea of becoming a part of local history. For so long she had felt like an outsider ... Now she had the chance to be a character in the town's story ...' (pp 81-82) What does it take to become a part of local history?
- 'Making cups of tea? Wetting down blankets? Is that all women were good for?' (p 88) One of the subplots in **Frieda** is the changing role of women in society. As you read the book, make a note of where this subplot surfaces and how Frieda's opinions on the subject form as the story progresses.
- How does the fire on Little Charles Street change how the Brandts are perceived by the local community? Why?



- After the fire, Mutti cleans Frieda's hair with cornflour and a stiff brush, not unlike the dry shampoos that exist today. What other contemporary remedies and medicines can you identify in **Frieda**? How many of these still are in use today?
- Read pp 114-16, where Papi is developing camera film. These days, cameras are digital and images are digitally printed. How did older, film-based cameras work? How were photographs developed from film? Research the development of photography and cameras from the mid-19th century to today.
- 'Sorry, Frieda! I didn't mean you. You're not like those other Germans.' (p 125) Midge and the other children consider Frieda their friend, but they are prepared to dislike and rally against Germans as a general group. As a class, discuss how racial stereotypes and discrimination are formed. Do you think it is easier to dislike a group of people whom you see as 'other', defined in terms of 'us' and 'them'? Why/why not? Why is it so easy to generalise about a group of people, rather than considering them as a collection of individuals?
- What is the 'jingo spirit' (p 128)? Why does Archibald Peake warn the crowd against it?
- Read more about the philosophies of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. What did he represent? How do you understand Papi and the way he thinks when he invokes Goethe?
- 'The police may not have taken him away, she thought, but they have taken something from



him.' (p 134) What has Papi lost in the time he has spent in the police station? Why?

- Why does Smithy react so viscerally to Frieda, even before the war begins? How does the dynamic between them change after the game of 'Catch the Kaiser', and again when Smithy destroys Frieda's garden?
- Why were German Australian interned during the First World War? What information could they have passed to anyone back in Germany about the war? To what extent are the Germans locked up for the community's peace of mind, rather than any real threat they posed to the community?
- Men of German heritage are interned after the outbreak of the First World War, but women and children are not — Frieda and Mutti are allowed to remain in their home. What does this reflect about the perception of women's capabilities at this time? How does this change by the time of the Second World War?
- Read more about the German Australian experience of the First World War here: <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/enemyathome/german-australian-community/>.
- Torrens Island, already the site of a quarantine station, was also the location of the internment camp that Papi and Onkel Heinz are taken to. Read the 1919 newspaper article found at <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/63760953>. How does the treatment of the POWs reflect on



the people who put them there? Do you think Papi was right to document what was happening to interned Germans?

- Reflect on the different political views of Prime Ministers Andrew Fisher and Billy Hughes. Why do you think Fisher was unseated by Hughes in 1915?
- What was the War Precautions Act? How was it used to fuel Australian nationalism during the First World War? Why would it have been in the interest of the Australian government and later Prime Minister Billy Hughes to make sure that lines of division between Britain and her allies, and Prussia and his allies, were kept clear, even in a place as far away as Australia?
- Why are the German members of the Unley community attacked every time the Prussian army carry out an attack in the war? How do different members of the community react (eg the Meister family changing their signage and décor to become the McLeods)?
- What was the Cheer Up Society?
- What effect does the name 'Brandon' have on Frieda? What prompts her to create the name? How does she feel about it afterwards? Why? In the Epilogue, she proudly gives her name as 'Brandt'. How does this symbolise the change in Frieda?
- Find some Australian recruitment and propaganda posters from the First World War. What common themes do these posters have? Why? Design your own poster in a similar style.



- What does the Garden of Safe Return come to represent for Frieda and for the greater community? What does it represent for the Anti-Hun League? What does its destruction represent to Frieda and Smithy? What does its reconstruction represent?
- Lorna's brother is sent to train in Egypt by the Australian armed forces. Research the role Indigenous soldiers played in the two World Wars. Can you reconcile the sacrifices they made with their treatment back in Australia?
- As a class, design and plant your own friendship garden on the school grounds. Research what different plants symbolise and try to create a holistic message with your garden. You might even invite other classes to come and contribute to the garden as well.

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