

## Eventual Poppy Day

Libby Hathorn

### Book Summary

Respected YA author Libby Hathorn has drawn on family history and done extensive research to write a fascinating book that profiles two young protagonists, both seventeen years of age, who are related: Maurice, who went to Gallipoli and the Western Front and his great-great nephew, Oliver, who is trying to deal with difficult family circumstances but whose discovery of Maurice's WW1 diary changes the way he sees the world. The balance of the historical and contemporary points of view makes this title perfect for use in the classroom, but also appealing to the YA reader.

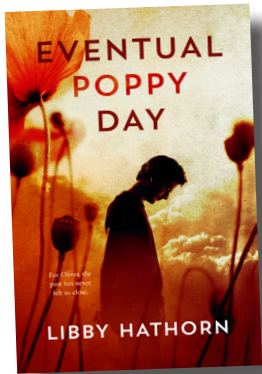
### Curriculum Areas and Key Learning Outcomes

ACELT1640, ACELT1642, ACELT1643, ACDSEH095

### Appropriate Ages:

14+

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Notes By Robyn Sheahan-Bright



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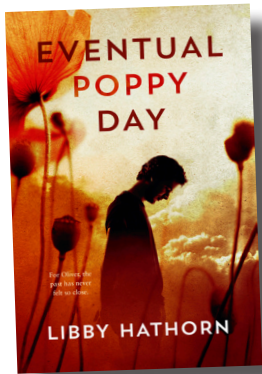
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### Book Description

'Reading about a real war, and a boy like him in the thick of it, after his experience in the warehouse, when he'd been so raw and hurt, when he remembered such fear so clearly, must have been a part of it. The way he'd even begun trying to size up his own life.' (p 343)

'She was with them, the thousands upon thousands of soldiers who'd believed and gone, and those who hadn't believed but had gone anyway. She was with the futility of it and yet the nobility of it too, something beyond the inglorious and incompetent masters his history teachers said sent so many of those young men — what, some of them a year older than he was? — needlessly to their deaths. She was with — he searched for the word and was amazed when it came to him so easily, probably from a hymn that had been sung earlier — yes, she was with valour. For him it was a breathtakingly new understanding.' (p 73)

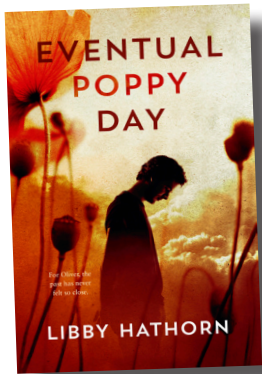
The novel alternates between two narratives set a hundred years apart: Maurice Roche, enlisting in 1914, and Oliver Maurice Day, a disaffected youth in 2102. Oliver's great-grandmother, Dorothea, who lives with him and his mother, Julia, was Maurice's sister, born after he left for the Western Front. Oliver is in love with India Boden but worried that the sophisticated uni student Tom Oatley might steal her away from him.

Both Maurice and Oliver are artists; both are in love for the first time – Maurice with Rosie, and Oliver with India; both are suffering trauma, Maurice as a naive young soldier escaping from a desperate home life on a farm stricken by poverty and escaping to a war he doesn't comprehend, and Oliver at war with his feelings since his father, Dan, left them, his baby sister, Poppy, became ill, and he depressed.

When Dorothea remembers on Anzac Day where she hid the tin containing Maurice's diaries, letters and drawings, their two stories begin to align. For in reading his records of the war, Oliver comes to a new understanding of what it means to be a man, what war was like for Maurice and his friends, and how he too might forge forward with his life, despite the issues that have troubled him.

Above all, this is a novel about hope:

'And in the further fields, the signs of new life, grasses and flowers and trees with tiny leaves sprouting, like the birdsong, spelled revival. They could have been signs of hope, but the farm-boy in Maurice knew that the land, ghastly as it looked, was indifferent to the blood of the soldiers spilt here, French, British, Australian or German. Its roads and canals, its fields and forests, its towns might have been gutted, burned, razed, distorted by the maelstrom of steel and fire, the acrid fumes of gas and smoke that drifted over it, the monsterring of men themselves into machines of war. But



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underneath it all, he figured, lay the readiness to spring back to life, everything that it had been here before, just waiting for them all to piss off out of here.' (p 252)

Carefully researched and beautifully written, this is a deeply moving work for teenagers by one of Australia's most acclaimed writers.

## About the Author

Libby Hathorn is an award-winning author of more than fifty books for children and young people, as well as books for adults. Translated into several languages and adapted for stage and screen, her work has won honours in Australia, the United States, Great Britain and Holland. In 2014 she was winner of the Alice Award, a national award for 'a woman who has made a distinguished and long-term contribution to Australian literature'.

Libby loves poetry. Reading it, being inspired by it, reciting it, teaching it, writing and dreaming about it. Many of her novels and picture books are inspired by poetry entirely.

Her first young adult novel, *Thunderwith*, was made into a movie (starring Judy Davis, who was nominated for an Emmy for her performance as Gladwyn) by Hallmark Hall of Fame and this

book enjoys its 25th year in continuous print. Two of her picture books, *Grandma's Shoes* and *Sky Sash So Blue*, have been performed as operas; the first in Sydney and the second in Birmingham, Alabama. She is currently working on a libretto for her latest picture book, *Outside* (Hardie Grant Egmont/Little Hare, 2014).

Alongside *Eventual Poppy Day*, Libby has developed a presentation entitled 'An ANZAC in the Family', which explains the process of writing a historical novel based on true war records of a family member. She collected and published Australian women poets' work in *Women's Work: a collection of contemporary Australian Women's Poetry* (Pax Press, 2013).

Libby is a keen educator, and has lectured part-time at Sydney University. She is also a regular guest at conferences and writers' festivals including the Ubud Writers' Festival in 2012 and the Adelaide Writers' Festival in 2015. Libby is devoted to being an ambassador for poetry anywhere and everywhere.

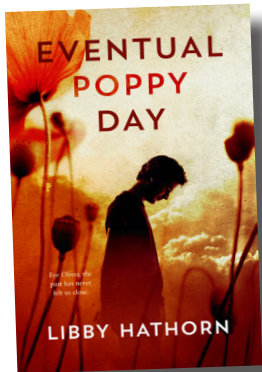
[www.libbyhathorn.com](http://www.libbyhathorn.com)

[www.libby-hathorn.blogspot.com](http://www.libby-hathorn.blogspot.com)

## Author Inspiration

Libby Hathorn writes in her Author's Note at the back of the book:

'The story is inspired by discovering part of the "story" of my mother's brother Maurice Roache.'  
(p 371)



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# Study notes on Characters, Themes and Curriculum Topics

## a) Characters

### The Significance of Character

Characters are the heart of any narrative, the catalysts for action, and the central core around which all other narrative aspects must revolve and work. In this work there are several major characters (some of whom figure briefly in the action) and a cast of minor ones.

**Discussion Point:** How do the characters' actions in this novel illustrate the nature of the times in which they lived? Choose a character and analyse his or her character in relation to societal influences.

### Major and Minor Characters

**Roches:** Maurice Roche (also known as Moss); Emily (his mother); Michael (his father); Aubrey, Will, Charlie and Tom (his brothers); Katie (his sister); Tot, Jane and Alice (his aunts); Bessie Longbottom and daughter Rosie (distant relatives of the aunts); Aunt Bess and her son Cecil; Cecil's friend, Rupert Kirk; servant Hannah.

**Maurice's fellow soldiers:** Eddie, Swift, Bluey, Verne, Armitage, Evans, Williams and Ernie.

**French Family:** Sisters Madeleine and Angeliqne and their mother, Mathilde.

**Days:** Oliver, Julia (his mother), Dan (his father), Poppy (his sister), Dorothea (his great-grandmother), India Boden, Tom Oatley, Jenny and Crystal.

**Discussion Point:** Which of the main or minor characters did you find most appealing, and why? Which character would you like to have seen more of and why?

### Character Arcs

Character Arcs are the curve on which key events show how a character grows or develops in response to events and to interactions with other characters in the novel.

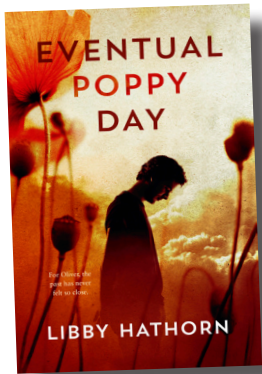
**Activity:** Choose a character and trace an arc on which key events indicate some aspect of their personality or change in their behaviour (e.g. Katie or Cecil).

**Activity:** What might have happened to Angel after she gave birth to Maurice's child? Write an episode in her life in diary form which imagines a possible fate for her.

## b) Themes

### World War One

'You could see that months of an unrelenting cycle of life and death had run the veterans like him down.



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Some of them, he thought that day, looked positively old, though not a man was over thirty and most were around eighteen or nineteen.' (p 127)

**Discussion Point:** The 'war to end all wars' took a terrible toll. Many lives were lost and the effect on future generations in Australia was immense. What were some of the national and international outcomes of this loss? (Discuss topics such as women, economics, society etc.) Debate Australia's involvement in World War One, and its outcomes.

**Discussion Point:** Choose one of the campaigns in which Maurice fought (e.g. The Somme, Pozieres, Messines Ridge) and write a brief essay about the outcomes.

**Activity:** What is the significance of Remembrance Day (or 'Poppy Day' or 'Armistice Day') held on 11 November since 1919? [Visit websites such as 'Origin of Remembrance Day' <http://www.dva.gov.au/commemorations-memorials-and-war-graves/anniversaries-and-commemorative-events/origin-remembrance> and 'Remembrance Day' [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remembrance\\_Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remembrance_Day) Research the significance of the red poppy and what it symbolises.

**Activity:** The novel mentions the fact that many soldiers were not identified and were buried in unmarked graves. The term 'Unknown Soldier'

recognises this fact. Read Paul Keating's 'The Unknown Soldier: Remembrance Day 1993' eulogy delivered at the funeral service of the unknown soldier, 11 November 1993. <http://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/keating.asp> Discuss.

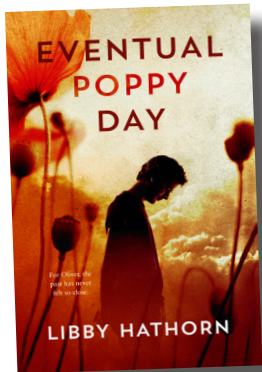
**Discussion Point:** Read some of the media coverage of the centenary of the outbreak of World War One and discuss the Australian government's promotion of this concept.

**Discussion Point:** Oliver changes his mind in the course of the novel; he begins with a cynical attitude, but concludes by recognising that the valour of these soldiers should be remembered. Do you agree with his sentiments?

**Discussion Point:** Maurice has to wait for his father to sign a form on his eighteenth birthday before he can enlist, but many didn't wait and actually joined up as young teenagers. Read about 'Boy Soldiers' <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/boysoldiers/>. Read other texts about boy soldiers [see **Bibliography**].

**Discussion Point:** In several conflicts, an 'armistice' has been declared to allow both sides to bury their dead. In this novel, the men work side by side with the Turks and discover how similar they are (pp 116-7). Discuss the irony of such armistices.

**Activity:** David Noonan's book about casualties in World War One is summarised in his article: 'Why our World War One Casualty Numbers are Wrong', *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 28 2014 <http://www.smh.com.au/national/ww1/>



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[why-our-wwi-casualty-number-are-wrong-20140430-zr0v5.html](http://www.harpercollins.com.au/why-our-wwi-casualty-number-are-wrong-20140430-zr0v5.html) Research this topic further.

**Activity:** Lucky is a German dog rescued by Bluey, and later cared for by Eddie. Pets were often smuggled into war. Research the role of animals in conflicts. [See **Bibliography**].

**Activity:** Ernie is an Indigenous soldier mentioned in this novel. Research the experiences of Indigenous soldiers fighting in World War One. [See **Bibliography**].

### Gallipoli and Anzac Day

'Yes they'd all changed after months of trench living, endless barrages and death all around them, and the knowledge that despite the horror and yes even the humdrum of just keeping on, they were not winning at Gallipoli: they were holding on and that's all. Not winning the way they'd been told they would.' (p 125)

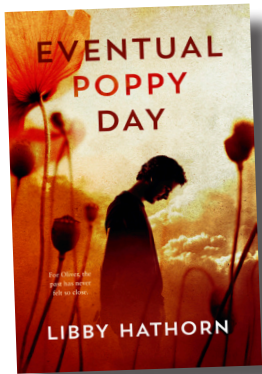
**Activity:** The Australian national curriculum addresses this topic in various ages and class groups (Remembrance Day and Anzac Day are studied at Yr 3; Gallipoli conflict is studied at Yr 9). In 2015, the centenary is celebrated, so teachers might make a particular focus on this theme. Research the origins of the campaign, how it was managed, and its outcomes. [Visit 'Timeline of the Gallipoli Campaign', *Wikipedia* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_the\\_Gallipoli\\_Campaign](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Gallipoli_Campaign)]

**Discussion Point:** Australians celebrate Anzac Day on 25 April each year. Research the myths behind the concept of Anzac Day. See 'Anzac Day History' <http://www.dva.gov.au/commemorations-memorials-and-war-graves/anniversaries-and-commemorative-events/anzac-day-history> and 'Anzac Day' <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/anzac/> See also 'National Ceremony' <http://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/anzac/national/> Why does Australia celebrate this tragic loss of life? Is this a healthy ideal for young people in Australia to be nurturing?

**Discussion Point:** Anzac Day celebrations at Gallipoli Peninsula have grown in popularity and there will be a lottery in 2015 to decide who can attend the centenary. How should we celebrate such an occasion, if at all?

**Discussion Point:** Why is a 'period of silence' observed on Anzac Day and Remembrance Day? [See <http://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/customs/silence.asp>]

**Activity:** The Turks were led by a great leader and roundly defeated the ANZACs. Research his life and history at: 'Atatürk (Mustafa Kamal)', Australian War Memorial <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/ataturk/> and 'Kemal Atatürk', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/40411/Kemal-Ataturk> What made the conflict so difficult for the ANZACs? Were the Turkish soldiers more likely to win, and why? Did the British commanders get their planning wrong?



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### Brutality of War

“The knowledge that each man back there in the wagon, so earnestly singing his lungs out, had probably killed what? Twenty men? Fifty? A hundred? More? Some with more than the usual amount of relish. And he was hardly innocent either.”  
(p 164)

**Discussion Point:** The novel is full of the horrors of war. It details the use of mustard gas (p 186); the plagues of rats in the trenches (pp 275–6); the cold conditions which led to life-threatening conditions such as pneumonia (p 276); the wet and insanitary trenches which led to conditions such as trench foot (p 277), which caused gangrene, loss of limbs and death; the cruel military punishment for leave without permission (p 295); the madness caused by warfare (e.g. Smithy p 284) and the carnage on the battlefields. What were the long term effects of poison gas? See ‘Poison Gas in World War One’ [http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/poison\\_gas\\_and\\_world\\_war\\_one.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/poison_gas_and_world_war_one.htm) What other long-term effects of war injuries did soldiers suffer? How were they cared for on their return?

**Discussion Point:** Maurice suggests that he and his fellows were capable of terrible brutality in the heat of conflict. Are human beings naturally aggressive or were they acting largely from fear?

### Colonialism and Propaganda

“It means of course they will defend us if ever we’re attacked in this part of the world,” Aunt Tot went on.  
(p 5)

**Discussion Point:** Was Aunt Tot correct in this assumption of what being part of the British Empire meant? Did the British always look after Australians in subsequent conflicts?

**Discussion Point:** What other statements are made in this book which indicate how much Australian ideals were allied to British interests?

### **Discussion Point:**

‘And for that matter something in him didn’t entirely fall for the go-to-war propaganda sweeping through the place — not just the posters, the editorials, the addresses from the pulpit, but the pressure from the townsfolk themselves: the heartfelt poetry, the war songs, and the church bazaars all raising money for the war effort, and the new Win the War League that he’d failed to join.’ (p 8)

What part did propaganda play in recruitment during World War One?

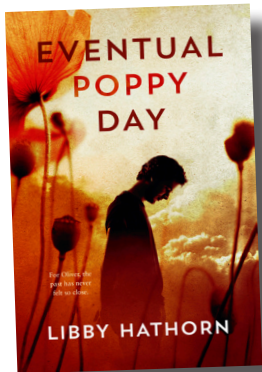
### Pacifism

“Yeah — but why me? I’m a pacifist anyway,” he said. “I hate all this pomp and ceremony about something so evil. It makes too much of war!” (p 67)

**Discussion Point:** Oliver discovers that being a ‘pacifist’ is not as simple as he had once thought. Why not?

**Activity:** Debate the pros and cons of settling disputes via military conflict.





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### Masculinity and Mateship

'And each new day here they all knew their chances of survival diminished.' (p 244)

**Discussion Point:** Much of Maurice's mateship with his fellow soldiers is founded on his masculinity. True or False?

**Discussion Point:** When Cecil visits Maurice the men consider him somewhat effeminate. How difficult would it have been for a person like Cecil to become a member of a military team?

### Love

'... how he felt he burned for her and how at home alone he would draw and re-draw her face until his rendition of it was perfect.' (p 21)

**Discussion Point:** Love is a source of both comfort and pain in this novel. Both Maurice and Oliver fall deeply in love for the first time with Rosie and India respectively. Maurice, however, makes love with Angelique (pp 230–2), despite his lingering love for Rosie. When he receives a letter from Rosie ending their relationship, he regards it as 'punishment' for his affair with Angel, and writes a heart-broken note to Rosie: *'Only love me, Rosie! Just love me!'* (p 288) which eerily echoes Oliver's note to India after she breaks up with him. What does

this novel suggest about first love?

**Discussion Point:** Oliver's love for Poppy drives him to steal a car and gets him into terrible trouble. How important is their relationship in the novel's thematic development?

### Art

'They didn't need to discuss their ideas about art if they didn't choose to; much of it was tacit.'  
(p 332)

**Discussion Point:** Both Maurice and Oliver are artists and gain a lot from their skills and talents. What does art represent in their lives?

### Maturation

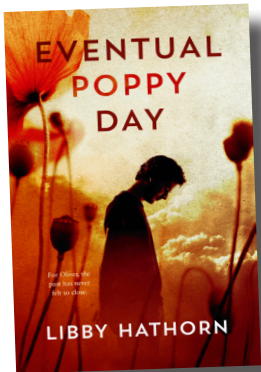
'... he was aware of some sort of change in him.'  
(p 331)

**Discussion Point:** This is a novel about both men growing up. How do they each change in the course of the narrative?

### **Discussion Point:**

'Wartime a hundred years ago against his tame life now, as if there could be any comparison at all, and yet he compared and it was an amazing and addictive thing to do.' (p 344)

What points of comparison does Oliver find between himself and Maurice?



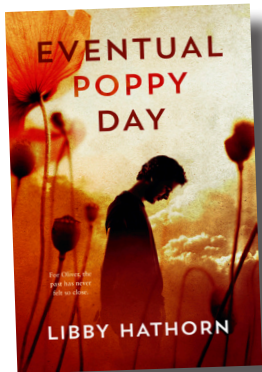
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### Key Quotes

The following quotes relate to some of the **Themes** above. You might like to present any one of them (or two related quotes) to your students as a catalyst for further discussion, or as the subject of an essay outlining how the quote reflects a theme which is central to this novel:

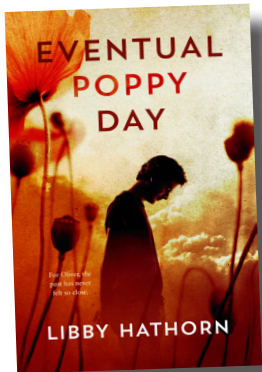
<p>'Everyone was saying it would be a short war — maybe six months to a year — and what an adventure for a young fella. He had to get there too. That was all he knew.' (p 4)</p>	<p>'They knew scads of history, much more about Great Britain than they did about Australia, their own country, which was considered to have very little history at all. 'So has your teacher said why Australian boys are expected to go?' 'Because we're lucky to be part of the Empire,' Charlie had parroted happily. 'Yeah, we're allies!' (p 12)</p>
<p>'Anyway,' Maurice cut in, 'lots of the families here came from Britain in the first place. You know, <i>it's the mother country</i> even though they've never been there. Nor even hoped to go there on a visit.' (p 58)</p>	<p>'So my relatives were on the wrong side, fighting and hiding from the Nazis. And Sonny's brother down the road was on the wrong side fighting the Taliban. And leaving East Timor to its fate was OK too? Is that what you're saying?' (p 67)</p>
<p>You don't, you know. You don't give a damn that most of my family perished at the hands of evil, that my father had to change our name because of racism, that your great-great-uncle gave up his life to protect a way of life he believed in ... You don't give a damn!' (p 69)</p>	<p>'If Dan was a loser as he'd been told so many times, then it was like father like son wasn't it? Bad blood she'd once said after yet another argument. And she was right.' (p 77)</p>
<p>"A life not fully lived," she'd always say, so sad as if he'd died just the day before.' (p 80)</p>	<p>'Especially him, the country boy from the north coast, from Ettrick near Kyogle close to Casino, who had never thought to travel the world, to be part of a glorious war that he'd help end sooner rather than later, though not before proving himself in the field.' (p 103)</p>



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<p>'Already dead! he thought in wonder at the swift-ness of it all. Some of them were splayed on the ground, pools of dark blood telling their story, some were twisted in grotesque poses of death, some without limbs or with limbs bloodied and maimed, worst of all some were faceless, the awful victims of shells driven deep into the ground on which they lay. And then there were the remains of men that didn't bear closer inspection or thinking about. And this was only the beginning.' (p 111)</p>	<p><i>'You know they shipped in some newspapers from England that said "A spectacular debut on the world stage for a young nation like Australia", that's what they're saying. Maybe it is and maybe it isn't but I could think of a hundred other ways I'd like to have seen our debut made ...'</i> (p 120)</p>
<p>'Going back into the discipline of more drill, leading up to some new attack, with no time to digest the dreadfulness and loss of their last battle, felt like a betrayal, and a stupid one at that. And yet the drill persisted.' (p 250)</p>	<p>'the irresistible feeling that in doing this, he was moving towards an altered destiny. It was similar to the way he'd felt moving over no-man's-land at the beginning of a battle, at the beginning of this war.' (p 291–2)</p>
<p>'And India was right, Dorothea was right, Maurice and all those young men, whatever their reasons for volunteering, deserved to be remembered.' (p 359–60)</p>	<p><i>'No butcher bird, no lorikeet will call for you but in this field perhaps, 'a lark, still bravely singing, flies,' with the poetry of birdsong, over a summer blaze of poppies. And over you.'</i> (p 370)</p>



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### c) Curriculum areas and key learning outcomes

#### Language and Literacy

**This novel is a work of Historical Fiction or Faction** — a genre which relies on the author weaving together fact and fiction seamlessly. Libby Hathorn has taken her great-uncle's story and used research into the experiences of World War One soldiers to create a fiction about a soldier named Maurice Roche and a contemporary boy named Oliver Day.

**Discussion Point:** How much did you recognise from the history you have read? What was similar and what was different to actual events or people? Talk about the writing of historical fiction with your students, with reference to some of the articles on writing such fiction in the **Bibliography** below.

**Narrative Structure** — The novel follows two different chronological structures, 1914–8 and 2012–4, but also refers to key events which have taken place earlier in Maurice's and Oliver's lives such as Maurice's meeting and falling in love with Rosie, and Oliver's father leaving them.

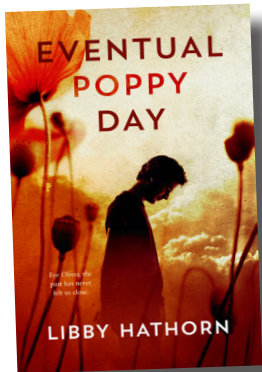
**Activity:** Create a timeline of all the incidents referred to in the book.

**Narrative Perspective** — The story is told in third-person subjective from the perspectives of Maurice and Oliver, but sometimes other perspectives are introduced. (eg Ch 4, pp 47–59, Cecil's first-person perspective; pp 77–83, Dorothea's third-person perspective; pp 85–6, Ben and Chloe in third person; Maurice's diary and letters in first person are scattered through the text; pp 205–210, Cecil's perspective in third person; pp 210–11, Cecil's letter to Rupert in first person; pp 304–8 Maurice's first person letters to his unborn sister and to Rosie; Ch 19, 20, pp 309–328, Katie in first person; Ch 22, pp 333–40, Eddie's diary in first person; Ch 25, pp 363–8 Eddie's story in first person; pp 369–70, Libby Hathorn's poem for her lost uncle.) What effect does this alternating viewpoint have on your reading of the novel?

**Discussion Point:** How might the story have changed if it had been written by Katie Roche, or India Boden, or another character? Describe an incident through their eyes, as if written as a diary or letter.

**Suspense** — There are several mystery elements in the novel which contribute to suspense.

**Discussion Point:** Cecil hints at feelings for Rupert which are never fully explained, and he actually seems to declare his love for him (p 55). There is also a suggestion that Katie may



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have married Rupert, but we don't discover the answer. Eddie's diary (p 340) reveals that Angel was pregnant with Maurice's child, but we never hear the outcome. Oliver's future looks brighter but the novel concludes with an open ending. Will he become a successful artist? Will he and India renew their love affair? Will his dad successfully make the movie about Maurice's life? Such unanswered questions enhance the sense that this is a history in which gaps are often found, due variously to insufficient or lost records, deliberate obfuscation of uncomfortable truths, or the failing memories of those who are left from past times.

**Activity:** Write a letter describing what might have happened to Katie.

### Use of Literary Devices (such as Simile and Metaphor)

**Activity:** Locate examples of the use of literary devices, and discuss their meaning and effect. *For example, metaphorical language; here Rosie is describing the house at Evan's Head:*

'the aunts' house there was practically in the water. It reminded her of a sea creature for it was up on stilts that made it look like it could walk right in and take a dip in the seawater,' (p 41)

*Rosie has been taken to meet the relatives and Maurice, having only just met her, cannot bear the time without her:*

'A wave seemed to pass over me, the hours apart; a wave had swept over us. Minutes were tocking on, minutes, even seconds to be related in bright detail, when we saw each other. But when would that be, brilliant cousin from the city? Angel.'  
(p 42)

**Activity:** Locate literary devices such as these used by the author and discuss their meaning and effect. E.g. Katie's terrible moment in the grocery shop when her father has just died, Chapter 18, and Maurice's feelings as they head toward Gallipoli, Chapter 6.

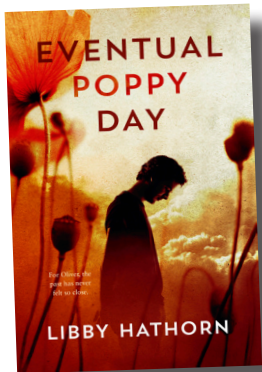
### Poetry

**Discussion Point:** Libby Hathorn is a poet, and this sensibility imbues her writing:

'He watched a lone bird making its high-arc'd way to some supposed safe nest. No crow, no kookaburra or brilliant lorikeet, no reassuring sounds of home. A kestrel? Back to the nest?'  
(p 213)

Choose another passage which you find particularly affecting and discuss the use of language in the passage and how it achieves its effect.

**Activity:** Read the poem 'In Flanders Field' by John McCrae, written in 1915. Think about the feelings of the soldier fighting for months in the



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trenches and yet able to still see such a thing as a bird overhead, and think about its singing and its freedom. Look at the structure of the poem and model on it to write your own poem marking the end of war.

**Activity:** Write your own poem about war.

### Literary Quotes

**Discussion point:** Look at the quote from Leo Tolstoy's famous novel *War and Peace* and consider why the author may have chosen these lines as an epigraph for her own novel *Eventual Poppy Day*.

**Activity:** Read some of the literary quotes included in the text and analyse the relationship between those quotes and the themes of the novel. (E.g. p 10, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' by WB Yeats; pp 11 and 291, 'The Man from Snowy River' by Banjo Paterson; p 27, 'In Flanders Field' by John McCrae; p 45, 'Drink to me Only With Thine Eyes'; p 72, 'Abide With Me'; p 195, 'All Things Bright and Beautiful'; p 212, 'Strange Meeting' by Wilfred Owen; p 266, John Masefield; p 290, 'He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven' by WB Yeats; p 291, 'How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix' by Robert Browning; pp 311–2, 'Bellbirds' by Henry Kendall; p 360, 'For the Fallen' by Laurence Binyon; pp 366, 'Andy's Gone with Cattle' by Henry Lawson and p 367 the prayer 'Yea, though

I walk through the valley of the shadow of death'.)

### Humour

**Discussion Point:** Soldiers often coped with the brutality of war by employing humour in dire circumstances. Eddie, for example, makes a satirical remark on the fact they have been issued with packs of firewood for the landing at Gallipoli:

'We dig in, light up quick as a flash and toast marshmallows. Like we did in London!' (p 93)

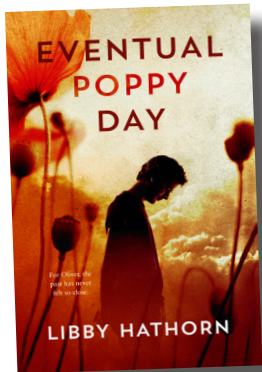
What other examples of humour did you notice in this text?

**Activity:** A lot of humour was tied to the use of colloquial language. Find a passage which employs colloquial expressions in a humorous way.

**Critical Literacy** — this text might be used to encourage students to use critical literacy skills.

**Activity:** Read the passage about Maurice and Rosie's first kiss under the orange blossom (pp 45–6); what techniques does the writer use to convey feeling in this passage?

**Activity:** Study the historical fiction listed in the 'Primary School Resources to Support the Australian History Curriculum', *Australian*



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School Library Association, 2012 <http://www.asla.org.au/site/defaultsite/filesystem/documents/primaryhistoryresourcesapril2012.pdf> and compare to this novel. Read some picture books set in World War One, as well, and compare to this novel. [See **Bibliography**].

**Visual Literacy** — Images enhance text in many ways.

**Activity:** The cover of a book is an ideogram for the contents, and a marketing tool as well. Examine the cover of this book, which features a figure of a boy surrounded by poppies. What does it suggest about this novel? What details are particularly significant?

**Activity:** Create a new cover for the work, drawing on either theme or incident to create the image. Use techniques such as collage. Write a blurb for the back cover of the book as well.

**Activity:** Encourage students to investigate images of World War One online to give them a sense of both place and social times.

### SOSE

**History and Social Class** — This novel reveals a lot about the social history of these times.

**Whose History?** — There are many versions

of history. In the **Bibliography** below there are websites tracing the history of World War One which include oral history and researched secondary texts.

**Activity:** Research the life of a World War One soldier using resources listed in the **Bibliography**.

**Activity:** Read any first-person accounts and diaries of World War One as an introduction to this topic.

**Activity:** Choose an incident referred to in the novel and then write a diary entry as if it was written by Rosie.

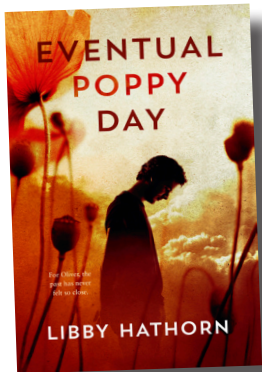
**Discussion Point:** How did the war change the balance between the upper, middle and lower classes?

**Values** — This novel is about 'character' and the qualities or values necessary to make your life meaningful. Some of these are:

### Kindness

'Kindness, which had been just about leached out of him month by month in Gallipoli, but was restored in the break between battles, after just days back in battle was gone again, leaving him hollow.' (p 194)

**Discussion Point:** Maurice recalls his father's



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kindness to strangers and laments that he hadn't fully recognised it before he went to war. He also fears that some of the horrors he has witnessed have made him less inclined to kindness. What evidence of the latter did you observe in the novel?

### Bravery or Valour

'Fear more than bravery is my daily companion, survival my daily aim. Not even victory any more.' (p 198)

**Discussion Point:** Oliver comes to appreciate the valour of these young men, despite their naivety. But Maurice suggests that fear was their primary motivation. Is bravery simply the act of overcoming fear or is it more complex than that? (Read Maurice's letter to Dorothea pp 304–6 for more insight.)

**Discussion Point:** Discuss quotes above in relation to such values.

**Activity:** Create a table and list some of the values demonstrated in any of the scenes or events in this book with a corresponding quote to illustrate it.

### Fortitude and Endurance

**Discussion Point:** Dorothea's strength and endurance is clearly evinced in her life story.

'Like her mother before her, Dorothea was determined that her family would survive. They would do better than survive.' (p 72)

What gives her such strength? Why does Maurice's death mean so much to her?

**Individual/Community** — This novel, like any work of historical fiction, records the interplay between individual action and community responsibility.

**Discussion Point:** Invite students to consider how the characters in this novel play a role in their local and national community.

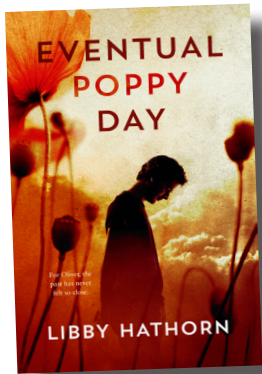
## Further Points for Discussion

1. 'And for a moment, with that rush of love for him, Maurice wanted to go back to the cosy room of his boyhood where his father read or better still told the old stories to them all before good-night hugs.' (p 10)

What role does literature and literary reference play in this novel?

2. What sort of man was Michael Roche? He was a great lover of literature and a devoted father,





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but also deeply flawed. What role model as a man did he offer to his sons?

**3.** Why does Cecil kiss Rosie (p 57)? What did you make of Cecil's character? What were the nature of his feelings for Rupert?

**4.** 'That's my Oliver Maurice. Named for my brother, you know, who died on Flanders Field. So Poppy Day is Armistice Day — not today, but November, the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918 when peace was declared. And his sister, as it happens, their father being a Day, is called Poppy, so she's Poppy Day too. I don't think they planned it that way but there you are. They called it Armistice Day then, and now they call it Remembrance Day. To me it's always Poppy Day of course for obvious reasons.' (p 70)

Discuss this quote in relation to the novel's action.

**5.** Chapter 12, pp 212–221, describes Maurice waking in no-man's-land with no memory of the hours which led to him being there. Read this carefully as it details the journey he has made from home to this point. How has he changed in that time?

**6.** 'In making love to Angel I realised there is another life and another death. And that it was the same here as everywhere else in the world. Another life and death.' (p 233)

What does Maurice mean by this statement?

**7.** 'from what we're deducing back here, Moss, we simply do not believe the press any more.' (p 283)

What role did the media play in World War One and when did the people at home begin to realise that the press wasn't always reporting the truth?

**8.** 'Because how small a thing is your death too, amid the hundreds of thousands of dead soldier men and boys.' (p 323)

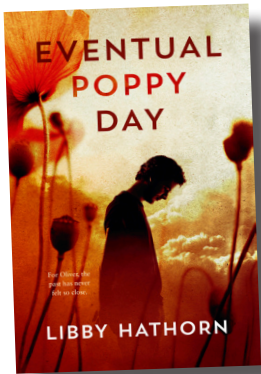
How do we reconcile our feelings of loss for a loved one, with the fact that so many people die every day?

**9.** Cecil has a revelation in the French guesthouse (p 209) that he could compose music to reflect what he has seen, and for Rupert to sing. What did this scene suggest to you?

**10.** What was the major idea or theme that this novel conveyed to you as a reader?

## Notes on the Text

At the back of the book, Libby Hathorn's Author Note (pp 371–2) explains the family origins of this text. This should be a very useful resource for teachers using the book, in conjunction with these notes, in the classroom.



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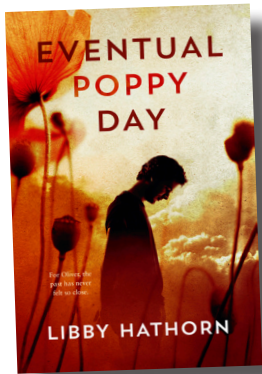
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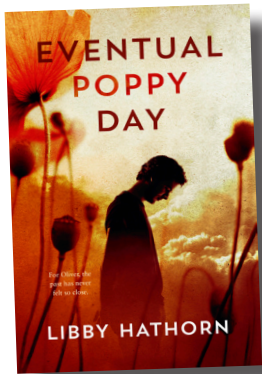
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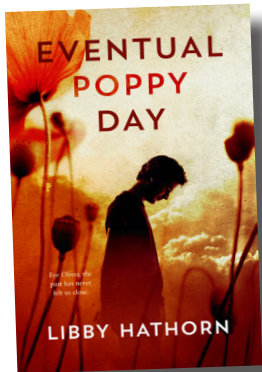
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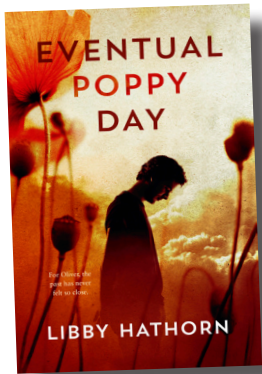
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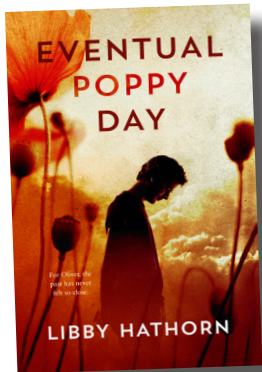
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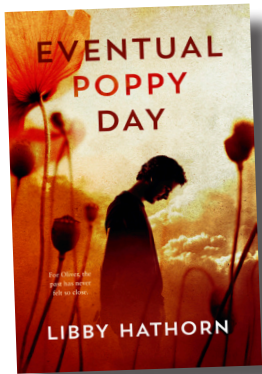
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## About the Author of the Notes

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright** operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and publishes regularly on children's literature, Australian fiction, and publishing history. She was inaugural director of and is a Life Member of the Queensland Writers Centre, and was co-founder of Jam Roll Press. Her publications include *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia (1946-2005)* (2006) co-edited with Craig Munro and *Hot Iron Corrugated Sky: 100 Years of Queensland Writing* (2002) co-edited with Stuart Glover. In 2011 she was recipient of the Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012, of the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature, and in 2014, of the Queensland Writers Centre's Johnno Award.