

Teachers' Resource Kit

# MONSTERS OF BLOOD AND HONOUR

KEN CATRAN

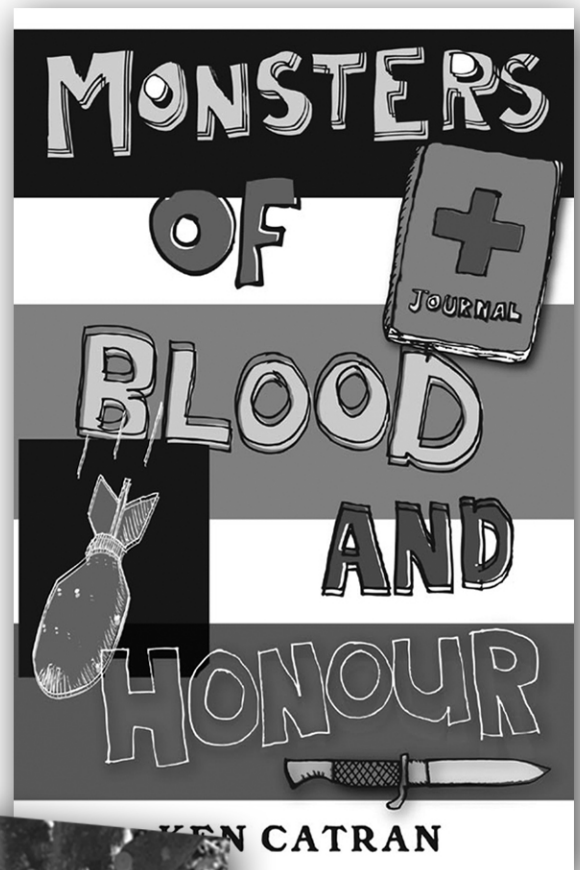
A powerful fictional examination of war for older teenagers, *Monsters of Blood and Honour* contains three stand-alone stories with related themes.

In each story a teenager of 17 or 18 interacts with an older person who was their age during World War II. Each of the elderly people have undergone a traumatic and violent experience, which the modern teen, in a different world and lifestyle, cannot relate to. However, the young adults are in turn affected, having their perspectives altered as they come to know the older characters.

You too will be affected by the characters: Jooney who was a nurse during the fall of Singapore in 1942; Fred, a co-pilot on a Lancaster during the thousand-bomber raids over German cities; and Mr Goodman, 'Old Goodey', an SS man who fought at the great tank battle of Kursk, was wounded and sent to be a camp guard in Belsen.

## KEN CATRAN

Ken Catran is an award-winning writer of over 30 acclaimed novels for young adults. He is the 2007 winner of the New Zealand's most prestigious award for children's writers, the Storylines Margaret Mahy Medal. The award is given annually by the Storylines Children's Literature Charitable Trust to acknowledge a distinguished contribution to New Zealand children's literature.



Including classroom activities for students aged 14+, in the following areas:

- Comprehension Questions
- Problem Solving
- Issues:
  - Boy racers
  - Firebombing of cities
  - War
- Historical background
- Creative Responses

*Teachers' notes developed by Raymond Huber*

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# Before Reading

- Title: what images do these words suggest to you: monsters, blood, honour? Is there any connection between the words?
- Cover: what might the cover images symbolise?

## 1. Mr Parkin's Milk Run To Hell

### Comprehension Questions

- How old do you think Jase might be? (p. 8)
- Describe the town of Huia Falls. (pp. 7–10)
- What is Jase into? (pp. 8–10)
- Why did Parkin bring potatoes? (p. 11)
- Why is Jase scared of not 'measuring up'? (p. 15)
- What's your impression of Jase so far? (p. 15)
- Why is he reluctant to be seen with Mark? (p. 18)
- Why does the word 'sonny' press his buttons? (pp. 21–22)
- What is your impression of Eithne so far? (p.24)
- Why does Jase go to visit Fred? Why the sudden change of heart? (p. 25)
- 'Fred was very sharp.' In what ways? (p. 27)
- Why did Jase want to hear the CD? (p. 28)
- What is a 'classic boner' in this context? (p. 32) What was Fred's boner? (p. 36)
- Why were the crew unfriendly? (p. 34) Why wouldn't people in a bomber crew want to become close friends?
- What is 'hoodoo'? (p. 36) Why do the pilots have superstitions?
- What is a 'milk run'? (p. 37)
- What is 'slanting music'? (p. 47)
- Why does Jack give him the pendant? (pp. 48–49)
- Why did Jase say his 'hooning' was 'kids' games' now? (p. 63)

### Issues

#### 1. Boy Racers

- What effect did they have on people's lives? (p. 9)
- Why didn't the boy racers care? (pp. 9–10)
- 'Boy racers should have their cars/motorbikes confiscated.' Debate this statement.

#### 2. Firebombing of Cities

- Research the firebombings of Hamburg or Dresden.
- What is a 'firestorm'? (p. 43)
- Was there anything wrong with bombing German towns and cities? Why do some historians consider it to be a 'war crime'?

(Reference: *Among the Dead Cities* by A. C. Grayling)

- What was so terrible about phosphorous bombs? (p. 42) Why would someone invent a weapon that inflicted a lingering death?

### 3. War

- What emotional damage does war do to soldiers? What were some of the war's after-effects on soldiers? (pp. 61–62)
- 'We had a job to do, so we did it', says Fred about the bombing. Do you agree that this is true for soldiers in wartime? Should individual soldiers be held accountable for their actions? Should the commanders who make the decisions be held accountable?
- What is Jack's personal motivation for bombing? (p. 37)
- 'You don't know one thing about war,' says Fred (p. 65). Why can't Jase fully understand the morality of war?
- Find a picture of a Lancaster bomber (pp. 31–32). Draw a labelled diagram.

## Creative Responses

- Read the paragraph on page 55 beginning 'And that hell-breaking sound again as the cannon-shells gutted upwards . . .' How does Catran use words to make the battle come alive? List the images, colours, metaphors, adjectives and verbs that make the scene so visual.
- Write your own battle scene.
- Write a short story about a young soldier in a present-day war zone.
- View one of the following flying movies: *Dark Blue World*, *Battle of Britain*. Review it in the light of this story. Does it convey the horror of war, or does it glamorise it with Hollywood heroics?
- Design a poster for a movie version of this story.
- Read Ken Catran's other flying novel, *Red Leader Down*.

## 2. Jooney's Day At The Beach

### Comprehension Questions

- What kind of story does the title suggest?
- 'Life sucks'. What does this mean to you? (p. 73)
- How did Sarah's mother 'out-think' her? (p. 74)
- Is it fair of her mother to ask Sarah to look after Jooney? (p. 75)
- In what ways is Jooney's attitude to teenagers like Fred Parkin's attitude? (p. 78)
- Why is tea 'uncool'? (p. 79)

- What does ‘duplicitous’ mean? (p. 80) Is this a good word for her mother?
- What does ‘asperity’ mean? (p. 84)
- Why did Jooney hide the television from Sarah? (p. 88)
- Describe Jooney’s personality. Is ‘snapping turtle’ (p. 112) a good metaphor for her? Think of an animal metaphor for Sarah.
- What are some of Jooney’s ‘polite ways of saying shut-up’? (p. 92)
- ‘Hate is a simple waste of time’ says Jooney. Do you agree? (p. 95)
- Explain Sarah’s sudden change of heart about staying with Jooney. (p. 99)
- Should she have read the private journal? (p. 103)
- Is it true that people read too quickly today? (p. 104)
- What does ‘tidapathy’ mean? (p. 107)
- What does ‘flibbertigibbet’ mean? (p. 106)
- Why didn’t most people consider the Japanese an invasion threat? (p. 107)
- Why do people say ‘pear-shaped’? (p. 108)
- Why couldn’t Jooney talk about the war? (p. 112)
- Why did the Japanese shoot them? (p. 118) Re-evaluate the title of the story.
- Why did the officer not shoot her? (p. 130) How does he explain the massacre? How does he feel about it?

- ‘Truth is often stranger’ than fiction. Meaning? (p. 133)
- How has Sarah changed by the end of the story? (p. 138)
- ‘We were bastards too’. (p. 141) What does Sarah mean by this?

## Historical Background

- Research the George Cross. (p. 91)
- Find out what happened to Singapore in 1941–1942.
- Why was the attack on Pearl Harbour a turning point in the war?
- War crimes (p. 134) in this story include shooting civilians and the wounded. Are there any rules (written or other) about whom a soldier can shoot in wartime? Write some rules for ethical conduct in war.
- ‘Terrible things need punishment’ (p. 135). How did this explain Akira’s hanging?
- In your opinion, was the nuclear bombing of Japan a war crime? (p. 134) ‘Nuclear weapons should never be used.’ Debate this statement.

## 3. Old Goodey and the Fortress of Dreams

### Comprehension Questions

- What is Robin's fantasy world like? (pp. 145–148)
- What is his reaction to his father's death? (pp. 154–155)
- Why is 'Getting someplace where nobody could hurt you' (p. 157) important to Robin?
- Why does he compare himself to Hitler? (p. 160)
- Why does Mr Swaggert react to Goodey's greeting ('Yooden')? (pp. 63, 168)
- Describe Courtney Swaggert. (pp. 165, 168)
- What is a cookie-cutter? (p. 171)
- What is 'the balance of power'? (p. 173)
- Why do you think Goodey let go of the \$50? (p. 177)
- Why did Robin think that 'tomorrow belongs to me'? (p. 178)
- What is happening to his fantasy world? (p. 180)

- Why does he want power? (p. 183)
- Why did the dagger excite Robin? (pp. 190–191)
- Why does Goodey think he did the right thing in the concentration camps? (p. 204) Why does he feel as though he has 'not been alive'? (p. 205)
- Why had he made the 'monsters'? (p. 215)
- Why was 'honour' his undoing? (p. 222)
- How has Robin changed by the end?

### Responses

- Research the Battle of Kursk, 1943. Sketch one of the tanks involved.
- Watch the movie *Cabaret*. What is your response to 'Tomorrow Belongs to Me'? What makes this scene so emotionally charged?
- The word 'Nazi' has negative connotations. Why is that? Movies often present a stereotyped Nazi villain. Is Goodey like this?

## Epilogue: Dead Blokes at Dawn

### Comprehension Questions

- Why is the poverty of this old soldier emphasised? (pp. 227–229)

- Who is in the SUV? (p. 229)
- What is the old soldier's attitude to modern wealth? (pp. 229, 231)

- Why hold a ceremony about ‘killing’ if it is bad? (p. 237) Do you agree with Jason’s statement about ANZAC Day?
- Why is Rob struggling with money? (p. 238)
- Rob wonders if he would ‘fight against evil’ again. (p. 239) Was the Second World War a ‘fight against evil’? Are wars today described in the same way; is the enemy still called evil?
- Read *Letters From the Coffin Trenches* by Ken Catran.

## Theme of the Book

- What is the overall theme of this book of short stories?
- What ‘devices’ does Catran use to tell his war stories? (e.g. tape recordings, journals.) Why use modern teenage characters?
- Compare the first two stories. Look at structure, characters, and the theme of war crimes. For example, in both stories the main characters experience a turning point — what is it? At the end of both stories the enemies are referred to as ‘bastards’. (p. 65 and p. 141) Is this significant?