

TEACHER NOTES

The Friendly Games

by Kaye Baillie

illustrated by Fiona Burrows

Summary

The Friendly Games is the true story of Australian John Wing, whose early life in a Children's Home in Cheltenham, Victoria enabled him to see all people as equals. During the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games, John's early childhood experiences inspired him on to write a letter to the Olympic Committee, suggesting that athletes from every nation walk in one, big mixed group at the Closing Ceremony.

Written by award-winning author Kaye Baillie, and illustrated by educator/illustrator Fiona Burrows, this inspirational picture book shines a light on the power of coming together as one in order to strive toward world peace.

Kaye Baillie's text, written in personal third person perspective from John's point of view, tells a heartfelt account of how a baby boy spent eight years in a Children's Home, and how his experience of inclusiveness while living there helped to shape him into a caring and compassionate individual who was willing to speak out during a time of worldwide tensions.

This lively book concludes with an uplifting message about world peace and friendship.

Use in the curriculum

English

Younger students can engage with the book as a touching and inspirational story to listen to, with pictures to help them understand the story's message.

Older students can explore the genres of biography and Olympic history. Some questions to consider might be:

- How do picture book biographies tell a story?
- How much historical fact is woven through the text?
- How might the endpapers and Author's Note play a role as features of non-fiction texts?
- What other elements might help to signal that this a true story?

History and Social Sciences

The Friendly Games can be used to discuss elements of Australian history during the 1950s, as well as Olympic history more broadly. For example, the story takes place in an era heavily influenced by the recent end of World War II. What may have been some of the reasons that there were tensions between nations at the Melbourne Olympics? What was life like in Children's Homes in Melbourne at the time? When did the Olympic Games start? What is the history of the Games?

Younger students can focus on the differences between life in modern times and the past. In what ways does the world around John differ from our own time? How do technology and communications differ now (for example, John watches the television in a shop window; he delivers a handwritten letter)? How are these differences made clear in the illustrations?

Watch this video, made to showcase Melbourne and the 1956 Olympic Games, and use it as a discussion point for some of these differences:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDA5BvvtDsM>

Additional research can be done on the following topics.

- Who is the Duke of Edinburgh?
- Why does Melbourne still use the tramway system?
- John's bedroom was upstairs at 16 Bourke Street, Melbourne. Looking at a map of Melbourne, how close is this in distance to Parliament House?
- How might living in the city have allowed John to watch city life and the preparations for the Olympic Games?
- When was Flinders Street station built?
- Where in Victoria is the MCG?
- What is the role of Parliament House?

Compare how some of the cultural landmarks illustrated in the book might appear, or be used, today.

Art and Music

Compare the artwork of *The Friendly Games* with other historically themed picture books.

Explore how Fiona Burrows conveys action, inclusiveness, and emotions in her illustrations.

Students can discuss further elements such as: the placement of text in relation to pictures; the relative space taken up by text and pictures; elements of the story that are told or suggested only by the pictures; the use of colour.

The Olympic Hymn, Waltzing Matilda, Song of Farewell, and the National Anthem are referred to in the story and were all sung during the Olympic Games. These can be learned and explored. Was Australia's National Anthem in 1956 different from the one we use today?

Further discussion questions and activities

Before reading *The Friendly Games* examine closely the book's front cover.

- Ask students where they think this story is set and if they think it is a modern-day story, how old the boy on the cover looks, and what might the boy be about to do.
- Discuss what in the image gave them clues to their answers – scaffold these replies by suggesting things that can influence our thinking such as colour, clothes, framing, subject matter, architecture and transport, and the font used in the title.

After reading:

- Why did John remain anonymous when he wrote his letter?
- How did John feel when he saw the Closing Ceremony?

Fill in the gaps

John was born to C_____ parents. He spent his first e_____ years at a Children's Home in C_____, V_____.

If any squabbles arose, they were s____ s_____ out.

When John was eight, he got a big shock because _____

_____.

John would never again see _____.

John was able to follow Olympic Games by r_____ and n_____.

John felt sorry for the people of Melbourne because _____

_____.

Not many people had televisions in 1956 but John was able to see one in a s____ w_____.

People queued waiting for the movies but afterwards they walked jumbled up.

This gave J____ an idea to change the C_____ C_____.

The 1956 Olympic Games were held at the famous M_____ C_____ G_____.

The Hon. Wilfrid S. Kent Hughes thanked John for his letter by sending his driver with a gift of an O_____ b_____ m_____.
 John's letter is kept at the N_____ L_____ A_____.

True or False

T	F	When John delivered his letter, he was sure it would work.
T	F	Nobody decorated the streets of Melbourne for the Olympic Games.
T	F	John felt like part of a big family at the Children's Home.
T	F	John wasn't bothered when a fight broke out in the water polo pool.

Visual literacy

Ask students to look closely at the spread where John looks at Olympic magazines. How many Olympic sports do they recognise?

Explain to your class that illustrations in picture books often tell us much more than words. Turn to the first page with the opening line 'There once was a Children's Home...'. Now ask students to look at the body language and facial expressions of the characters and decide if they look happy and if the setting looks safe.

In the scene where John has a meal with his parents, how has the illustrator shown his parents' culture and traditions?

Ask students to look at the book's endpapers (the images appearing on the inside front and back covers) and the title page. What do the images suggest about the story?

Compare the illustration of John on the first page with the page where he watches the Opening Ceremony through the shop window. How has the illustrator shown John's age and development?

How has the illustrator used colour and lighting to show the time of day when John delivers his letter in the middle of the night?

In the final two spreads how has the illustrator shown people from different nations?

In the spread of the St James theatre, John is shown as a silhouette. What is a silhouette and how is this effective?

Students can study flags found in the book and on the front and back cover. Which countries do the flags represent? Students can choose a flag to draw then write a small description about the details of that flag and why those details are important to that country.

On-line resources

To learn more about John Wing and the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, ask students to research the Sources found on the final page.

The National Library of Australia has confirmed that John Wing gave permission for his letter (see below) to be published by other parties. Ask students to read John's letter aloud in class and discuss its presentation, its voice, and his accompanying diagram showing how he imagined the athletes should walk.

It is important to note that the pdf file holds John's second letter, where he responded to the newspaper article asking for the 'Chinese boy' to name himself. This letter may also be discussed.

Students are to note the following citation and discuss why is it important to get permission to publish someone else's work.

Citation: Letter from John Ian Wing to the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games Committee suggesting that athletes walk together rather than in teams by countries at the closing ceremony, Papers of Sir W.S. Kent Hughes, 1914-1986, National Library of Australia, MS 4856.

See accompanying PDF: [John_Ian_Wing_letters.pdf](#)

Research Questions

Was John Wing the first person to suggest that Olympians walk freely during an Olympic Closing Ceremony?

Why was television introduced to Australia in 1956?

Was it unusual for any part of a Closing Ceremony to be changed without prior approval from the International Olympic Committee?

Was the Closing Ceremony at the Melbourne Olympic Games a success and did the crowds find it emotional and uplifting?

Do the different newspapers report on events in the same way?

Who was the torchbearer to light the Olympic flame at the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games and why was he chosen?

The author

Kaye Baillie has been writing for children for twenty years. Her first picture book, *Message in a Sock* (2018 MidnightSun) was written based on a World War I letter from a soldier thanking a volunteer sock knitter and was shortlisted in the NSW Premier's History Awards (2019) and the West Australian Young Readers' Book Award (2019).

Kaye was born in Shepparton, Victoria and grew up on an orchard where she spent school holidays picking fruit and writing and illustrating her own short stories. She feels lucky that she had many Enid Blyton books and one of her other favourites was *The Sneetches and Other Stories* by Dr. Seuss.

Kaye loves to research and write stories about lesser known people who have done amazing things. While researching when television first came to Australia, Kaye discovered that it was introduced in time for the 1956 Olympics. She also came across John Wing's letter. She knew she wanted to tell his amazing story. As part of her research, she visited John's home at 16 Bourke Street in Melbourne and imagined John looking down from his bedroom window. Students might visit his home one day too and imagine what life was like in 1956 Melbourne.

The illustrator

Fiona Burrows is an author-illustrator from Perth, Western Australia. When she was young, she loved to write and illustrate books for her younger brothers and sisters, and now that she is grown up, she loves to write and illustrate books for kids all over Australia!

The Friendly Games is Fiona's fourth picture book, and she enjoyed reading about and looking for pictures of the Melbourne 1956 Olympic Games to help her illustrate the story. Did you know that the illustrator also needs to do research for a story, just like the author does? If you look closely you can spot little details about life in the 1950s in the illustrations: the type of clothes they wore, the cars they drove, the advertisements they saw, the movies they watched, and what the televisions, shops and buildings looked like.

Fiona's favourite part about being an author-illustrator is visiting schools and talking to kids about how they can write, draw, and create books of their own.

She loves seeing how creative and imaginative their ideas are, and she is excited about meeting the next generation of authors and illustrators!