

NED KELLY'S JERILDERIE LETTER

A lesson plan for Year 5 English

Introductory activity

Ned Kelly is one of the few bushrangers to justify their actions in writing. The 56-page 'Letter' he tried to have published at Jerilderie in February 1879 appears to be the final working of a document first circulated at Euroa in December 1878. A copy was taken by the police, and publican John Hanlon made a 40-page transcription. Hanlon's copy is now part of the National Museum of Australia's collections. Hanlon's copy forms the basis of the Museum's 'Jerilderie letter' interactive and of this activity.

Show students the 'Jerilderie letter' interactive so they can gain a sense of the style of writing. The 'key phrases' feature is a useful way of getting an overview of the text.

>> [Launch the Flash version](#)

>> [Open the HTML version](#)

Then, as a class, discuss:

- What do you notice about the writing style?
- Was it difficult to understand the meaning? If so, what made it difficult?

Game

Divide the class into two teams. The aim of the game is for each team to figure out the meaning of a word in as few steps as possible, and thereby gain the most points.

Each team needs:

- a scribe, to write the word on the board for the other team
- a reader, to read it out in the context of the lines of the narrative
- one or more copies of their table of words and meanings (below)
- (optional) access to a dictionary, the internet or other resources

If the team identifies the meaning:

- by the word only – 5 points
- when it is read in context – 3 points
- when given a hint / access to a dictionary – 1 point

The teacher might need to come up with the hints (unless the other team does so), and to keep score!

Team 1

word/s	page	context	meaning
welt	3	[...] he said I was a liar and he could welt me or any of my breed [...]	wound, create a welt on
liberty	13	when I got my liberty [...]	freedom
navvies	13	[...] Constable Flood stole [the horses] and sold the most of them to the navvies on the Railway line	poorly-paid workers
in their bilits	18	[...] Berry would have sacked a great many of [the police] only I came to their aid and kept them in their bilits [...]	billeted – by avoiding capture, Ned kept the extra police in employment
blowed	26	[...] he is the man that blowed before he left Violet Town if Ned Kelly was to be shot he was the man that would shoot him	boasted

Team 2

word/s	page	context	meaning
cob	13	one bay cob he stole and sold four different times [...]	horse
cads	13	[...] Flood is different to Sergeant Steel, Strachan Hall and the most of Police as they have to hire cads [...]	badly-behaved people
faller	14	[...] I worked as a faller at Mr J Saunders and K. Rules Sawmills [...]	tree-feller
slewed	29	[...] he dropped his revolver and ran I fired again with the gun as he slewed around to surrender [...]	turned
shewing	34	[...] it will give the public a chance of shewing whether they are worth more pay than a common trooper or not	showing

Individual book work – punctuation

The following passage is from pages 19–20 of Ned Kelly's letter.

Add correct punctuation to it – bonus points for correcting the word that was either spelt wrongly or whose spelling has changed.

I threw big cowardly
Hall on his belly I straddled him
and rolled both spurs into his thighs
he roared like a big calf attacked
by dogs and shifted several yards
of the fence I got his hands at the
back of his neck and tried to make
him let the revolver go but he stuck
to it like grim death to a dead
volunteer he called for assistance
to a man named Cohan and Barnett
Lewis, Thompson Jewell, two blacksmiths
who was looking on I dare not strike
any of them as I was bound to keep
the peace or I could have spread
those curs like dung in a paddock
they got ropes tied my hands and
feet and Hall beat me over the head
with his six chambered colts revolver
nine stiches were put in some of the
cuts by Dr Hastings And when Wild
Wright and my Mother came they could
trace us across the street by the blood
in the dust and which spoiled
the Lustre of the paint on the
gate post of the Barracks

Metaphor and similes – class discussion / activity in pairs

A metaphor is a vivid and therefore powerful description of something or someone. A metaphor will refer to something by saying it is actually something else. By contrast, a simile is a likening of something or someone to something else.

Ned Kelly referred to a lot of animals in his letter:

- the ground was that rotten it would bog a duck (1)
- he roared like a big calf attacked by dogs (9)
- the ignorant unicorns even threaten to shoot myself (19)
- their hounds were barking at the wrong stump (20)
- a parcel of big ugly fat necked wombat headed big bellied magpie legged narrow hipped splawfooted sons of Irish bailiffs or English landlords (30)
- that misplaced poodle (34)

Display these one by one and discuss:

- What it is that Kelly is describing?
- How does he feel about it?

As a class, brainstorm a list of characters or types of people (a new student at school, a dentist, a robber etc). Then in pairs, ask students to come up with some metaphors that describe a person/character. For more fun, ask students to create metaphors that are based on animals.

Curriculum links – Year 5 English

Language

Language variation and change

- Understand that the pronunciation, spelling and meanings of words have histories and change over time

Text structure and organisation

- Understand how to use punctuation conventions

Literature

Literature and context

- Identify aspects of literature that convey details or information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts.

Literacy

Texts in context

- Show how ideas and point of view are conveyed through use of visual language choices, idiomatic expressions, subjective language and that these can change according to context