Activity types: Reading, ordering verses, text analysis, writing

History: World War I.


Note: The ANZAC forces (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) landed in Gallipoli, Turkey on the 25th April, 1915. The song "And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda" by Eric Bogle commemorates the ensuing battle and is often praised for its haunting imagery of the devastation. Written in 1972, it was conceived as an anti-Vietnam War protest. In 2012 Bogle told The Sydney Morning Herald: "In the last verse, I say, 'The young people ask what are they marching for and I ask myself the same question.' I knew what I was trying to say there. The old soldier knew why they were marching, but he was heartbroken that they had to. But what comes across is that he's saying Anzac Day is a waste of time. I said it clumsily. I'd say it better now."

There have been many covers of the song – this worksheet uses The Pogues’ version. Waltzing Matilda is Australia’s unofficial national anthem – there is a worksheet for this on www.tuneintoenglish.com.

Anzac Day is celebrated in Australia and New Zealand every 25th April.

1) Make copies of the worksheet for every three or four students. Cut the worksheets into strips as indicated, and mix the verses. If you would like to make it a little more difficult, separate also the verses and choruses.

2) Divide class into groups of three or four. Give each group a copy of the cut up worksheet. Students read the strips and put the verses in the correct order. Help them with any difficult vocabulary. Do not play the song at this stage.

3) Feedback. Ask students to prepare a timeline detailing the events in the song, with two labels for each verse and one of each chorus (if students are having difficulties with the previous activity you can read the following list to them).

   Possible answer:
   1. A carefree life
   2. Receiving the draft (call to war)
   3. Being celebrated as they left for war
   4. Being attacked
   5. The Turks were waiting
   6. A short break, then fighting again
   7. Soldiers dying all around
   8. Bombed
   9. The end of dancing
   10. Preparing to return home
   11. Relief to be arriving alone
   12. No celebrations
   13. The Anzac Day march
   14. The futility of war
   15. Memories fading

4) Play the song, students follow the lyrics. There is an excellent slideshow based on the lyrics at www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyzPP_DaTJY. This is sung by June Tabor and is also on www.tuneintoenglish.com.

Follow up: Ask students to write a newspaper article about the battle at Gallipoli. Encourage them to do some additional research on the Internet.
When I was a young man I carried my pack
And I lived the free life of a rover
From the Murray’s green basin to the dusty outback
I waltzed my Matilda all over
Then in 1915 my country said: Son,
It's time to stop rambling ‘cos there's work to be done
So they gave me a tin hat and they gave me a gun
And they sent me away to the war

And the band played Waltzing Matilda
As we sailed away from the quay
And amidst all the tears and the shouts and the cheers
We sailed off for Gallipoli

How well I remember that terrible day
When the blood stained the sand and the water
And how in that hell that they call Suvla Bay
We were butchered like lambs at the slaughter
Johnny Turk, he was ready, he primed himself well
He showered us with bullets, and he rained us with shell
And in five minutes flat, he’d blown us all to hell
Nearly blew us right back to Australia

And the band played Waltzing Matilda
As we stopped to bury our slain
And we buried ours and the Turks buried theirs
Then it started all over again

Now those who were living did their best to survive
In that mad world of death, blood and fire
And for seven long weeks I kept myself alive
Though the corpses around me piled higher
Then a big Turkish shell knocked me arse over tit
And when I awoke in my hospital bed
And saw what it had done, Christ I wished I was dead
I never knew there were worse things than dying

And no more I’ll go Waltzing Matilda
Through the green bushes so far and near
For to hang tents and pegs, a man needs two legs
No more waltzing Matilda for me

So they collected the cripples, the wounded and maimed
And they shipped us back home to Australia
The legless, the armless, the blind and insane
Those proud wounded heroes of Suvla
And as our ship pulled into Circular Quay
I looked at the place where me legs used to be
And thank Christ there was no body waiting for me
To grieve and to mourn and to pity

And the band played Waltzing Matilda
As they carried us down the gangway
But nobody cheered, they just stood and stared
Then they turned their faces away

And now every April I sit on my porch
And I watch the parade pass before me
I see my old comrades, how proudly they march
Reliving the dreams of past glory
I see the old men all twisted and torn
The forgotten heroes of a forgotten war
And the young people ask me “What are they marching for?”
And I ask myself the same question

And the band plays Waltzing Matilda
And the old men still answer the call
But year after year, their numbers get fewer
Someday no one will march there at all
Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda
Who’ll go a-Waltzing Matilda with me?