CHARLES BEAN'S GREAT WAR

A STUDY GUIDE BY ROBERT LEWIS

http://www.metromagazine.com.au

http://www.theeducationshop.com.au
Charles Bean’s Great War (Wain Fimeri, 2010, 52 minutes) is a dramatised documentary about the life of C.E.W. Bean – war journalist, historian and founder of the Australian War Memorial – and his influence on Australian identity.

Charles Bean reported on the Great War not from some general’s chateau but from the front line. He witnessed the horror and the heroism of war up close and he made it his life work to record the Australian perspective. He desperately wanted it to be the war to end all wars and to apply the lessons learnt to making the world a better place.

Born in 1879 in the colony of New South Wales, Bean was a public schoolboy who was lucky enough to attend Oxford University. He believed in the superiority of the British race but he seriously questioned the idea of inherited privilege. He returned to work with The Sydney Morning Herald as a feature writer before being selected by his peers as official war correspondent in 1914.

Charles Bean was there, alongside the troops, for their entire participation in the conflict. He never carried a weapon but earned a reputation for bravery under fire, putting himself in danger to ensure the story was told.

Initially considered to be a boring writer, Bean soon became renowned for his obsessive attention to detail and absolute adherence to the facts. Alongside his articles, he accumulated vast amounts of information in his diaries, notebooks and journals.

He was so inspired by the dignity and performance of Australian troops that he made it his life’s work to tell their story to the Australian public. The result was a monumental twelve-volume history that is still recognised as one of the best histories of the Great War ever written.

After his return from the Gallipoli mission in 1919 and before he started on the history, Bean wrote a publication called In Your Hands, Australians. In it he called on all Australians to honour the sacrifice of our soldiers by applying the lessons learnt in the war to peacetime. He passionately believed that planning, education and community participation could make Australia great.

Bean’s commitment led to him being instrumental in the establishment of the Australian War Memorial and to leaving us perhaps the greatest legacy that any country could have – a sense of what it is to be Australian.

Curriculum Applicability

Charles Bean’s Great War is suitable for middle and senior secondary classes in:

- Australian History – World War One, representations of history, museum site study
- SOSE/HSIE – the ‘Anzac legend’
- English – biography
- Media – creating a dramatised documentary
Before Watching The Film

What is meant by the ‘Anzac spirit’?

Charles Bean’s Great War explores the origins of a significant element of Australian identity, the ‘Anzac spirit’ or the ‘Anzac legend’.

What do you understand by the term ‘Anzac spirit’?

Here are some statements that may or may not be part of what you understand by the term ‘Anzac spirit’. Decide whether you agree, disagree or are not sure if each is part of what the Anzac spirit means to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENT – THE ‘ANZAC SPIRIT’ INVOLVES THIS ELEMENT:</th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
<th>NOT SURE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australians were fearless fighters</td>
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<td>They always showed great bonds of mateship</td>
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<td>They were better than soldiers of other nations</td>
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<td>They suffered greater casualties because they were used in the hardest fighting</td>
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<td>The Australians were young boys and men</td>
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<td>They joined to protect Australia as soon as war was declared</td>
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<td>They were gracious towards the enemy</td>
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<td>They were skilled in trench warfare</td>
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<td>They were the best people of their generation</td>
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<td>They enjoyed killing</td>
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<td>They were prepared to sacrifice themselves for their fellow soldiers</td>
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<td>They showed respect for authority</td>
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<td>They were good parade-ground soldiers</td>
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<td>They had a sense of humour and could laugh at the dangers around them</td>
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<td>They were able to survive anything that happened to them</td>
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<tr>
<td>They were racist in their attitudes to others</td>
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showed up all other soldiers and especially the British to be lacking in initiative and go; they revealed that they were rather undisciplined when that discipline was merely a formality, but really needed no controlling when it came to the deadly business of battle – then they became highly effective, skilful and feared killers; they were a classless army; they stuck to their mates through thick and thin; their burden as soldiers was lightened by a sardonic sense of humour that sometimes took the form of practical jokes, and in their ranks abounded many wags and tough nuts who made it a rule to always outwit the authorities; they did not give a damn for anyone on earth, in heaven or in hell. Their highly distinctive tunics and hats were perhaps never cleaned and brushed as they might have been but if a man appeared spick and span it was a sure and certain sign that lie was tip to no good; they had a penchant for removing objects of value left in their way and were expert con men; their contempt for [Egyptians] was notorious; though they at first hated the Turks and though they tortured prisoners, very soon they developed a respect for Johnny Turk … The stereotypic Australian soldier was very tall and sinewy and hatchet-faced. He had a great respect for the institutions of the ‘old country’ and what he perceived as its quaintness, but little time for pommy officers and men as a rule, or until they proved themselves manly.

Historian Lloyd Robson quoted in Peter Dennis et al., The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1999, p.45.
Exploring Ideas And Issues In The Film

The film explores four main themes:

- Bean’s personality and background
- his early experience in Egypt and his reporting of Gallipoli
- his experiences as journalist and historian on the Western Front
- his post-war life writing The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918, and planning the Australian War Memorial.

Discuss your answers to these questions about those four aspects of his life. There are also extra activities that you can carry out in class to develop your understanding of these elements further.

In addition, there are interesting aspects of creating a dramatised biographical documentary that you can consider.

Who was Charles Bean?

1. How did Bean’s background help prepare him for the role of war correspondent?
2. What qualities did he have that made him successful?
3. What limitations did he have on fulfilling the role?

Egypt and Gallipoli

4. What problems did Bean’s reporting from Egypt cause?
5. Was he justified in reporting these criticisms back to Australia?
6. How did he overcome the problems these initial reports caused him with the men?


8. How was Bean able to write with great accuracy and authenticity?

9. The film says that Bean became a historian rather than a journalist. Explain the difference.

10. Bean’s personal writings contained many criticisms of the commanders. Should he have published these at the time? Explain your views.

11. Bean was responsible for a collection of soldiers’ writings and illustrations, The Anzac Book. This book has been credited with being perhaps the most influential of his writings in terms of creating a popular image of the Anzacs that became the Anzac spirit or legend. See Additional Activity 1 (on pages 12–19) to explore some aspects of this book and its influence.

Western Front

12. What was Bean’s aim in gathering so much detailed information?
13. How did he gain the men’s confidence, and gain so much information?
14. What does his attitude to Monash reveal about him?
15. The Anzac spirit or legend developed wide acceptance as a result of the stories of the soldiers’ experiences on the Western Front. Did the image fit the reality? Look at the extracts from soldiers’ experiences in Additional Activity 2 (on pages 20–24), and make your own decision.

The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918 and the Australian War Memorial

16. What was Bean’s aim now that the war was over?
17. How was Bean’s approach to history unique?
18. Was Bean a good historian whose record of the war, particularly through the Official History, tells us the truth? Look at the following table of the main sources that Bean used to gather the information he included in his official histories. Discuss the likely strengths and weaknesses of each main source. Some examples of points to raise in your discussion are included. Then read the following extract from the online Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB) on Bean, and decide how reliable and truthful Bean’s history is likely to be.

Research and Discussion

- Look at the following table of the main sources that Bean used to gather the information he included in his official histories. Discuss the likely strengths and weaknesses of each main source.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Source</th>
<th>Likely Strengths</th>
<th>Likely Weaknesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Official History</td>
<td>Detailed accounts</td>
<td>Biased due to Bean’s personal views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anzac Book</td>
<td>Popular image</td>
<td>Not as reliable as official histories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Writings</td>
<td>Detailed personal experiences</td>
<td>Biased due to Bean’s personal views</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Read the following extract from the online Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB) on Bean, and decide how reliable and truthful Bean’s history is likely to be.

Bean, Charles (1869–1940) was a journalist, biographer, and historian who played a significant role in promoting a popular image of the Anzacs in Australia. He was responsible for the publication of The Anzac Book, which has been credited with being perhaps the most influential of his writings in terms of creating a popular image of the Anzacs that became the Anzac spirit or legend. Bean’s approach to history was unique in that he combined personal experience and reporting with a broader historical perspective. His work has been subject to criticism, with some historians arguing that his accounts were biased and not fully representative of the experiences of all soldiers. However, Bean’s efforts have also been praised for their contribution to the understanding and interpretation of the Anzac legend. Ultimately, the reliability and truthfulness of Bean’s history is likely to be a matter of subjective opinion, with different historians offering varying perspectives.
Scenes from the film starring Nick Farnell as Charles Bean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEAN’S SOURCES</th>
<th>LIKELY STRENGTHS</th>
<th>LIKELY WEAKNESSES OR LIMITATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What he saw</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did he see the main bits? Did he see the overall situation or only his own little piece? etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>People he interviewed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did they know what was happening? Are they likely to tell the truth? etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Official accounts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do they give the full picture? What sources do they rely on for their information? etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Photographs, films</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do they capture the key events? Are they impartial records? etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objects/artefacts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do they tell a story or have a story imposed on them? Are they typical or exceptional? etc.</td>
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</table>
Here are some comments made in the online ADB account of Bean by historian K.S. Inglis:

Late in 1918 Bean took leave in the south of France and wrote In Your Hands, Australians (London, 1918), an Australian version of the world-wide hope that the survivors of war would perform peaceful deeds which justified the years of death ...

Late in 1919 the historian, his staff and their crates of records moved into the homestead of Tuggeranong near Canberra, to create the fifteen volume The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918 ...

The first two volumes of the history, The Story of Anzac, appeared in 1921 and 1924 ... Bean himself wrote six volumes about the infantry divisions: the two on Gallipoli, and four on France. He edited eight more, and he and a colleague annotated the volume of photographs. The last volume appeared in 1943. The series contained nearly four million words. In Australian historical writing nothing had ever been done on such a scale; and there had been no military history anywhere quite like Bean’s.

"Its theme", he wrote, "may be stated as the answer to a question: How did this nation, bred in complete peace, largely undisciplined except for a strongly British tradition and the self-discipline necessary for men who grapple with nature ... react to what still has to be recognized as the supreme test for fitness to exist?" His answer, in plain prose dense with personal detail, had been foreshadowed in a passage of In Your Hands, Australians: ‘the big thing in the war for Australia was the discovery of the character of Australian men. It was character which rushed the hills at Gallipoli and held on there’.

Bean brought a democratic and colonial scepticism to bear on the assumption that the dispatches of high commanders were the best source of information about what actually happened when men went into battle. His own diaries (226 note-books) were full of the evidence about ‘what actual experiences, at the point where men lay out behind hedges or on the fringe of woods, caused those on one side to creep, walk, or run forward, and the others to go back’.

Bean’s approach differed from that of the British war historians, whose work was official not only in sponsorship but in texture: history written by generals, not by an honorary captain. The British volumes had no biographical footnotes of the sort that were essential to Bean’s method because he wanted to show that the participants were ‘a fair cross-section of our people ... that the company commander was a young lawyer and his second in command and most trusted mate a young engine driver and so on’.

The Official History was published by Angus & Robertson, Sydney, and paid for by the Defence Department. The government accepted Bean’s request that it be uncensored, though he had to yield when the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board insisted on removing critical passages from
19 Quite early in the war, Bean had a vision of creating a war memorial to commemorate the Australian experience. He was able to found that memorial during the Second World War.

• What would you expect to find there?
• What would you not expect to find?
• Can it tell the truth?

To find out how to critically analyse the Australian War Memorial as a site study, see Additional Activity 3.

20 What do Australians today owe to Bean?

Creating a dramatised biographical documentary

Charles Bean’s Great War is a dramatised biographical documentary. This means that many choices have to be made, and strategies used, to achieve the best possible result.

21 Here is a list of some of the elements that need to be addressed in making such a film. For each, discuss what strategies the filmmakers have used to achieve a good outcome. In discussing strategies, take into account such key elements of filmmaking as:

• editing
• creation of a narration
• use of a narrator (or not)
• use of experts
• use of historical images and footage
• characters
• settings
• cinematography
• sound
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPECT OR ISSUE</th>
<th>HOW ADDRESSED IN THE FILM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Covering a lifetime</td>
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<tr>
<td>Re-creating elements with historical accuracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Battle scenes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recreating historical settings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focusing on a few key ideas or aspects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating a feel for different periods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informing the audience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entertaining the audience</td>
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</table>
At one stage it looked like the production was going to stretch from one end of Victoria to the other. This was neatly solved by using a beautiful property past Geelong called Warrambeen. Warrambeen was a one stop shop for most of our locations, a big advantage when you’re working fast, and the film crew moved into shearer’s quarters for a week. It was like being on a school camp, only the food was better.

There was a rolling green paddock which served as French battlefields, a magnificent bluestone woolshed which covered French farm buildings and the wool trail, a manor house that doubled as Egypt. The veranda of the homestead became a Cairo bar. We recreated Gallipoli in a dormant volcanic crater. We constructed Charles Bean’s dugout at Anzac Cove here. The property was also close enough to the beach to allow us to recreate the Gallipoli landing at Point Addis, where we found very similar terrain to that of Turkey. If you avoid the tea tree and the pounding surf, there being neither at Gallipoli, it looks strikingly like Gallipoli. The same beige clay cliffs and tangled undergrowth rising quickly from the beach.

The later Bean footage was all filmed in and around Williamstown, Melbourne.

At a time when we find such sentiments questionable, Charles Bean stood clearly as a nationalist and a patriot. But above all, he was a humanist. He believed in these things without wrapping himself in the flag or holding extreme political views. He believed we should be citizens not consumers, and he thought far into the future about the potential of the world to be a better place.

The life of Charles Bean encompassed many different parts of the world which were all important to tell his story and so, initially, the greatest challenge for the production was finding the locations to recreate France, Gallipoli, Egypt, outback NSW and the home and hospital of Charles’ later life – all in some sort of proximity to each other.
Another quandary that presented itself was the need to cover a number of ages of the characters. Casting relieved most of these problems but it was decided that Nick Farnell would have to go through an aging process over the duration of the film in order to maintain the believability of the Charles Bean character. Make up specialist José Perez was able to weave some magic and we were able to take Nick from a youthful 25 to a doddering 88 with a minimum of fuss.

The realism was maintained by also paying special attention to the production design, where Neil Angwin and Tim Burgin got stuck into the dirt at Warrambeen. The experienced Ian Sparke was on hand with his amazing costume design and kept us on track as our historical consultant.

The film was shot in eight days. This is called having limited resources. It also means you have to plan thoroughly. I storyboard all shots and try to have a timing for all scenes. It generally works but in filming, like war, as the rather apt analogy goes, plans rarely survive the first shot.

Having limited resources compels you [to] make a virtue out of what you don’t have. We didn’t have hundreds of extras; indeed we shot battle scenes with no more than six people. It meant a filming style that was tight and close. You get your camera into the action rather than stand outside and watch. But our film was never about spectacle. It’s an intimate portrait of a man’s life. I hope you agree, a rather interesting, oddly attractive man.


Further Information

Official website for the documentary:
<http://www.charlesbean.com.au>


Janda Gooding, Gallipoli Revisited: In the Footsteps of Charles Bean and the Australian Historical Mission, Hardie Grant Books, South Yarra, 2009.


Richard Reid, A ‘duty clear before us’, Department of Veterans’ Affairs, Canberra, 2000.


The first day at Gallipoli:<http://www.abc.net.au/innovation/gallipoli/>
Additional Activity 1

*The Anzac Book*

*The Anzac Book* was a collection of stories, poems, drawings, sketches, jokes and articles written by Australian soldiers at Gallipoli and collected and edited by the official war correspondent, and later official war historian, C.E.W. Bean. It was published in 1916, and was extremely popular both among the soldiers overseas and their families at home in Australia. *The Anzac Book* provided a very popular and influential version of the ‘Anzac spirit’. You can explore this more in the Department of Veterans’ Affairs education resource *Gallipoli and the Anzacs*, sent to every secondary school during 2010.

One historian, David Kent, in trying to understand the origin and spread of the Anzac legend, has argued that a certain image was deliberately created and manipulated by Bean. Kent argues that perhaps the most significant element in creating this image was *The Anzac Book*. He argues that certain qualities of the Anzacs were deliberately included and exaggerated in *The Anzac Book*, while others that did not fit a certain image were deliberately rejected and excluded. You can find Kent’s article in *Historical Studies*, vol. 21, no. 84, April 1985, pp.376–390.
Is this true?

You are now going to be a historian and test Kent’s ideas against some further evidence.

Here is a summary of Kent’s argument. Look at the extracts from *The Anzac Book* that follow. Use these extracts to decide if the particular source supports or challenges Kent’s ideas. We have not included every page of *The Anzac Book*, so not every aspect of Kent’s ideas will be able to be tested. But at the end, after you have analysed the sources, you will be able to say whether Kent’s ideas seem to be accurate, or whether they need refinement. The extracts given are particularly focusing on step three of Kent’s argument as summarised below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KENT’S ARGUMENT ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF C.E.W. BEAN’S MANIPULATION OF <em>THE ANZAC BOOK</em> TO CREATE A PARTICULAR IMAGE</th>
<th>YOUR COMMENT ABOUT WHETHER THE EXTRACTS FROM <em>THE ANZAC BOOK</em> THAT FOLLOW SUPPORT OR CHALLENGE HIS ARGUMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> <em>The Anzac Book</em> presents the classic image of the Anzacs, portraying them as:</td>
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<td>• tough, practical, inventive and able to endure hardships with humour</td>
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<td>• loyal to their mates beyond the call of duty</td>
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<td>• a bit undisciplined, but only in non-essential ways</td>
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<td>• chivalrous and gallant</td>
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<td>• showing typical traits of the bushman</td>
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<tr>
<td>• loyal and patriotic</td>
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<td>• egalitarian and irreverent towards officers.</td>
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<td><strong>2</strong> <em>The Anzac Book</em> hid or suppressed less worthy elements such as:</td>
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<td>• their boozing</td>
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<td>• examples of cowardice and reluctance to fight; malingering</td>
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<td>• officer/non-officer divisions</td>
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<td>• bad behaviour in Egypt, racism</td>
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<td>• inequality of sacrifice.</td>
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<td><strong>3</strong> <em>The Anzac Book</em> also gives a distorted picture of the reality of the Anzacs’ experience at Gallipoli by not stressing:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• the dangers of combat, casualties and harm</td>
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<tr>
<td>• the suffering, waste of life and dehumanising aspects of warfare</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• the bitter personal grief and individual sacrifice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• the real nature of the combat.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong> This image, created by Bean, was very popular and influential both on the soldiers themselves and on the people back in Australia. In effect, Bean created the ‘Anzac spirit’, but readers were getting an inaccurate sense of the reality of what the soldiers were like, and what the war was like. So, the Anzac legend is a deliberate distortion.</td>
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</table>

Is this true?
Here are some extracts from *The Anzac Book*. Look at them and decide if they support or challenge any of Kent’s arguments above.

1. What physical image or images of the Anzacs do these drawings and paintings show? What values and attitudes do they show? Are they consistent with Kent’s arguments?

**Source A**
Cover of *The Anzac Book*

Supports/challenges Kent’s argument because:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

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**Source B**
A cartoon

Supports/challenges Kent’s argument because:

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**Source C**
A sketch of a Digger

Supports/challenges Kent’s argument because:

__________________________________________________________________________

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Source D
Alternative cover of The Anzac Book

Supports/challenges Kent's argument because:

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Source D
A cartoon of a Digger returning from combat

Supports/challenges Kent's argument because:

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Source F
A portrait of Anzacs

Supports/challenges Kent's argument because:

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Source G
A cartoon about the ‘Anzac Spirit’.

Supports/challenges Kent's argument because:

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Written pieces reflecting aspects of the campaign and conditions

2 Kent argues that *The Anzac Book* does not give a true picture of the horrific nature of the war. How do you think readers would react to sources H and I, and the nature of the fighting? Would they find these descriptions realistic and disturbing? Justify your views.

Source H

*The Landing*

Se-ee-e-e … bang … swish! The front firing line was now being baptised by its first shrapnel. Zir-zir … zipzip! Machine-guns, situated on each front, flank and centre, opened on our front line. Thousands of bullets began to fly round and over us, sometimes barely missing. Now and then one heard a low gurgling moan, and, turning, one saw near at hand some chum, who only a few seconds before had been laughing and joking, now lying gasping, with his life blood soaking down into the red clay and sand. “Five rounds rapid at the scrub in front,” comes the command of our subaltern. Then an order down the line: “Fix bayonets!” Fatal order – was it not, perhaps, some officer of the enemy who shouted it? (for they say such things were done). Out flash a thousand bayonets, scintillating in the sunlight like a thousand mirrors, signalling our position to the batteries away on our left and front. We put in another five rounds rapid at the scrub in front. Then, bang-swish! bang-swish! bang-swish! and over our line, and front, and rear, such a hellish fire of lyddite and shrapnel that one wonders how anyone could live amidst such a hail of death-dealing lead and shell. “Ah, got me!” says one lad on my left, and he shakes his arms. A bullet had passed through the biceps of his left arm, missed his chest by an inch, passed through the right forearm, and finally struck the lad between him and me a bruising blow on the wrist.

*The Anzac Book*, p.3.

Supports/challenges Kent’s argument because:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Source I

*Glimpses of Anzac*

The work of enemy shell behind the actual trenches is peculiarly horrible. Men are struck down suddenly and unmercifully where there is no heat of battle. A man dies more easily in the charge. Here he is wounded mortally unloading a cart, drawing water for his unit, directing a mule convoy. He may lose a limb or his life when off duty – merely returning from a bath or washing a shirt.

One of our number is struck by shrapnel retiring to his dug-out to read his just delivered mail. He is off duty – is, in fact, far up on the ridges overlooking the sea. The wound gapes in his back. There is no staunching it. Every thump of the aorta pumps out his life. Practically he is a dead man when struck; he lives but a few minutes – with his pipe still steaming, clenched in his teeth. They lay him aside in the hospital.

That night we stand about the grave in which he lies beneath his groundsheet.

*The Anzac Book*, p.18.

Supports/challenges Kent’s argument because:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
3 Kent argues that *The Anzac Book* does not stress the bitterness of personal grief and loss. Do sources J and K support his ideas? Justify your views.

**Source J**

*The Graves of Gallipoli* (poem)

THE herdman wandering by the lonely rills
Marks where they lie on the scarred mountain’s flanks,
Remembering that wild morning when the hills
Shook to the roar of guns and those wild ranks
Surged upward from the sea.

None tends them. Flowers will come again in spring,
And the torn hills and those poor mounds be green.
Some bird that sings in English woods may sing
To English lads beneath—the wind will keep its ancient lullaby.

Some flower that blooms beside the Southern foam
May blossom where our dead Australians lie,
And comfort them with whispers of their home;
And they will dream, beneath the alien sky,
Of the Pacific Sea.

“Thrice happy they who fell beneath the walls,
Under their father’s eyes,” the Trojan said,
“Not we who die in exile where who falls
Must lie in foreign earth.” Alas! our dead
Lie buried far away.

Yet where the brave man lies who fell in fight
For his dear country, there his country is.
And we will mourn them proudly as of right—
For meaner deaths be, weeping and loud cries: They died pro patria*

*Pro patria is a Latin phrase meaning ‘for their country/fatherland’

*The Anzac Book*, p.25.

**Supports/challenges Kent’s argument because:**
KILLED IN ACTION

WHERE the ranges throw their shadows long before the day’s surrender,
Down a valley where a river used to tumble to the sea,
On a rising patch of level rest the men who dared to tender
Life and all its sweetness for their love of liberty.

In a thousand miles of ugly scrubby waste and desolation,
Just that little space of level showing open to the sea;
Nothing there to lend it grandeur (sure, it needs no decoration)
Save those rows of wooden crosses keeping silent custody.

There’s a band of quiet workers, nameless lads who joked and chatted
Just this morning; now they’re sullen and they keep their eyes away.
From the blanket-hidden body, coat and shirt all blood-bespattered
Lying motionless and waiting by the new-turned heap of clay.

There are records in the office—date of death and facts pertaining,
Showing name and rank and number and disposal of the kit—
More or less a business matter, and we have no time for feigning
More than momentary pity for the men who have been hit.

There’s a patient mother gazing on her hopes so surely shattered
(Hopes and prayers she cherished bravely, seeking strength to hide her fear).
Boyhood’s dreams and idle memories—things that never really mattered—
Lying buried where he’s buried ’neath the stars all shining clear.

There’s a young wife sorrow-stricken in her bitter first conception
Of that brief conclusive message, harsh fulfillment of her dread;
There are tiny lips repeating, with their childish imperception,
Simple words that bring her mem’ries from the boundaries of the dead.

Could the Turk have seen this picture when his trigger-finger rounded,
Would his sights have blurred a little had he heard that mother’s prayer?
Could he know some things that she knew, might his hate have been confounded?
But he only saw his duty, and he did it, fighting fair.

Just a barren little surface where the grave mounds rise ungaily,
Monuments and tributes to the men who’ve done their share.
Pain and death, the fruits of battle, and the crosses tell it plainly,
Short and quick and silent suffering; would to God it ended there.

HARRY McCANN, Headquarters, 4th Aust. Light Horse.


Source K
Killed in Action (poem)

Supports/challenges Kent’s argument because:
There are two ‘Anzac Alphabets’ included in *The Anzac Book*, one of which is reproduced here.

4 Look at the letters and note any ones that support or challenge Kent’s ideas. For example, does the letter D challenge Kent’s claim that there was no recognition of cowardice in *The Anzac Book*, or is it a joking and self-mocking reference that really does not show cowardice at all?

**Source L**  
**Another Attempt at an Anzac Alphabet**  
Supports/challenges Kent’s argument because:

- [Blank]
- [Blank]
- [Blank]
- [Blank]

5 Do you think there are any aspects of Kent’s argument about the nature of the Anzac image presented in *The Anzac Book* that might not be accurate? Explain your conclusions.

6 Go back to your original ideas about the Anzac spirit and make any changes that reflect what you now know.
Additional Activity 2

You created an image of the Anzac spirit in the introductory activity in this study guide.

How does this image compare to the reality of the war experience?

Here are some extracts from Australian soldiers’ diaries and letters from both Gallipoli and the Western Front.

1. Look at these and decide what they show you about the qualities or characteristics of the Diggers. For each one say whether it confirms or challenges your image of the Anzac spirit, and why. One example has been done to help you.

Source 1

**Company Sergeant Major G.S. Feist**

I was in the second tow and we got it, shrapnel and rifle fire bad. We lost three on the destroyer and four in the boat getting to land. The Turks were close on the beach when we got there. We had to fix bayonets and charge. We jumped into the water up to our waists and some of them their armpits … we had to trust to the [bayonet] at the end of our rifles … I tell you, one does not forget these things … all we thought of was to get at them. One would hear someone say ‘They’ve got me’ and you register another notch when you get to them, that’s all.


**This tells us about:** Anxiety, relief, bravery, death

**It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:**

Source 2

**Sergeant A.A. Barwick**

I saw several men sacrifice themselves here, they went to certain death, one chap in particular I remember … we were chasing some Turks round a little sap & they reached the bend first, everyone knew the first man round the corner was a dead one, but this chap never hesitated, he threw himself fair at them, & six fired together, & fairly riddled him with bullets, that was our chance & we into them, & it was all over in a few minutes.

Quoted in Gammage, p.113.

**This tells us about:**

**It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:**

Source 3

**Australian War Correspondent C.E.W. Bean (diary entry dated 26 September 1915)**

[E]veryone who has seen a battle knows that soldiers do very often run away; soldiers, even Australian soldiers, have sometimes to be threatened with a revolver to make them go on … Not very many will actually shoot their fingers off to escape from the front, but even this is not uncommon even among Australians … There is horror and beastliness and cowardice and treachery … but the man who does his job is a hero. And the actual truth is that though not all Australians, by any means, do their job, there is a bigger proportion of men in the Australian Army that try to do it cheerfully and without the least show of fear, than in any army or force I have seen in Gallipoli. The man who knows war knows that this is magnificent praise.


**This tells us about:**

**It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:**
**Source 4**
Private Blake Young

The South Australians were sent straight into the thick of it, and our first taste of fire affected me, at least, less than I expected. I am not boasting, for I frankly admit that I dodged every shell that screamed overhead and it took me some time to distinguish between the echo of the rifles and the ping of the bullets landing in the bushes near by. Still, at times I found myself scarcely heeding the risks. Thus a week passed. Every case was a new experience, and another danger passed, and we became callous to the terrible sights.


**This tells us about:**

**It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:**

---

**Source 5**
Private W.R. Guest

[I] ... have shot 1 Turk, that is for certain ... he grasped his side & rolled down the hill. I was awfully excited, it is just like potting kangaroos [sic] in the bush.

Quoted in Gammage, p.113.

**This tells us about:**

**It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:**

---

**Source 7**
Lance Corporal W. Francis

… up the hill … we swarm … the lust to kill is on us, we see red. Into one trench, out of it, and into another. Oh! The bloody gorgeousness of feeling your bayonet go into soft yielding flesh – they run, we after them, no thrust one and parry, in goes the bayonet the handiest way.

Quoted in Gammage, p.109.

**This tells us about:**

**It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:**

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**Source 6**
Private R.G. Richards

It was a remarkable day right enough and a day in which it was easy to pick out the wasters and also the brave men.

It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:

Source 10
Sergeant Martin

One of our officers got shell shock under all the shelling and he cried like a child. Some were calling out for their mother.

Quoted in Gammage, p.165.

This tells us about:

It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:

Source 11
Recommendation for awards


During attack on German position North of FLERS during 5th and 6th November, 1916 these men upon orders given, worked continuously for 30 hours carrying in wounded from NO MAN’S LAND despite heavy machine gun, shell and snipers’ fire. They showed great determination under most trying circumstances working mostly in daylight. They are suffering still from their exertions. Military medal each.

Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, 11 October 1917.

This tells us about:

It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:

Source 8
Lieutenant F.C. Yeardon

A lot of our men went down, but one never stops to think of them or oneself it is just a matter of keeping a few men together & go on so as to keep the front line intact … I used often to think what sort of feeling it would be to kill anybody, but now it is a matter of who is going under first, the Turk or yourself & you just … let him have the bayonet right through, but ‘oh’ the misery & cruelty of the whole thing, ‘but a soldier does not want any sentiment.’ The look on the poor devils when cornered & a bit of steel about a foot off in the hands of a temporary [sic] mad man, because the lust for killing seems very strong.

Quoted in Gammage, p.108.

This tells us about:

It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:

Source 9
Private R.L. Donkin

I know it is right and proper that a man should go back and fight again but Sunday’s battle and the horror of the trenches Sunday night … have unnerved me completely … [We sailed] … off to death and ‘Glory’. What fools we are, men mad. The Turk he comes at one, with the blood lust in his eyes, shouts Allah! Australian like, we swear Kill or be killed … Where are the rest of my 13 mates?

Quoted in Gammage, p.70.

This tells us about:

It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:
Falling everywhere & the boys struggling through the mud bogged nearly to the knees … [In the German wire, I] got badly cut all over & ended up by getting hung up in the staff for all the world like a sack of wool chucked onto a heap of barb wire, but I felt nothing at the time for my blood was running hot & we only thought of getting in their trench, the fighting by this time was very fierce, shells, mortars, & worse than all liquid fire bombs were falling among us like hail … I had one of the most thrilling minutes of my life for I was rushing … down a shallow trench … when … a Hun rushed out at me & made a desperate lunge at my body … his bayonet slid down my rifle & stuck in the fleshy part of my leg … a sharp stinging pain went through my body … but I kept my block & before he could draw his rifle back for another attempt I shot him dead.

Quoted in Gammage, p.181.

This tells us about:

It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:

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All day long the ground rocked & swayed backwards and forwards from the concussion … men were driven stark staring mad & more than one of them rushed out of the trench over towards the Germans … any amount of them could be seen crying and sobbing like children their nerves completely gone … we were nearly all in a state of silliness & half dazed but still the Australians refused to give ground … men were buried by the dozen, but were frantically dug out again some dead and some alive.

Quoted in Gammage, p.171.

This tells us about:

It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:

---

there were dead and wounded everywhere … I had to sit on top of a dead man as there was no picking and choosing … I saw a shell lob about twelve yards away and it … lifted [two men] clean up in the air for about 6 feet and they simply dropped back dead … one or two of the chaps got shell shock and others got really frightened it was piteous to see them … One great big chap got away as soon as he reached the firing line and could not be found … I saw him in the morning in a dug out and he was white with fear and shaking like a leaf.

Quoted in Gammage, p.165.

This tells us about:

It confirms or challenges the Anzac legend by:

---
Source 15
Private Bill Harney

There was a chap, a big, tall man, you know, and he had his jaw shot away, and he’s got another bloke with broken legs or something and he’s got this chap on his back. He’s staggerin’ back along the road, and when they saw me, they had to [salute]. It made me very near cry to think of it. And I used to go up and pat ‘em on their back, and then they’d point to their big bottle that they had and it was full of coffee and cognac and I’d have a drink of this ... and give them some, and then they’d sit down and pull out their postcards and they’d show you your photos of your wives and their children and the farms they were in. And when I saw all these things I thought, well blimey, what’s it all about? ... It’s all right for people that are victorious, to march in, but think of the defeated people going back, to the horror of it all.

Quoted in Bill Harney, Harney’s War, Currey O’Neil, South Yarra, 1983.

Source 16
Private Gallwey

In one trench I saw three or four Germans pinned in. The side of the trench had closed in pinning them as they stood. The tops of their heads were blown off with machine guns. It was a horrible sight. Blood and brains had trickled down their faces and dried ... I was filled with delight to see so many Huns killed and could not help laughing.

Quoted in Gammage, p.228.

Source 17
Anonymous soldier

This afternoon we got 15 German Red Cross prisoners, they were marched down & searched & 13 of the dogs were found to be carrying daggers and revolvers they [were] promptly put against the wall & finished.

Quoted in Gammage, p.258.

2 What would you say are the main qualities of the Anzacs that you can see from these extracts?

3 Are there any aspects of the soldiers that surprise you? Why?

4 Go back to your original ideas about the Anzac spirit and make any changes that are now needed.

Left: Charles and Effie Bean at Tuggeranong
## Additional Activity 3

**Site study – analysing a museum display:**  
The Australian War Memorial

These questions can be used to analyse a particular display, such as the Gallipoli Gallery or the Western Front Gallery, at the Australian War Memorial.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPECTS TO CONSIDER</th>
<th>YOUR RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What does the display show?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the historical context explained clearly?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the significance of this display clearly explained?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is a variety of types of evidence displayed?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are the objects displayed authentic for that event or period?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are these objects the best possible ones to be displayed?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are the text descriptions clear and informative?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do the surroundings influence my impression of the display?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>How is the display arranged?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there a particular message being conveyed?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the nature of the event clearly identified (e.g. am I told if it is controversial or contested)?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>If so, is a variety of viewpoints clearly and fairly put?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do I know where the evidence has come from and what sort of evidence it is?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is it giving me a particular message?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is its purpose to present objects (neutral), to explain (impartial), or to argue a particular view (partisan)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the end, do I feel that I really understand the situation?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My initial impression of the display</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My final judgement about the display</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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