

The War Series

A JOURNEY BEYOND BELIEF.
OR IS IT?

The War Series tells a powerful and gripping story of a group of young friends who are thrust into war.

John Marsden compels us to think: Who is right? What is right? Who has what right? What right does anyone have to ...? The novels are filled with humour, grief, courage, fear, tension, anger and hostility, and all these different atmospheres are created by the skilful use of language. John Marsden makes the reader constantly aware of the emotions, ideas, feelings and thoughts of his characters. He also makes very colourful use of similes and metaphors, and vivid and imaginative imagery. Think about the techniques he uses throughout the series to tell the story of the friends and have an impact on his readers.

Exploring the Text

Check with your teacher about which questions to try.

- ① Throughout the War Series we follow the extraordinary adventures of a group of friends. John Marsden has chosen a female narrator. What do you consider to be the significance of such a choice?
- ② Many young readers have remarked that the end of each chapter compels you to read on. What is significant about the endings? In what way does the beginning of a chapter draw you along?
- ③ Chris sleeps on guard duty. Ellie is furious and is frightened by the intensity of her reaction. Describe the way the author creates the atmosphere of anger, almost out of control. *Tomorrow, When the War Began* (p. 161).
- ④ **'Lee put his arm around me and I turned and buried my head in his chest ... I was grateful for his strong hold and his silent understanding'** *The Dead of the Night* (p. 40). Explain how this short sketch of Lee relates to what you already know about him.

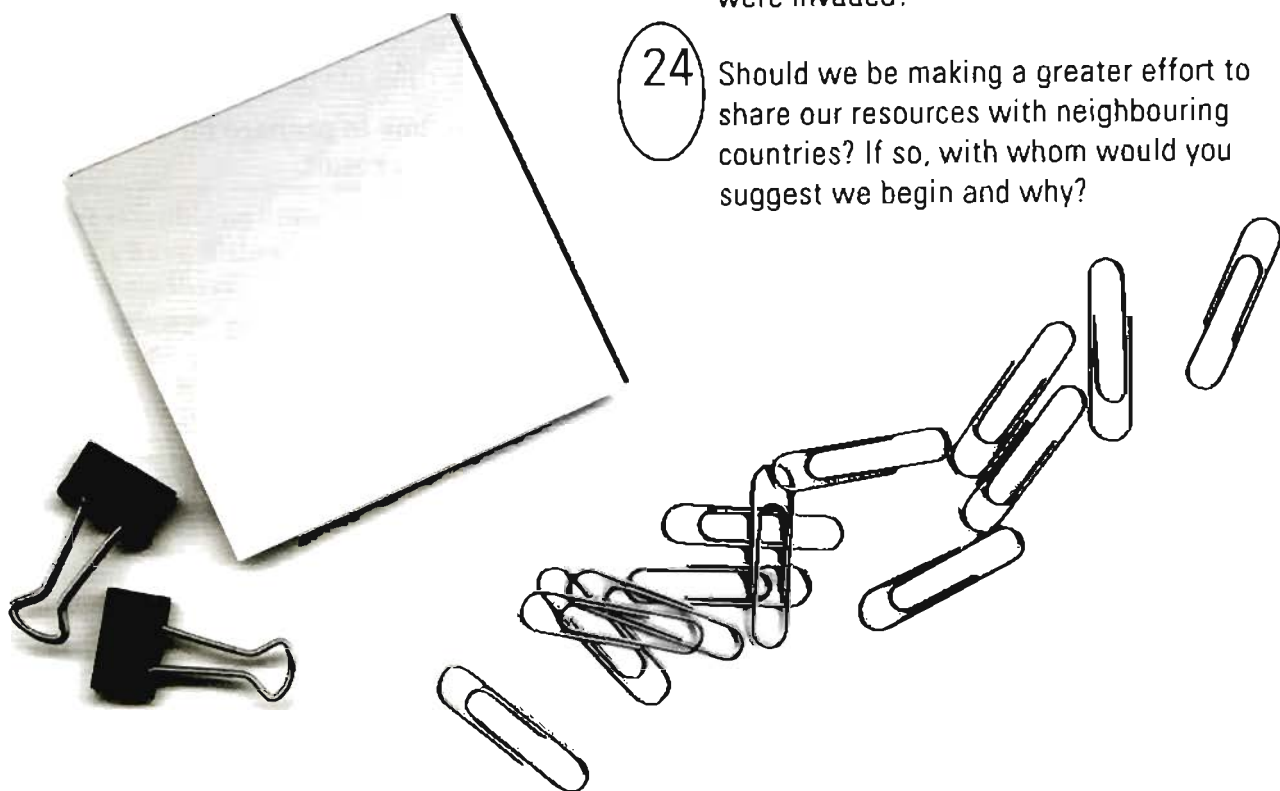
Page references are to the following editions:

Tomorrow, When the War Began 1995 Pan paperback;
The Dead of the Night 1995 Pan paperback;
The Third Day, The Frost 1996 Pan paperback;
Darkness, Be My Friend 1996 Pan hardback;
Burning for Revenge 1997 Pan hardback.

- 5 What are the three strongest personal qualities that constitute the essence of Lee's character?
- 6 Ellie is a leader, and yet, she often has misgivings about her attitude and personality. Sometimes she panicked. Despite this, why do you think she is still a character the friends wish to follow?
- 7 Do you know anyone like Ellie? How is your friend the same as Ellie? How is she different?
If you do not know anyone like Ellie, why would you want, or not want, to be her friend if you arrived at her school?
- 8 Is Homer typical of any of the boys you know? List three ways in which the author reveals a gradual change in Homer.
- 9 What would it take for a boy like Homer to become more mature and aware of others if he had not been involved in the war?
- 10 Is it only by confronting adversity that a person can become more sensitive? If not adversity, then what?
- 11 Think about two very different characters, Fi and Robyn. Comment on a characteristic of each girl that makes her very human.
- 12 Imagine you are Kevin. Write a diary entry describing a typical day in the showgrounds before you were sent out on work parties.
- 13 Often when the friends have been involved in dangerous adventures, they stop to reflect on their actions and the rights and wrongs of their efforts. What does the author achieve by these contrasts in atmosphere?



- 14 Select a chapter in one of the novels, read it through and comment on its structure. Does it follow a pattern?
- 15 Why does John Marsden end the novels the way he does? Re-reading the last chapter of one of the novels will help you with your answer.
- 16 What is the effect on the reader of the internal monologues of the characters?
- 17 List two or three examples of similes and metaphors in any of the novels that particularly appealed to you. Comment on their relevance to the scene in which they were used.
- 18 Choose your favourite novel from the series and comment on the use of language to create tension and/or humour.
- 19 There are several themes weaving through John Marsden's novels. Consider the issues of 'culture' or 'the consequences of actions'. Does the author have a message for young people? Give your opinion and justify it.
- 20 The friends appear to be ordinary teenagers, yet they prove themselves capable of extraordinary strength and courage, time and again. Are they different from ordinary teenagers or have circumstances changed them? Explain.
- 21 List possible reasons for the invasion that so deeply affected the lives of the friends.
- 22 Write a diary entry describing how you feel as the victim of an invading force.
- 23 What would you fear most if the country were invaded?
- 24 Should we be making a greater effort to share our resources with neighbouring countries? If so, with whom would you suggest we begin and why?



Think it through talk it over

In groups or as a class, discuss one or more of these topics.

1 Our lives or his?

'Homer arrived with a rush and, between us, we prised the gun out of the man's grasping fingers ... I started getting hysterical myself but some force within me made me hold on ... Lee was implacable.'
The Third Day, The Frost (pp. 45–6).

What did the friends' actions imply about the importance of Kevin's life, and about their own lives? Give evidence to support your reasons.

What differences, if any, were there in the attitudes of Ellie, Lee and Homer as the soldier died?

Did they have an alternative? Explain.

What would you have done if you had been there by yourself and you had not yet been seen by the soldier?

2 War

The friends were literally thrown into the war. They had no time to prepare for such a situation. Read these statements and discuss the questions that arise as a result.

I could kill the enemy, but only if my life were threatened.

I would kill to ensure protection for my family and my country.

War is murder.

No-one has the right to kill another.

No country has the right to invade another country.

Non-violent protest is the way to indicate disagreement.

People have to fight for peace.

Bombs save lives.

When territory is threatened, war is inevitable.

A country must arm for protection.

3 Individuality

Ellie suggested that the twelve army personnel had 'a sameness about them ... maybe they were picked in the first place because they fitted the mould that the army wanted'. *Darkness, Be My Friend* (p. 21).

Can a person be a member of the armed services and still retain her or his individuality?

What is expected of a good soldier?

Can you think of a situation when a good soldier could legitimately disobey an order?

What would be the likely result of such an action?

Who is responsible for a death: the soldier who obeys an order or the officer who gives it? Justify your answer.

If on trial for shooting a civilian, what defence could a soldier offer? Explain.

4 To fight or not?

'Fi and I cleaned up the campsite, then sat by the creek with our feet in the water, talking about nothing in particular. We didn't say anything about the war ... sometimes it was all too scary. There was so much to be afraid of that I didn't know where to start.' *Darkness, Be My Friend* (p. 77).

What possible options did the friends have if they chose not to become involved in the war?

What were the positive aspects of the friends' involvement?

What were the negative aspects?

On balance, what had the friends gained or lost?

What do you think would be the long-term effects on teenagers who had to fight to survive?

How did the manner of Robyn's death affect the teenagers?

Having read the War Series of novels, comment on the notion of compulsory military training for all young people.

What difference would it have made to the story if only the boys had been involved in the attempts 'to make a difference'?

ANYTHING GOES

Try one or more of the following ideas.



write a letter You are Ellie, Robyn was your friend. Write to Robyn's mother telling of Robyn's courage in saving your lives.

heroes Write the story of someone you know who is truly heroic. Think about the idea that heroism can be found in a wheelchair, in an ordinary house, in the schoolground, as well as on mountain tops, on the ocean, and perhaps in the mind.



write a play Together with some friends, script and present a one-act play based on the notion of no school for six months. Work through:

- the initial delight
- how you would occupy yourselves
- whether these activities are a good use of your time
- realisation of what school really means to young people
- the fact that six months away from school will disrupt the whole year
- re-assessment of your use of time.

music Select a series of songs, sounds or orchestral arrangements, tape them and present them to the class. Explain your choice and say how the music or sounds represent Robyn's heroism. At the end ask the class for their feedback.



brainstorm Get together with a couple of friends. Brainstorm, then write and illustrate a guide for campers or hikers, designed to help if they are forced to survive out in the bush for a few days.

ceremony The friends are to be awarded medals for bravery and service to their country.



Arrange and plan the whole ceremony:

- Write the invitation list.
- Write the speech. Who will give it?
- Design and make the medals.
- Design and write the inscription for a plaque. Where will it go?
- Choose the 'cast': the friends, the Lord Mayor, the Governor, the families ...

Present the ceremony for the class.