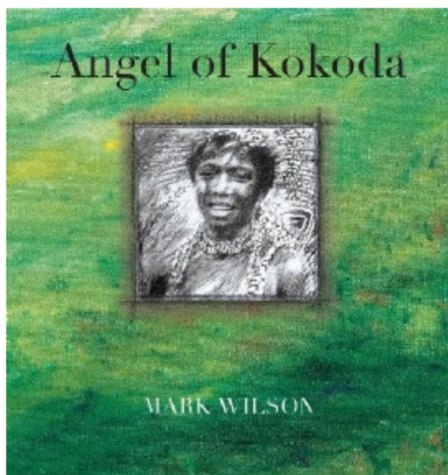


# ANGEL OF KOKODA

**Author and Illustrator:** Mark Wilson



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**Teacher's Guide by Robyn Sheahan-Bright**  
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## Introduction

It's 1942, and twelve year old Kari lives in the village of Kokoda, which is situated in a tropical paradise in Papua New Guinea. There he has developed a warm relationship with Sister Mary who teaches him at the mission school since he has no parents caring for him—his father is away working, and his mother died in the flooded river some years earlier. Kari has been left to work and tend the crops while his father is away.

But this idyll is rudely interrupted when World War Two infringes on his small country and Kari finds himself isolated and alone, until he stumbles upon some Australian troop members, one of whom is later in need of his help.

The denouement of this moving story of a youth's survival and endurance is open-ended. Kari has offered comfort to the lone soldier, who has presumably passed away. Where will Kari end up? How many years will the war go on for? Will Kari ever find his father again? These are the sorts of questions which plague anyone involved in such a conflict. And there are no easy answers to any of them.

## Themes

Several themes are covered which might be related to other curriculum areas:

- **War**

During World War Two many Australian soldiers fought in Papua New Guinea and many remember the bravery of the New Guinean people known as the 'Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels' who fought beside them.

**Activity:** Research the role played by Australian troops and by the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels in Papua New Guinea. [See websites listed in **Bibliography**.]

**Activity:** Research the Kokoda story. Read about the contemporary Kokoda Trail and its meaning. Visit websites [See **Bibliography** below.]

**Discussion Point:** To Australians, the Kokoda Trail is the ultimate symbol of our country's involvement in PNG during WWII. But what did the conflict mean to the PNG people? This picture book story is told not from the point of view of the soldier but from a PNG boy's perspective. Try to discover how Kari's people might have presented or symbolized their own war history? Would Kari's memories be of bravery and heroism, or of fear, loss and confusion?

**Activity:** Sister Mary leaves a brief note which Kari discovers. Research and find out whether there are any first person accounts of the Catholic Sisters' times in New Guinea. (eg Doreen Edwards' *Woman of Vision: Sister Catherine O'Sullivan, daughter of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, also known as Mother Flavia*, and "*The Little Flower of Rabaul*" contains some of the Sister's letters. Note: This book is not readily available.) [See also **Language and Literacy** below.]

**Activity:** How did the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels fare in the aftermath of war?  
[See also **Blackline Master 3**]

- **Bravery**

Bravery is often described as if it consists of fighting bloody battles and fierce heroics. Kari has no allegiance to the soldier he encounters and yet he carries a man twice his size and looks after him. He braves leaches, dense undergrowth, the fear of animal predators and human adversaries, but

endures his journey largely alone.

**Discussion Point:** How would you describe bravery? What brave people do you know? Why do you think they are brave?

**Discussion Point:** What would you have done in Kari's situation?

- **Friendship**

Friendship is often forged in the most unlikely of circumstances and between people who might ordinarily never meet. War is often a great leveller. Men and women from different classes and educational and ethnic backgrounds work side by side or are thrown together in camps or by internment.

**Discussion Point:** The relationship between Sister Mary and Kari is suggested in a few brief words. Kari also forms a bond with the Australian soldier. How does learning another language help to create a bond between people of different races?

**Discussion Point:** Secondary students might read Michael Noonan's *McKenzie's Boots* (UQP, 1987) which is about an encounter between an Australian and a Japanese soldier in PNG and also features a butterfly as a symbol. Discuss.

### **Curriculum Topics**

This picture book touches on the themes above and might be used in conjunction with curriculum topics with primary or secondary school students in the following suggested areas:

- **Study of History, Society and Environment**

It can be used in studies of history, society or environmental issues.

**Activity:** Research the role played by the Australian government in PNG during and since World War Two.

**Discussion Point:** Discuss the lives of the highland people whose subsistence economy relied on adults and children planting food and looking after crops in order to survive. What sorts of crops were prevalent? Are they still staple foods today?

**Discussion Point:** The Kumusi River is not only a source of water but also a major thoroughfare and a threat in the flooding season. Research the role played by such rivers in a subsistence economy.

**Discussion Point:** Discuss the 'values' conveyed in the term 'angel' and how Kari's behaviour evinces those values. Is the term an appropriate one to describe the part played by PNG people in the WWII conflict? Is there a better way to describe it?

**Discussion Point:** *"It will never be the same, silent, sweet-smelling jungle track where man and his indecencies were almost unknown. It is a trail of blood and iron now, and in the memory of this generation will remain so."* These words are inscribed on the Kokoda memorial. Discuss these words and their implications in terms of the people of PNG.

**Discussion Point:** The Kokoda Trail has become a major tourism attraction which is visited by individuals and corporate groups. Discuss the role played by such ventures in memorialising and perpetuating the past.

- **English Language and Literacy**

The text of this book might be studied in relation to the following aspects:

**Question:** This story is told as a **third person past tense account** of a Papua New Guinean boy named Kari, who is attending a mission school in World War Two. Imagine if he was telling the story in first person. How might it have differed?

**Activity:** Tell **another version** of the story as Sister Mary's interpretation of these events, or in the voice of the soldier whom Kari rescues.

**Activity:** This text is **undercut by the inclusion of various other texts in different narrative styles which add to the telling of the story**. eg Excerpts from the official documents and also a handwritten letter presumably written by Sister Mary. It opens with a poem written by the author/illustrator of the picture book. And there is a map on one page as well. Discuss narrative styles and genres with the students and invite them to choose one of these styles and to create a text relevant to the story.

**Activity:** The butterfly is used as a symbol in this written text, and so is the idea of an angel. What do these two words denote? How might they be interpreted symbolically here?

**Activity:** Read the poem by Sapper Bert Beros about 'The Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels'. See *Wikipedia* <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fuzzy\\_Wuzzy\\_Angels#Bert\\_Beros\\_Poem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fuzzy_Wuzzy_Angels#Bert_Beros_Poem)> What does the poem suggest?

**Activity:** Test your students' comprehension by asking them questions about the visual and written text. [See also **Blackline Master 2** below.]

**Discussion Point:** Students might be encouraged to use critical literacy skills to unearth meaning in this text. What might have happened to Kari after the war? What happened to Sister Mary?

**Activity:** Read some picture book folktales from Papua New Guinea to give students some idea of the nature of the storytelling tradition in PNG. [See **Bibliography** below.]

- **Visual Literacy**

The visual text of a book works with the written text to tell the story using the various parts of the book's design and illustrations, as explored below:

**Activity:** The **cover** of a book is an important part of its message. Read the cover and discuss its impact. It is suggestive of a framed photograph in an older style. But the picture is of Kari, a mission child in Papua New Guinea who was unlikely to have had such a photo of himself. What is the author suggesting with this image?

**Discussion Point:** The **endpapers** are suggestive of the tropical paradise disturbed by war. The **half title** page depicts the mission school in this landscape, and is both suggestive of the peacefulness of the settlement but also of the encroachment of the so-called 'civilising' influences of outsiders. The **title page** is a black and white image of the soldiers labouring up the Kokoda Track who are due to interrupt this idyll even further. Later pictures are abstract and impressionistic images of the landscape which convey the essence of a scene; the action; the mood or feeling; the terror of war. Discuss the impressions each painting in the book gives you.

**Discussion Point:** The **format** of the book is square in shape, and the **layout of the storyboard** contains largely double page spreads which depict village and jungle landscapes. How does the format and design of the book influence your reading of it?

**Activity:** The **medium or style** employed is **oil painting on canvas in landscape paintings** which are impressionistic abstracts of these war scenes. However there are also some **charcoal or black and white images** which appear as if in frames in the midst of the landscapes. Try to create your own painting in this medium, depicting some scene suggested by this text.

**Question:** Green is the **colour** generally used in this book, in a rather rich and murky palette. How does colour affect your interpretation of this work?

**Discussion Point:** Butterflies and birds feature in these images. What do these symbolise?

**Discussion Point:** Examine the very moving page in which the text begins: 'In the darkness before dawn...' What change in technique has the artist used to create this sombre feeling?

## Creative Arts

There are many creative activities suggested by this text:

- Students might **paint their own image of the mission** eg Depict Sister Mary with Kari in front of the building. They may choose other images suggested by this text as well. After the works are completed, students can then display the works as an exhibition created in response to this text.
- **Watch some excerpts from PNG cultural ceremonies** on *YouTube*. Have the students study some aspect of PNG cultural performance and deliver an address about it.
- **Create a play** depicting the two different encounters between Kari and the soldier. The first meeting has the soldier in a dominant role and the second has Kari as the leader. Play on these contrasts in your dramatisation. Your play might be set against a **stage set** created by members of the class. They might **paint a backdrop** using images such as the butterfly, the angel and the jungle as reference. Or they could **create computer images** and project them onto the wall behind the actors. Choose relevant **music** to accompany your script.
- **Secondary students might study the film** entitled 'Kokoda'. The *Wikipedia* entry on this production offers useful links to popular songs of the time and other relevant materials.
- The Australian War Memorial has many records which you might research. Create your own **Papua New Guinean Conflict Project Display**.

## Learning Technologies

The topic of war is one which can be widely researched not only in libraries but on the internet where there is a wealth of information.

**Activity:** Research WWII and Papua New Guinea's history on the internet. [See **Bibliography** below.]

## Mathematics

Statistics relating to war might lend themselves to related mathematics activities.

**Activity:** An analysis of the various casualty figures of the PNG, Japanese and Australian troops involved in the conflict, in comparison to actual troop numbers involved, could offer students an insight into the effect of the war. Visit the Australian War Memorial website as a starting point for your research.

## Further Topics for Discussion & Research

- Follow the links from the Australian War Memorial's website to the Kokoda story, to discover the fate of the nuns who were in PNG, and to perhaps read some of the letters written by soldiers during WWII. Some of your older relatives may have stories of WWII. Piece together

some oral histories from written documents, and from these memories, if they are available, and then create a rehearsed reading of the stories to perform for the rest of the school.

- Research the work of Mark Wilson. Compare his *My Mother's Eyes* and this book.
- If you are working with secondary students you might compare this work to non-fiction books such as *Kokoda* by Paul Ham (HarperCollins, 2004) or to novels such as *Angels of Kokoda* by David Mulligan (Lothian, 2006) or Michael Noonan's *McKenzie's Boots* (UQP, 1987). If you are working with primary students you might compare it to the non-fiction work *Kokoda Track: 101 Days* by Peter Macinnis (Black Dog Books, 2007) or *The Kokoda Trail* by Robert Hillman (Echidna Books, 2003) or the picture book *Photographs in the Mud* by Dianne Wolfer and Brian Harrison-Lever (Fremantle Press, 2005). How does the perspective in these books vary from *Angel of Kokoda*? Do they have any similar messages or themes?
- Investigate the history of Papua New Guinea. How did Australian soldiers come to be fighting there? <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papua\\_New\\_Guinea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papua_New_Guinea)> Discuss.

## Conclusion

This work should encourage students to read more widely about the conflict in Papua New Guinea and its effect on the population of the country. It also reveals a lot about the lives of Papua New Guinean people in such villages as Kokoda. It brings home the impact of war on ordinary people and how children were forced to evince bravery in the face of very confronting situations and to play an adult role in the conflict. It's a stirring tribute to bravery, endurance and the power of human love and hope.

## Author's Notes

### Mark Wilson

*Angel of Kokoda* is the second book in the **Children in War Trilogy**. Book one is *My Mother's Eyes-The Story of a Boy Soldier*, where we learn of young William's experiences in the First World War, through his letters home to his mother. William was one of the Boy Soldiers who enlisted in the AIF and went to war while still only sixteen, but Kari (in *Angel of Kokoda*) is a boy living in the central mountains of Papua New Guinea. He is not a soldier, but becomes caught up in the immediacy of the battle for Kokoda village and its aftermath, during the Second World War.

When children read *Angel of Kokoda*, my main hope is that they feel a sense of empathy towards Kari, a young boy inadvertently caught up in war in his homeland, as he searches for the people from his mission school. I hope I have conveyed through his character, the commitment and determination of the people of Papua New Guinea and the Australian soldiers during the Kokoda campaign.

I also hope that children grasp a sense of the personal sacrifice and tragedy that is war, and that my books also encourage children to look up their own family history and the stories buried there. *My Mother's Eyes* is actually based on my own grandfather's story, as told to us over the years by his daughters, including my mother. In *Angel of Kokoda*, I have tried to portray Kari as just another teenage boy, not unlike many of the readers. He goes to school (at the mission), goes fishing and helps his mother and father when needed, especially in the family garden in the jungle. I wanted a strong sense of place before the story of the battle unfolded. It is when Kari makes a life changing decision to step out of his familiar world as the war comes closer to his home, that his selfless actions ultimately reveal his strength and character to the reader. An ordinary boy caught up in extraordinary circumstances.

I think children are not only more interested in Australian military history today, but also have a greater understanding of the significance that these battles hold for generations of Australians. Their parents (my) generation dealt with the Cold War, the Vietnam War, conscription and the anti-war

movement of the sixties. Today there is an increasing interest, pride and participation in ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day. There is also a poignant sense of appreciation amongst children of the sacrifices their forebears made.

I hope the book leads children to find out more about the battle that became a turning point in the Second World War and a pivotal moment in Australian history. I also hope it engenders an understanding and empathy for the people of Papua New Guinea, in particular where and how they live, and the significance of their selfless role in supporting the Australians in the Battle for Kokoda and Papua New Guinea.

## Research

I wrote and researched the two books together. ***My Mother's Eye -The Story of a Boy Soldier*** and ***Angel of Kokoda***. The first virtually wrote itself. It is based on my Grandfather's story, a boy soldier of just 16 years of age who served during the First World War. He served with the A.I.F. during the disastrous 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Bullecourt on the Western Front.

***Angel of Kokoda*** took a lot more time to research. I knew the story well from my childhood, but I wanted to write it from the point of view of somebody who lived there, not necessarily from either side, at least not initially.

The Australian War Memorial was a great help with official documents and maps. But my father served as a photographer in New Guinea with the RAAF after the war, and his collection of books and photographs, including personal, first-hand accounts of the Kokoda Campaign by ordinary soldiers were indispensable, especially their observations of the jungle, village life and the people. Many of these accounts can be found in a series of books published by the Australian War Memorial, Canberra A.C.T. in the late 1940's titled *As You Were-1946, 1947* etc. They are now extremely rare.

## About the Author/Illustrator

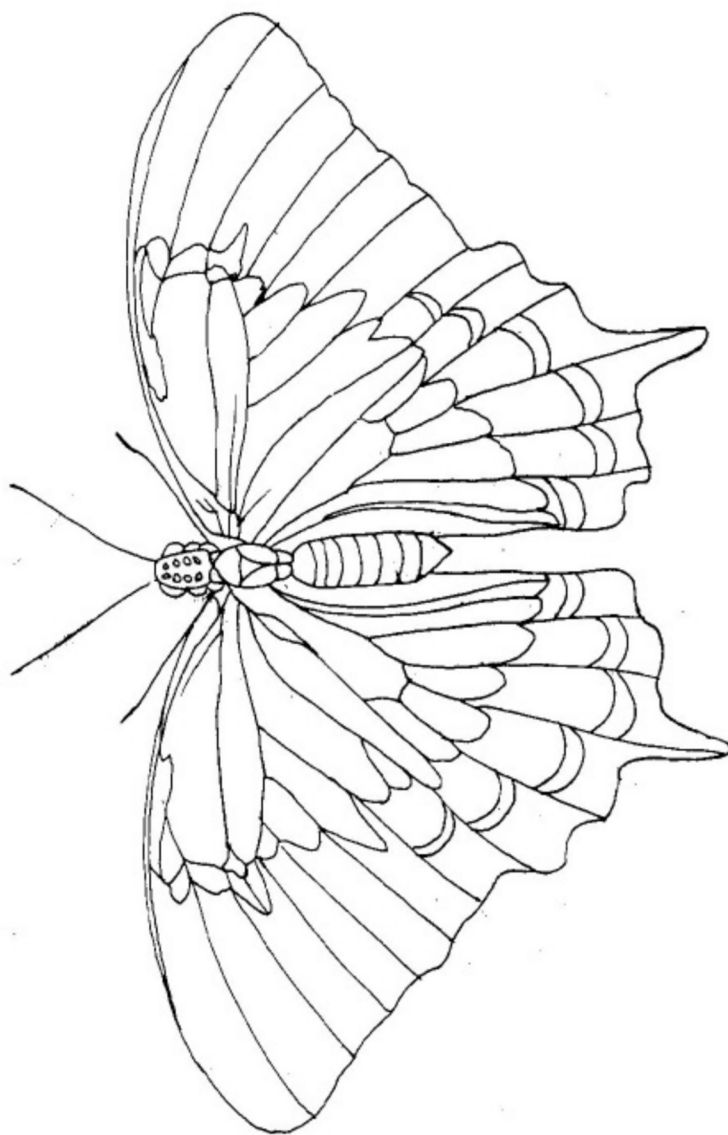
**Mark Wilson** was born in Brunswick, Victoria. He took to drawing from a very early age, and also loved comics. He went on to spend most of his teenage years 'pretending to be a drummer in a rock band (and trying my hardest to sing like John Lennon)'. He studied mural design and painting at C.I.T. (now Monash, Caulfield Campus). He also did National Service, followed by a Diploma of Education. In the early seventies, he became designer and illustrator for *The Education Magazine* and *Pursuit Magazine*, and also started illustrating for various publishers including Penguin, Rigby and Brooks Waterloo. In 1981 he held his first solo exhibition of paintings and drawings. Recently, he has focussed on writing and illustrating children's books and also picture book presentations in schools and at literature festivals. His recent books include *The Last Tree* (2007 Whitley Award for Children's Picture Books), which deals with the effect deforestation has on the creatures that inhabit our forests, and *Journey of the Sea Turtle*, which highlights the fragile existence of sea turtles, and *My Mother's Eyes* which is about World War One, were published by Hachette Australia in 2009.

<<http://www.markwilson.com.au/>>

## BLACKLINE MASTERS

### BM 1

Colour in this picture of the butterfly.



## BM 2 ANGEL OF KOKODA QUIZ

These questions can all be answered by reading or interpreting the text of this picture book.

1. What is a Mission?
2. What does 'Digging in' mean?
3. What river does Kari live near?
4. What happened to Kari's mother?
5. Where is his father?
6. What two things does Sister Mary leave behind which Kari finds?
7. What was the name of the man sent to PNG as Australian Commander-in-Chief?
8. What was the name of the combined PNG and Australian force he mobilised?
9. What is the name of the grass mentioned twice in this book?
10. The dying soldier sees butterflies. What else does he see in his dying moments?

**Answers:** 1. A place established by religious groups to educate, feed, and assist people often in poorer circumstances or countries. 2. It refers to how troops set up camp in a particular area with a view to presenting a continuous offensive against their enemies. 3. Kumusi River. 4. She drowned in the flooded river. 5. He's working carrying supplies from Port Moresby to the rubber plantation at Kokoda. 6. A music box and a note. 7. Major-General Morris. 8. Maroubra Force. 9. Kunai grass. 10. Angel.

### BM 3 KOKODA TRACK QUIZ

These facts can be easily accessed by doing some research on the Kokoda conflict.

1. What mosquito- borne illness did many suffer as a result of their time in New Guinea?
2. What mountain range does the Kokoda Track cut through?
3. The Track stretches for almost 200 kilometres between what major city centre and the villages above (including Kokoda).
4. What date did the battle of the Kokoda Trail begin?
5. Who was the Australian Prime Minister at the time?
6. The warfare fought in PNG was different to the trench warfare fought in Europe and Gallipoli. What sort of fighting was it?
7. What was the average age of Australian soldiers fighting in Kokoda?
8. What was the difference between how Australian and Japanese soldiers came to be enlisted?
9. How many Australians were killed on the Kokoda Trail?
10. What caused the Japanese to surrender in 1945?

**Answers:** 1.Malaria 2.The Owen Stanley Range 3. Port Moresby 4. 23 July 1942. 5. John Curtin 6. Jungle warfare. 7. Just under 23 years of age. 8. Australians were largely volunteers and although conscription began in 1940, only volunteers could fight outside Australia. In contrast, Japanese soldiers were largely conscripts. 9. 600. 10. The dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in July and August 1945.

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### About the Author of the Notes

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright** operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. From 1999-2009, she taught writing for children and young adults at Griffith University (Gold Coast), where she gained her PhD for a thesis on the development of the Australian children's publishing industry. Her latest publications are *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946-2005* (co-edited with Craig Munro, UQP, 2006) and *Kookaburra Shells Port Curtis Literature* (justified text press, 2006).