

Teachers Notes

by Judith Way & Helen McIntyre

India Dark

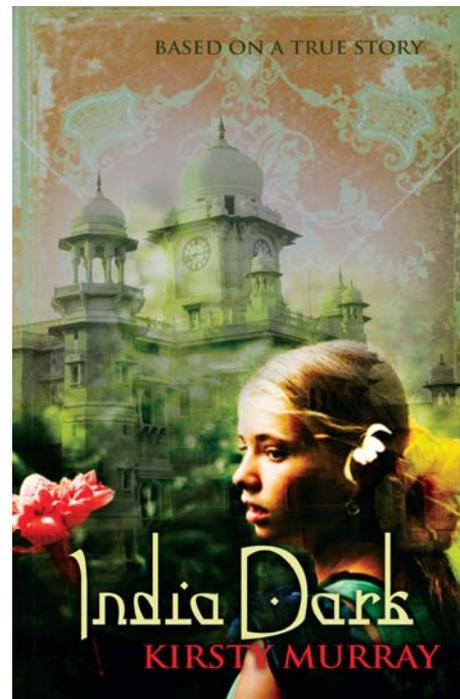
by
Kirsty Murray

ISBN 978 1 74175 858 0

Recommended for ages 13-16 yrs

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Introduction.....	2
Plot summary	2
In the classroom	3
English	3
Character study	3
Themes.....	5
Truth, secrets & lies.....	6
Innocence & experience.....	6
Racism & imperialism.....	6
Friendship & jealousy.....	6
Children's rights.....	6
Symbolism	7
Setting	7
Activities.....	8
Related reading.....	9
Linking to Asia in the Curriculum.....	10
Other resources.....	13
Kirsty Murray – on writing <i>India Dark</i>	14
About the writers.....	16



INTRODUCTION

PLOT SUMMARY

Set in 1909, *India Dark* is an entertaining novel based on the true story of Pollard's Lilliputian Opera Company. In their last, disastrous tour, the company fell apart in India when the child stars refused to perform and left the management of the Company. The children were left without funds and had to earn enough money to pay for their fares back to Australia.

Kirsty Murray brings this historical story to life through the eyes of the responsible and sweet 13 year old Poesy Swift and the complicated and tough 15 year old Tilly Sweetrick, two stars of Percival's Lilliputian Opera Company. The tour payment will ensure Poesy's family can make ends meet and she is excited to see the world. However, it is not long into the tour when all Poesy's hopes and dreams fall apart due to a combination of lies and penny-pinching by the Company's management. The two girls are poles apart in how they see events unfold and view fellow performers, and this gives readers an insight into the issue of a reliable narrator telling the story.

Following the children and young adults (aged 7 to 18) from their rehearsals in Melbourne through to their tour of South East Asia and India, the story of how the young people cope, first with their exploitation as workers and then with their abandonment in India, would be ideal for students to study in lower secondary school.

Murray's research brings the sub-continent to life with all its confusion, heat and complexity. The characters are realistic children and teenagers who face the task of growing up without parents and with little guidance from adults.

India Dark is a story about truth and lies, friendship, jealousy, hard times, children's rights, innocence and experience.

IN THE CLASSROOM

India Dark is suitable for students aged 13 – 16 years (particularly year 8).

ENGLISH:

Using *India Dark* as an English class text could lead to interesting discussions regarding life in Australia before World War I as well as life in India before Independence. Further discussions could include children's rights, the concept of truth and what might occur to children without any real parental or adult guidance. It is suggested that *India Dark* be studied:

- As an English text:
 - as an example of Australian historical fiction;
 - as an example of the use of multiple narrators and unreliable narrators;
 - as an example of a fictionalised piece of writing based on a true story;
 - as a basis for a detailed piece of work on how life in Australia before World War I compares to life today.

Teaching tools to support the study of *India Dark* include *Ballet Shoes* (DVD starring Emma Watson from *Harry Potter*), *Himalaya* and *Around the World in 80 Days* documentaries (both starring Michael Palin) and the *Brat Camp* reality television program.

Study of *India Dark* would fit into the following curriculum stages:

- VELS level 5 (Victoria)
- Stage 4 (N.S.W.)
- Standards 3 - 5 - stages 9 to 13 (Tasmania)
- Year 8 (Queensland)
- Early adolescence (Western Australia)
- Middle Years (South Australia)
- Bands 3 - 4 (Northern Territory)
- Early adolescence (A.C.T.)

LINKING TO ASIA IN THE CURRICULUM:

India Dark is a valuable novel for teachers who want to incorporate themes about Asia in their classrooms.

India Dark incorporates all five elements of the learning goals of the The National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools, 2005. This Statement outlines what young people will optimally know, understand and be able to do; that is:

- Understand 'Asia'
- Develop informed attitudes and values
- Know about contemporary and traditional Asia
- Connect Australia and Asia
- Communicate

Further, *India Dark* provides an opportunity to support the national *Scope and Sequence Statement of Learning for English, 2006*:

- A broad knowledge of a range of literature and other texts, including multi-modal texts from Asia in English or translated into English
- Knowledge of the ways in which texts might be interpreted and constructed according to cultural, social and personal backgrounds and contexts
- Capacity to use texts to make sense of one's world, to broaden and promote shared cultural understandings.

India Dark fits with curriculum areas of the Studies of Asia:

India Dark fits with the curriculum areas of English, Studies of Society and The Arts as in the national *Engaging Young Australians with Asia Scope and Sequence* series:

http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/public_html/scope_sequence.htm.

Suggested Studies of Asia themes for *India Dark*:

- Inter-cultural understandings – understanding 'Asia' - Capacity to use texts to make sense of one's world, to broaden and promote shared cultural understandings.
- Developing informed attitudes and values
- Knowing about traditional Asia
- Connecting Australia and Asia through our history – Kirsty Murray's research model
- Communication

Activities connected to these themes are outlined in the notes below.

CHARACTER STUDY

POESY SWIFT.

Poesy is a reliable girl who comes from a single parent family (widowed mother). She wants to perform and see the world, but she also wants her wages to be sent home to ensure her brother Chooky gets a good education.

- How does a 'good girl' like Poesy get caught up in High Court proceedings?

Tilly says of Poesy, 'That was Poesy. Always holding back, never saying yes or no – always might and maybe...' (p. 4)

- Why do you think Poesy was like that?
- What does it tell the reader about Poesy?
- Was she still the same at the conclusion of the novel?
- Why didn't Poesy's mother come to farewell her at Port Melbourne?

'That was the problem with Poesy. She saw the good and bad in everything' says Tilly (p. 34).

- Is that a problem or a virtue?

TILLY SWEETRICK.

Tilly says, 'I wished they would leave. I knew they'd start to blub if they stayed any longer. Two years might have seemed a long time to them. To me, it was nothing.' (p. 32)

- Does Tilly come across as a harsh character?
- Can you find more examples?

'I'd already said goodbye to Ma long before the call. I think she was glad to see the back of me' (p.31)

- Has Tilly's home life impacted on her character?
- Do you think Tilly was born a cynic or has her life experiences made her into one? Why?

Two narrators

Read pages 3 – 9 where the same event is narrated by both Poesy and Tilly (pp. 3-9). The author uses two characters to narrate the story.

- Why does the author do this?
- Which character is the one you most trust in terms of telling a correct version of the story? Why?

ELIZA FINTON.

Poesy says to Eliza, 'You mustn't lie to me.' Eliza replies, 'I'd never lie to you Poesy...I just can't tell you all of my secrets.' (p. 86)

- Is Eliza right to keep a secret?
- Are secrets dangerous? Why?

'Of course I don't have a crush on Mr Arthur...would I lie to you Poesy Swift?' says Eliza to Poesy (p. 164).

- What does this evasion of the truth to her closet friend tell the reader about Eliza's character?

MR ARTHUR PERCIVAL

Mr Arthur deceived the children about where the tour was going and the families about the children being paid. Yet Mr Arthur insisted that as he had a signed contract, the children could not leave the Company.

- Was he within his rights?

Mr Arthur turned out to be 'a drunkard, a brute and an adulterer' (p. 262) who took advantage of the children.

- Was he all bad?
- Was he as bad as he was made out in court?
- Why did Eliza stay with him?

THEMES

TRUTH, SECRETS AND LIES.

'I didn't really want my family to know I was in Surabaya' (instead of America) says Poesy (p. 67).

- Is omitting information lying?

'That's the truth. As I remember it, the plain truth.' Says Tilly (p. 57).

- Do the words 'as I remember it' make this statement seem more likely to be untrue? Why?

'They've said Myrtle Jones is our teacher, but Myrtle is really a Lilliputian. It's all a blind.' (p. 35).

- What is worse, the Company pulling the wool over the eyes of the parents, or the lies the children told? Why?

'I knew Yada would have been disappointed because we didn't tell the truth. But we simply had to do something.' (p. 91)

- Are there occasions when it is okay to lie? Can you give some examples?

'Tempe leaned against it in a way that looked so natural, you'd never believe there was a dead body on the other side...those girls were very good actresses.' (p. 92).

- Is acting a form of lying?

'Mr Togelo finally decided to pretend to be a gentleman.' (p. 118)

- Is pretence a form of lying?
- Why did Mr Togelo have to pretend?

'That's what my ma taught me was the genteel thing to do – keep a lady's secrets (p. 135).

- Was Max's behaviour honourable or dangerous? Why?

Poesy says, 'I didn't know then that lying is easier than truth telling.' (p. 205).

- Do you agree with her statement? Why?

Poesy says, 'The terrible, ugly truth.' (p. 217).

- Is truth always the best, most important thing? Even if it is ugly? Why?

'I mean you don't want to talk about, but you know it's going on.' (p. 245)

- How is Charlie's silence about Eliza and Mr Arthur's relationship a lie?

Poesy's grandmother says, 'there is no higher religion than truth' (p. 21)

- What are your thoughts about this statement?

The irony of *India Dark* is that the truthful Poesy only lies once in the novel, yet her lie is the downfall of Mr Arthur (p. 266).

- Is this one lie the worst lie of all? Even if it was a necessary evil?
- How does this lie affect Poesy?

INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE.

There is much in the media today about the sexualisation of children via music videos, advertising and television programs.

- What examples of this type of behaviour are there in 1909 in *India Dark*?

RACISM/IMPERIALISM.

Tilly says, 'I feel so much safer now we're in the British Empire' (p. 96); 'I hope he doesn't have too many natives,' (p. 97); 'Really, the Dutch aren't like us. They simply aren't like us at all' (p. 74); 'Even though he was a native, his voice sounded beautiful' (p. 192); 'Freddie knocked one of their turbans right off and we all screamed with laughter (p. 219); 'Even if she was a native, she was a woman and a queen' (p. 235).

- Are all of Tilly's statements evidence of racism or a product of imperialism? Is there a difference?

FRIENDSHIP AND JEALOUSY.

Poesy says, 'Why can't I be everyone's friend?' (p. 98).

- Do you think it is possible to be on friendly terms with everyone you encounter? How?
- Is it solely your decision?

'Why can't we all be friends?' asks Poesy. 'Because sometimes you have to choose,' says Tilly. (p. 201).

- Why do you have to choose between friends sometimes?

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

What were the 'career options' for young people in Australia before World War I?

- Was this fair?
- Why was this the case?

- How have things changed in the hundred years since this book was set?

How was schooling different in 1909 to today?

- Did many students finish year 12 or go to university? Why?
- Did many girls go to university? Why?

Some of the children in the Company were only 7 years old and away from their parents for years on end.

- Would this happen today? Can you find any examples?

What responsibilities did the children have to ease family poverty?

- What are your thoughts on this?

The children were often on the receiving end of violence from their families, Mr Arthur and each other (pp. 19, 57, 61, 89, 120, 215, 220, 236, 238 and 253.)

- Was this just the usual way of keeping children in line in this era, or was it something more vicious?

Was performing a freedom or a prison for the children? (pp. 31, 43)

- Did all of the children feel the same way? Find evidence to reinforce your point of view.

When the children split from Mr Arthur, was it a strike, a mutiny or an uprising?

- What is the difference?

SYMBOLISM

'The flowers that stood on the table were all made of paper and covered with a fine layer of dust' (p. 158).

- Many other things in *India Dark* are not as they seem. Can you name another five things?

The Goddess Kali is a teenage girl.

- What does she symbolise in terms of power within the novel?

Charlie learns how to perform magic while in India.

- What does this symbolise?

SETTING

MELBOURNE, SURABAYA, BATAVIA, SINGAPORE, KUALA LUMPUR AND INDIA

The changing settings symbolise the unfolding of the deep rift within Percival's Lilliputian Opera Company; the more chaotic the location, the more chaotic the events within the Company.

- Can you make comparisons between each tour destination and the unfolding events?

THE CEYLON AND OTHER STEAMERS

- Were these boats modes of transport or prisons for the children? Find examples to verify your thoughts.

- India before Independence was a far different place to that of today. Can you discover three major differences?

ACTIVITIES

ASSIGNMENT 1

Mark on the table below all of the types of lies used in *India Dark*, putting them in order of severity. Mark the name of the liar next to the type of lie.

Think of your own types of lies. Some examples could be:

- White lies
- Omission
- Pretending
- Acting
- Remembering something differently to the way it actually happened
- "A blind" (p. 35)
- 'Never saying 'yes or no'
- Withholding evidence
- Vicious lies
- Not telling secrets
- Being discreet
- Innocence (being oblivious to the truth – pp.212-4)
- Magic shows

Explain why you have placed each lie in its position. Which lies are less harmful? Why?

Types of lies, in order of severity	Example from <i>India Dark</i> including character

ASSIGNMENT 2

India Dark is based on a true story.

What evidence can you find of the original story? Where did you look for evidence?

ASSIGNMENT 3

Make a timeline of major events in India from the 1850s to the present day. Use either paper or the Timeglider <<http://timeglider.com/>> website.

Does this help you understand the setting and the attitudes of some of the characters towards the Indian people? Does that make them right?

ASSIGNMENT 4

Make a timeline of change in Australian children's rights from 1909 to the present day. Use either paper or the Timeglider <<http://timeglider.com/>> website.

What changes are for the better? Are any for the worse?

ASSIGNMENT 5

Make and save (as a .kmz file) a Google Lit Trip <<http://www.googlelittrips.com/GoogleLit/Home.html>> using Google Earth <<http://earth.google.com/>>

(see examples <<http://www.googlelittrips.com/GoogleLit/9-12/9-12.html>> . Students plot the journey of the Company (with every stop on the trip) and add an image and comment about the action for each location.

RELATED READING

Important: Teachers should note that *India Dark* carries a recommendation for children 13 to 16 yrs. The books listed below provide follow-up reading for students across a range of reading abilities and maturity levels. Consequently, teachers and parents are strongly advised to preview these novels before recommending them to specific children.

INDIA

Homeless Bird by Gloria Whelan. This is a story where Koly must face being married at 12 years of age. The setting in India is vibrant and expertly rendered.

Anila's journey by Mary Finn is set in 18th Century India, giving students an insight into the setting of historical India.

CHILD STAGE PERFORMERS

West End Shuffle by Natalie Jane Prior. The life of a young dancer set in contemporary Brisbane.

London Calling by Natalie Jane Prior. A sequel to *West End Shuffle*.

CHILDREN WITHOUT ADULT SUPERVISION/ REBELLION AGAINST AUTHORITY

Lord of the Flies by William Golding. The classic novel of what happens when children make their own rules.

Vulture's Gate by Kirsty Murray. Children rely on themselves for survival in a post-apocalyptic world.

Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift. Gulliver encounters the Lilliputians, who imprison him, on his many travels and adventures. Use to compare the use of the term Lilliputians and what that implies to Percival's Lilliputian Opera Company.

TRUTH AND LIES

Liar by Justine Larbalestier. Older readers can experience the complexities of an unreliable narrator.

Watershed by Kathryn Knight. Focuses on identity, first romance, independence and courage.

LOYALTY

The Whole Business with Kiffo and the Pit Bull by Barry Jonsberg. Calma shows incredible loyalty to her friend Kiffo, who eventually comes to trust Calma like no other person.

OTHER BOOKS BY KIRSTY MURRAY

Zarconi's Magic Flying Fish, Allen & Unwin 1999

Market Blues, Allen & Unwin 2001

Walking Home with Marie-Claire, Allen & Unwin 2002

The Children of the Wind series:

Bridie's Fire, Allen & Unwin 2003

Becoming Billy Dare, Allen & Unwin 2004

A Prayer for Blue Delaney, Allen & Unwin 2005

The Secret Life of Maeve Lee Kwong, Allen & Unwin 2006

Vulture's Gate, Allen & Unwin 2009

Tough Stuff, Allen & Unwin 1999 (non-fiction)

LINKING TO ASIA IN THE CURRICULUM

SUGGESTED STUDIES OF ASIA THEMES FOR INDIA DARK

- Inter-cultural understandings – understanding 'Asia' - Capacity to use texts to make sense of one's world, to broaden and promote shared cultural understandings.
- Developing informed attitudes and values
- Knowing about traditional Asia
- Connecting Australia and Asia through our history – Kirsty Murray's research model
- Communication

ACTIVITIES CONNECTED TO THEMES

Understanding 'Asia'

1. Chapter One, titled *The Betrayal*, and set in 1910 at the Madras High Court is quite brief. However it does require some inter-cultural understanding which positions the reader for the subsequent narrative. Therefore students should:
 - Locate Madras on the map of India on the book's inside back cover, identify the contemporary name of Madras, and find out when and why Madras's name was changed.
 - There are references to 'turbanned Sikhs' and 'Sikh guards' on page 2. Research Sikhs, their beliefs and characteristics, and their roles in India in the past and present. [LMERC (at 150 Palmerston St in Carlton, Melbourne) has a great poster about Sikhism in their library available for borrowing. LMERC = Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre. lmmerc.library@edumail.vic.gov.au]
 - What can we tell culturally about Mr Arthur's barrister, Mr Guruswami, from his name?
 - Find out when the Madras High Court was built, and who built it.
2. Reflect on why the novel is titled *India Dark*.
 - a. Choose one of the following four possibilities, and provide evidence to argue your point of view: -
 - (i) The title, *India Dark*, is meant to allude to the author's view of the dark time of India's British Raj history (1858 – 1947).
 - (ii) The title, *India Dark*, is meant to allude only to the dark events that befell the Lilliputian Company children in India in 1909-1910.
 - (iii) The title, *India Dark*, is only meant to describe the childrens' expectations and perceptions of mysterious India. (see Poesy's words page 47)
 - (iv) The title, *India Dark*, is meant to allude to all three of the above possibilities.
 - b. *India Dark* is set in various parts of south-east Asia, as shown on the inside cover map, for the first 141 pages or 30 chapters. This is more than one third of the 325-page novel. In Chapter 31 the children finally arrive in Calcutta, India. Can you suggest an alternative title which signals to the reader that the novel is set in south east Asia as well as India?

Developing informed attitudes and values

1. In Chapter 45, titled 'Serenading the Sahibs' on page 229-230, Tilly tells the reader that "I wrote to the Resident and the Commissioner, as Mr Ruse had instructed. I even wrote to the Maharani of Mysore because even if she was a native she was a woman and a queen."
 - a. What is a Resident? What is a Commissioner? What is a Maharani? What is a Maharajah? Which era of Indian history do these terms come from?
 - b. How can we account for Tilly's very loaded and discriminatory phrase about the Maharani, 'even if she was a native'? You will need to step into Tilly's

shoes. Where would this attitude have come from in 1910? Other Lilliputian performers? Other adults? Is this language and attitude acceptable today?

Knowing about traditional Asia

1. In Chapter 46, titled 'Shared Secrets', Charlie says to Poesy, 'They have stories here, like the stories we read about Homer and the Odyssey, except it's not all ancient and dead. It's as if the people still have magic in them too. That's why there are so many holy men here. They reckon gods come down and walk around in the skins of ordinary people.'
 - a. What are the names of the most famous ancient epic Hindu stories that Charlie is referring to? Clues: - one starts with R and has 8 letters. The other starts with B and has 12 letters.
 - b. What evidence is there in *India Dark* that traditional India is 'not all ancient and dead' at the turn of the 20th century?
 - see page 142 which describes a puja ceremony and the goddess Kali
 - see page 181 about the Diwali festival
 - see page 189 'heathen buildings with strange towers'
 - see page 191 about the Maharajah's *zenana*.
 - c. In pairs, how many traditional occupations can you find mentioned in *India Dark* which may or may not still exist today? Clue: Many occupations have the suffix 'wallah'.
 - d. In Chapter 38 Murray tells us that the children kept warm with *razai* quilts made in the city of Jaipur, which is in the state of Rajasthan in India. Research Rajasthani textiles. Is there still a textile industry there? Are traditional textiles still available? Are they available in Australia or on-line? Explain.

Connecting Australia and Asia through our history

1. Read the 'Author's Note' and 'Acknowledgments' at the back of the book, as well as the article 'Kirsty Murray on Writing India Dark' which is in the Teacher's Notes. From these construct a timeline titled 'Kirsty Murray's research model' which plots the steps, activities and any dates involved in writing and researching *India Dark*.
2. Kirsty Murray says she could not have written the novel without visiting India and following the itinerary of the children. Why was the three and a half month writer's residency in India, based in Madras/Chennai, so important?
3. We might assume that it was an unusual thing for the Lilliputian Company of Australian children to sail around Asia entertaining the Raj population. However Kirsty Murray's research has confirmed the opposite. What does she tell us about this?
4. Murray says that she hoped to help young Australians 'imagine the world and their historical and physical connection to south Asia and the sub-continent'. In what ways does the novel and its presentation do this? You might like to cite paragraphs, dialogue, chapter titles or maps.

Communicating

1. Contact members of your local Indian community, or a local Indian food business, to organize tiffin (see Chapter 36, page 173) in tiffin carriers for a class lunch. Research the tiffin carriers of contemporary Kolkata and Mumbai, and inform the class about this amazing daily operation whilst you enjoy your tiffin lunch.

See this fascinating website, put together by Indian students, about the tiffin history and design:

<http://designhistoryatnid.blogspot.com/2008/10/tiffin-story.html>

Also see photos and information at:

<http://www.mumbai-central.com/specials/tiffin.html>

2. Murray said it was a challenge 'to envision sensual detail' and communicate this to the reader. Her residency in India clearly assisted the author to do this. Select an extract from the novel which demonstrates sensual details about India. Identify Murray's integration of the five senses: - sight, sound, touch, taste, smell. Similarly, select another extract from the south-east Asian setting.

3. Murray communicates the viewpoints of the Australian children. Create a piece of writing using the first person voice that presents an aspect of *India Dark* from the viewpoint of an Indian character in the story eg. Prem, the Maharani

4. Identify and list how many languages the children would have encountered during their journey from Australia through south east Asia and India, as well as returning home via Ceylon (Sri Lanka). You may need to look up 'Distribution of Languages' maps. Be alert that India has a history of many languages.

OTHER RESOURCES

Teachers are encouraged to seek out art gallery collections on the British Raj, which are available in most states, for example, the NSW Art Gallery collection called 'Indian Empire – Multiple Realities'. Galleries rotate aspects of their Indian collections: there is always something of interest for students.

Ballet Shoes (DVD) starring Emma Watson (star of Harry Potter movies). This telemovie set in the 1920s and 30s portrays the life of child stage performers.

Liar Liar (DVD) Jim Carrey stars as a compulsive liar.

State Library of Victoria's *What it used to cost guide* website.

<http://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/content.php?pid=14258&sid=95520> shows costs for groceries and houses and wages in 1911. Use to promote understanding of how important the wages of the children were to their families.

Brat Camp television show. Teenagers get the chance to change their behaviour. In today's world, should Tempe and Ruby be put through the Brat Camp?

Himalaya and *Around the World in 80 Days* documentaries (both starring Michael Palin).

The children of Percival's Lilliputian Opera Company would have seen colourful Hindu calendar art everywhere. Contemporary versions of these calendars are available in Indian community shops around Australia. Many markets have big hangings of Ganesh and other Hindu gods available for sale, as well as vibrant Indian textiles and colourful but cheap enamel ware. Such resources could make a classroom come alive during the teaching of *India Dark*.

CRIN website: <http://www.crin.org/> . Child Rights Information Network is a global network.

UNICEF's *Convention on the Rights of the Child*: <http://www.unicef.org/crc/> A globally agreed set of standards.

Asia Education Foundation website: <http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/default.asp>

Asia Scope and Sequence for English:
http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/public_html/scope_sequence.htm.

Asia Scope and Sequence for SOSE:
http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/public_html/scope_sequence.htm.

Asia Scope and Sequence for The Arts (including drama, dance etc):
http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/public_html/scope_sequence.htm.

Voices and Visions from India - Texts for the Senior English Classroom CD Rom, 2004, Curriculum Corporation, Australia.

Monsoon Wedding, the film. See Film Asia – new perspectives on film for English, 2002, Lucinda McKnight & Juanita Kwok, Curriculum Corporation, Australia

Impressions - Texts from Asia for the Lower Secondary English Classroom, 1998, Anthony Bott, Lee Grafton, Carolyn Millard, Doug Trevaskis, Curriculum Corporation, Australia.

Reflections: Texts from Asia for the Middle Secondary English Classroom, 1998, Anthony Bott, Lee Grafton, Carolyn Millard, Doug Trevaskis, Curriculum Corporation, Australia.

Dimensions: Texts from Asia for the Upper Secondary English Classroom, 1998, Anthony Bott, Lee Grafton, Carolyn Millard, Doug Trevaskis, Curriculum Corporation, Australia.

Free, on-line tools for exploring literature can be found at the excellent ReadWriteThink website, jointly managed by the National Council for Teachers of English and the International Reading Association:
http://www.readwritethink.org/student_mat/index.asp.

KIRSTY MURRAY - ON WRITING *INDIA DARK*

In 2001, when I was researching the first book in the Children of the Wind series, *Bridie's Fire*, I interviewed **Peter Freund** (<http://www.hermaj.com/history/archive.htm>) a theatre historian and archivist at Her Majesty's theatre in Ballarat. I asked him questions about early Australian theatre on the goldfields as I wanted my character, Bridie, to be involved in one of the tent theatre companies. At the end of the interview, Peter opened a drawer in his desk and drew out an essay that he had written entitled 'Children Half Price – An account of the demise of Pollard's Lilliputian Opera Company' "Someone," he said "Should write a children's book about these kids."

When I read it, I couldn't help but agree kids would find the subject matter compelling. *Anyone* would find it compelling. Twenty-nine children and a handful of adults travelling through Southeast Asia and India singing and dancing and then, their tour ending in an international scandal.

Peter's challenge haunted me for years. It was a story that wouldn't leave me alone and despite how daunted I felt at the prospect of researching such a complex

subject, I bit the bullet. At that stage, I had become reasonably knowledgeable about early Australian theatre but the real challenge that lay ahead was how could I possibly write a book about so many places that I had never visited, places that I could barely imagine? [Eventually, Kirsty received funding from the Australia Council; an Asialink residency in South India at the University of Madras; and a creative fellowship from the State Library of Victoria.] I spent hundreds of hours at the State Library of Victoria researching Melbourne in 1910, the theatre scene in the Edwardian era and everything I could find about the colonial era and Australia's historical connection to India. I found so much treasure there was almost too much to embed in one story, but everything I needed to help me construct a novel about the Pollard's 1910 tour.

Unbelievably, there are no secondary sources (history books) about the Empire theatre circuit in Asia. From the 18th Century, British and then Australian theatre troupes toured every corner of the British Empire. When I first heard about the Pollard's, I thought they must have been unique. But as I began to study some of the primary sources (newspapers and theatre magazines) I discovered they were only following the example of other performers and theatre companies. There were dozens of troupes that toured Asia, India and South Africa. It was a lucrative route for many companies as audiences in colonial outposts were hungry for European, British and English-speaking entertainers. Australian companies were particularly keen on touring South Asia as it was so close to home. Children's troupes were economical to tour as the children's wages were relatively low. They were also cheaper to feed and house, as well as being subject to cheaper fares.

Only one history book has been written about any of the many Lilliputian theatre companies that were in operation in the 19th and early 20th centuries. New Zealand theatre historian, **Peter Downes**, in his book *The Pollards* details the history of a New Zealand branch of the Pollard Lilliputian Opera Company. It proved a valuable resource though it only briefly mentioned the disastrous 1909/10 tour that I wanted to write about. Peter was very helpful in providing additional material to help flesh out the story of the Pollards.

But writing historical fiction isn't simply about following a single story line. It requires so much more so my research ranged across dozens of related topics. And there's something very spooky about the way things can start to connect up when you get in the right headspace with a story. Almost like magic...

Possibly the most interesting collection I accessed at the SLV was the Magic Collection. Theoretically, you have to be a magician to explore every corner of the collection but as a Creative Fellow, I had access to materials that were still waiting to be catalogued. Magicians often toured the Empire circuit and through reading memoirs written by conjurers and puppeteers I gained added insight into the Pollard children's experiences.

So I decided to include a boy magician character in the troupe and use material from the SLV collection. I named my conjuring character Charlie Byrne. He was loosely based on one of the real boys in the troupe, Charlie Donaghey. One day, I came across an old book in the magic collection called 'The Boy's Book of Conjuring'. Looking at the cover, I decided it was exactly the sort of book that my Charlie would own. Then, when I flipped the cover open I had the creepiest feeling because inscribed inside was a dedication 'To Charlie Byrne from P.J. Green 19-1-90' (1890). Then there was a little note dated 1950 saying – "*found while demolishing an old house in Collingwood*". I had imagined my fictitious Charlie Byrne came from Collingwood too and the coincidence of the two names, the two boys coming from

the same area within little more than a decade, and owning the same book sent such a shiver down my spine that I changed Charlie's name to Charlie Chester. It was only when I told the story to some children at a talk in a Melbourne school that I changed it back to Charlie Byrne at their prompting.

Piecing the story of the Pollards together was like assembling a jigsaw puzzle when half the pieces are missing. I decided to fictionalise the story because I knew I could never be sure of every detail to be able to confidently declare it fact – and there were so many conflicting versions reported in the press. Even the number of children involved was complicated. Twenty-nine left Melbourne but three disappeared en route, presumably sent back home for bad behaviour. In essence, I believe the novel captures what it meant to be a child involved in the troupe in a way a strictly factual account could never achieve.

Researching the story also taught me much about the world and Australia's place in it. In February 2007, I travelled to India to take up my residency at the University of Madras and began the Indian leg of my research. So much research for fiction involves envisioning sensual detail, trying to evoke the living experience of a time and a place, that I could never have written the book without visiting India. I was disappointed to discover that the British had taken most of the records of the Edwardian period when they left India in 1947. But I did manage to access original court records at the High Court of Madras (now Chennai) and visit most of the places that the children had visited both in India and across Southeast Asia including Indonesia and Malaysia.

Before I began to research this book I had very small understanding of Australia's place in Asia. I could more easily have drawn you a map of the United States than of our geographic neighbours. I've crawled up a long, steep learning curve and though there is so much more to know, I have strong points of reference to anything that is cited in the media about India, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Those points of reference are something that I hope to share with younger readers. I wrote this book principally for Australian children (though I hope it also finds an international readership) because I believe that through story we imagine the world and find our place in it. In my own growing up, I felt a huge connection to both Europe and America because, apart from a couple of books by Rudyard Kipling, I had never read anything about India or South Asia. As places, they did not feature on my imaginative landscape. In writing *India Dark*, I hope to open a small door for younger readers to pass through and access a whole world of understanding. I hope it helps them to imagine the world and their historical and physical connection to South Asia and the subcontinent. My earlier books have often ignited in younger readers an interest in Australian history and landscape: with *India Dark* I hope that interest will range further afield into the geographic region of our near neighbours.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

KIRSTY MURRAY

Kirsty Murray is the author of fourteen books for children and teenagers. Her novels have won and been short-listed for numerous awards including the WA Premier's Award and the NSW Premier's History Award. She has been a Creative Fellow of the State Library of Victoria and an Asialink Literature Resident in South India. She lives in Melbourne with her husband and a drifting tribe of young people.

Kirsty was born in 1960 and grew up in suburban Melbourne. The middle child of seven children, her childhood was always crowded with people and stories.

In writing for younger readers, Kirsty decided she wanted to write the type of stories she wished she could have read when she was growing up. As a child, she had believed that Australia didn't have many big stories worth writing about as not many children's authors of the 1960s and early 1970s wrote about Australian history. She wanted to read books that had big ideas in them – ideas about time and space, the past, the present and the future and how everything fitted together.

Kirsty is addicted to books – both fiction and non-fiction - and reads widely across all genres. She is an active member of two bookclubs and likes nothing better than hanging out in bookshops and libraries. She is an Ambassador for the Victorian Premier's Reading Challenge and was on the steering committee for Melbourne's bid to become a UNESCO City of Literature. In 2007, Kirsty was an Asialink resident at the University of Madras in South India and was also a Creative Fellow of the State Library of Victoria.

Kirsty regularly gives talks and conducts creative writing workshops in schools and at festivals. She has been a guest speaker at writers' festivals in Bali, India and Hong Kong as well as all around Australia.

Kirsty writes most of her books in her office at home, though she often travels to different places around Australia and the world to do research. Leisure interests include reading, listening to music (especially the music made by her kids – a number of whom are terrific musicians), walking with friends, cooking huge meals, travelling (it's a habit you never outgrow), throwing things out of cupboards and re-arranging the furniture.

JUDITH WAY

Judith Way is a teacher-librarian with a Graduate Diploma of Children's Literature and a Master of Arts. She was the recipient of the School Library Association of Victoria's Innovators Grant in 2009, the SLAV John Ward Award for outstanding contribution to teacher librarianship in 2007 and was awarded the Children's Book Council of Australia Eleanor E. Robertson prize in 2003. She has presented at conferences locally and internationally. Judith writes the Bright Ideas blog (<http://slav.globalteacher.org.au>) for the School Library Association of Victoria and has developed the content for the Professional Learning Network Program for teachers (<http://plnteach.globalteacher.org.au>) on behalf of the State Library of Victoria and the School Library Association of Victoria.

HELEN MCINTYRE

Helen McIntyre is an experienced Year 7 – 12 English teacher, English Coordinator and Curriculum Leader with a special interest in the studies of Asia. She has a Graduate Certificate in Teaching Studies of Asia. She received Victoria's *Excellence in Studies of Asia Educator Award* in 2000, and has presented at conferences and workshops in Australia, India and China. She has been visiting India since 1982 and received a fellowship to be hosted by the Banyan Tree School in Delhi in January, 2006. In return she has hosted teachers from India in Australia on behalf of the Asia Education Foundation. In 2007 she was a delegate to the Linking Latitudes Conference in Delhi, and enjoyed leading a group to visit Katha, a non profit publishing house which runs programs for children and women. She is the co-writer, with Jill Wilson, of the Year 12 English VATE *Inside Stories* guide to *Voices and Visions from India for the Senior English Classroom CD Rom*. She is currently writing materials for the new national curriculum and enjoying completing a Master of Education – Studies of Asia with Flinders University.