

This was the first time I had read a graphic novel and I really enjoyed it. It has a lot of depth to the story I think sometimes graphic novels can be pigeon holed into being “easy” or “simple” but this is certainly not the case in terms of *The Sacrifice*. The political history and the social context of the outbreak of the Second World War in Australia is certainly something that can be explored from an historical as well as a literary perspective.

In terms of activities students should be able to research actual events described in the book and discuss the difference between their portrayal in the text and in history.

Teachers may want to show students the difference between a novel written in a prose fashion and a graphic novel. They should explain the challenges to the author and how they can meet them while not compromising the integrity of their plot.

In the following lessons student may then find it possible to choose a page from a selected number of poignant parts in the plot and they can redesign the page while showing the aspects of the plot, character, themes they find to be the most important.

Another lesson could be used to study the aspects of the characters that have been emphasised visually and through the dialogue. Students should explore how the author needs to incorporate these two aspects to create a three dimensional character that is realistic and credible.

This text would be suitable for a year 11 group who will have just studied the context of World War Two in their mandatory history class the previous year.

Vanessa Wickens, NSW

A graphic novel, *The Sacrifice* deals with life in Melbourne in the years which cover the start of the Second World War. Robert wrestles with the idea of joining the war as a soldier despite his conviction that it is immoral and evil to kill others. While deciding, working in a ‘reserved occupation’ which means he doesn’t have to go to war unless he chooses, Robert has to deal with the changes he sees in society around him. The influx of refugees from Europe, the position of the Church, the popularity of the Communist party and the changes that the war and visiting American soldiers wrought in Melbourne are all dealt with through Robert’s experiences.

The language and opinions dealt used in the text are quite authentic and convey quite a sense of the times, with all the prejudices, beliefs and fears of the war years. It would be a useful text for work with senior students, and would work best with teacher support as background knowledge of the period is needed to fully understand the attitudes expressed by several of the characters.

The Sacrifice is quite an adult and complex story, despite its graphic format. It is an interesting look at the different aspects of society in the face of war without any rose coloured glasses or romantic notions about the glory of war. The novel is the first of a trilogy exploring the story of Robert, and it will be interesting to see how things unfold, as the story so far has not been predictable.

Anne Sim, Dromana Secondary College, VIC

The Sacrifice is the first book of a trilogy based on the experiences of a central character, Robert Wells, during the Second World War.

The book is presented in a graphic novel / comic form, but is much grander in style and far from the usual comic book. At times it is like watching a movie as the characters come to life in our imagination.

Set in and around Melbourne, local readers will recognize place names and landmarks in the text and drawings.

Mutard has gone to great lengths to successfully re-create the 1940’s Australian (specifically Melbourne) culture with the fashions, outlook and prevailing attitudes of the time. Robert Wells wrestles with two major dilemmas – a moral one and a spiritual one. These are brought into sharp focus as the war takes over the lives of those involved and everything else beside. Alongside the authenticity there is a slight hint of early 21st century political correctness, as our uncertain times echo the resonances of earlier events.

The characters grow and develop as the book progresses and at the end I was left wanting more, eager to know the fates of these characters in the next instalment.

Eddie Cole, Mountain District Christian School, VIC

The Sacrifice is one of a several new graphic novels which have appeared on the market recently. It is set in Melbourne during 1939-1942. The story follows the main character – Robert Wells – a pacifist and through his interactions with his Communist girlfriend, soldier brother, Christian mother, refugee renters and various friends the story is carried along with in-depth discussions about politics and religion.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and learnt more about Australia during the war years. I thought it would be quick and easy to read but it actually took quite a while. People who think that graphic novels are an ‘easy’ choice for students should take a look at *The Sacrifice*. There is a lot happening in each picture and both the pictures and text need to be read carefully to truly understand the story. I was especially impressed with the way the angles changed in picture – it was like reading a film! The characters are remarkably well developed, as is the setting. The use of slang and vocabulary from the era (dandy, Pig Iron Bob, susso) adds to the realism. My one concern is that I often found it difficult to differentiate between the male characters.

I would recommend this book to senior students who are studying or just display an interest in World War II. I think that they would benefit more from the story when they know or understand some of the political and religious background – there were a couple of discussions that I found difficult to follow and I had to pause in my reading and do some extra research. Sections of the book could lead to interesting conversations about Australian culture, both in the 1940s and today. Areas discussed include: the morality of Australians fighting a far-away war; supporting refugees; poverty and accepting charity; and questions of religion. There are plenty of differing views presented to allow an interesting debate. This is book one in the Robert Wells series. I will be looking to see where the story goes in the next two books.

Anne Fry, Grant High School, SA

Bruce Mutard’s *The Sacrifice* is a war story with a difference. Dialogue and graphics combine to create the atmosphere of Australia in the early days of World War II. Through Robert’s story, Mutard traces the issues and emotions of that difficult time. The enthusiasm of the early enlisters is contrasted with the agonising that others such as Robert and Bluey had to suffer before they committed themselves to the AIF. The changing social fabric is highlighted by characters linked to women’s roles, religion, refugees, communism and American-Australian relations. Linking them all is the recurring theme of sacrifice and responsibility. The novel is well-written and the black and white graphics reflect the darkness of the times.

The novel will be an excellent resource for history classes, but the language and concepts make it more suitable for senior students. English students could use it for studies on manipulation and semantics and how literature can be used to portray the events and people of significant periods of Australia’s past. It would also serve as a discussion starter for issues facing contemporary Australians and how our present can always be linked to our past. *The Sacrifice* is Book 1 of a trilogy and it will be interesting to see how the series develops and to check student responses.

Patricia Andersen, Nanango State High School, QLD

The graphic novel provides a striking genre through which Bruce Mutard explores the impact of war on society. By charting the lives of the Wells, Blumenstein and Krautshammer families through the early years of World War Two, from 1939 to 1942, *The Sacrifice* builds a compelling picture of the political, economic, religious and social complexity of the period. Its monochromatic layout reinforces the dark undercurrents of the time and compliments the heightened political awareness of the characters in a way that is accessible to a modern audience and is an effective means of presenting the various ideologies they embrace to 21st

century students. Elsa's communism contrasts sharply with the capitalist values upheld by Robert's uncle Alan and the humanitarian endeavours of the Blumensteins, as they attempt to house numerous European refugees, transcends the racism that informs much of the dialogue of suburban church goers in Father O'Brien's congregation. Through all of this Robert wrestles with his sense of the futility of war and the moral imperative that drives him towards enlistment. Set in Melbourne, the text invites a comparison between the city as it was some seventy years ago and today, through images of Flinders Street Station, the Botanical gardens and St Kilda pier. Mutard presents a society which is at once familiar and alien.

Robert Wells' journey traces the changes wrought on Melbourne society during the war years in a manner that brings the tensions and challenges of the time to life. The novel begins with images of an elderly woman carrying buckets of water to a dying tree that has "turned its back to the world", as smoke and ash from the bushfires that ravaged the state in that time blanket the city. She maintains this practice as the intensity of the effects of war on Australian society increases. In the closing stages of the narrative, shortly before Robert's departure for overseas duty, a single shoot indicates the life that remains viable within the tree. The old woman's devotion is validated and the reader is left with a sense of the tenacity of life and perhaps of hope for the future.

Wendy Jackson, Healesville High School, VIC

Spanning the early years of World War 2, *The Sacrifice* presents a powerful, no-holds-barred analysis of Australia's political and military history and of the social and cultural conditions on "the home front", as seen through the eyes of central character Robert Wells. Confronted by the issues, divided opinions and social problems of the day, there are difficult decisions to be made as Robert grapples with a death in his family, his mother's failing health, his romantic feelings for the head-strong, politically-active Elsa, his religious faith and questioning of the Church's support for this war and his own attitude to the war itself. Indeed, Robert's journey of self-discovery parallels the journey of Australia and Australians – a "melting pot" of war propaganda, ideals and ideologies, prejudice and power and a search for national identity through patriotic involvement in international affairs. Visible, too, in the behaviour Robert sees on the streets, is an apparent sense of "wild abandon" in uncertain times, with moral standards compromised by promiscuity and alcohol abuse, social order seemingly under attack. For kind-hearted, highly-principled Robert, the pacifist, it is a crisis of conscience, a moral dilemma of personal duty not necessarily resolved when he leaves behind his "reserved occupation", enlists and ships out for duty. *The Silence*, due for release in 2009, will continue both his physical journey and his soul-searching, as part of The Robert Wells Trilogy.

Unique and different in its content and approach and told through cleverly-created, strong characters representing a cross section of Australian society and viewpoints of the day, *The Sacrifice* is a biting, thought-provoking social and political commentary, featuring the vernacular of the day (including some coarse language) and some very graphic images. Exploring themes of family, mateship, loyalty, prejudice, tolerance, courage and psychological and social survival, in light of the home-grown "casualties of war" during this time of instability and upheaval, *The Sacrifice* is suitable as background reading and discussion –starter material for the Queensland Senior Modern History curriculum, specifically as part of the *Global Conflicts* unit. Topics addressed include the racist hate campaign of the media, anti-Semitism and negative attitudes towards all "enemy aliens", women workers, American troops stationed here and Communist party members. Moreover, Mutard's basic questioning of the morality of this war, and the perceived glory, to some, of war, is certainly relevant today, with current public opinion divided regarding Australia's involvement in the Iraq conflict.

Alison Cassell, QLD