Just Imagine Book Guide

Archie's War
Written by Marcia Williams

Just Imagine...
About the Author

Marcia Williams

Marcia has written and illustrated numerous books since *The First Christmas* was published in 1987. Many of these have been retellings of classic stories, illustrated in her distinctive cartoon-strip style. She has also applied her characteristic storytelling to history, with award-winning books about the World Wars (*Archie’s War* and *My Secret War Diary* by Flossie Albright), *Greek Myths* and *The Stone Age*. She works in watercolours, which, she says, “are just unreliable enough to be interesting”. She has retold many of Shakespeare’s plays and taken to the boards herself to play the Bard in a production based on her books, *Mr William Shakespeare’s Plays*, and *Bravo, Mr William Shakespeare!* – culminating in a performance in Stratford-upon-Avon.

About the Book

*When Uncle Colin gave me this book for my tenth birthday, on 3rd April 1914, I was just an ordinary boy in an ordinary family. We were poor but happy all squashed into a house in London’s East End. Then out of the blue, a young Bosnian man killed an archduke in a country I’d never heard of called Serbia. We didn’t think much of it at the time; it wasn’t our quarrel. But then Germany invaded Belgium, a neutral country and our friend, and we were at war. Archie’s War (2007) endpapers*

*Archie’s War* is a fictionalised scrapbook kept by Archie Albright which follows the fortunes and misfortunes of Archie and his family throughout the years of the First World War. Williams’ has developed her comic style using more muted crayons on sugar paper to imitate the drawings of a 10 year old boy and reflect the mode and tone of the subject. Found objects such as cigarette cards, photographs are combined with illustration to simulate a real scrapbook. Initially, Archie is excited by the war but as the impact on his family is felt, he realises that war is not a game: a main theme of the book is growing up. Children will benefit from time to read and explore the pictures, either independently, or in pairs before engaging in group discussion.
Before Reading

Look at the cover of ‘Archie’s War’.

- Who do you think Archie is?
- What do you know about the First World War (make notes on the white board or a flip chart and keep them for reference)
- Why is the young Archie Albright wearing an army uniform? What costumes do children use for playing in today? Are there any similarities? Any differences?
- Why do you think a leaf has been stuck to the front cover? What kind of leaf is it? Consider whether this might be significant.
- Why has Archie given his scrapbook the title Archie’s War? What do you imagine the book will be about?
- Open the first pages and look at the front endpapers. These show some of Archie's collection of cigarette cards. Ask if anyone know what these cards are. Explain how cards could be collected in packets of cigarettes and tea. Collectors could mount cards in specially produced books. The hobby collecting cigarette cards is called cartophily and is similar to the collection of trading cards with which children are familiar today. Search the internet to find out more about cartophily and the subjects depicted on cigarette cards. Children may have grandparents or great-grandparents with card collections that they can bring into school to show the class.

During Reading

My Family

- What kind of character do you think Archie is? Choose 3 words to describe him. Explain your choice.
- What are the similarities and differences between Archie’s family and your own?
- Whose head is on the postage stamp? Does the head face the same way as the Queen’s head on stamps today? Find out about the importance of the way the monarch’s head faces on coins and postage stamps.
- What value is 1/2d in today’s currency? How much does a comic cost today?
- What was a suffragette? (Use a range of references sources to find out, if you do not know). What causes do people wear coloured ribbons for today?

Home and Away (p7)

- Which of Archie’s favourite foods have you eaten or tasted? What are your favourite foods? Do you think these were available in 1914? Use a range of reference sources to see if you can find out.
- What does Archie’s Dad do for a living? What is scrap?
- What do you imagine were the best things about being a child in 1914? What do you imagine were the worst things about being a child in 1914? Why do you think that?

Baby Billy’s First Birthday (p 8-9)

- Why do you think Archie mentions that Mum’s cake had real butter and strawberries? Are you surprised by this?
- What do you think each of these words mean: pacifist, patriot, ally? Have you heard anyone use them recently? After pooling knowledge, check your definitions using a dictionary.
- How do different members of Archie’s family react to the news of war? Have you heard different reactions to news about more recent wars?
- Why does Mum play the national anthem?
We are at War (p 10-11)
- What do you like most about this page? Why?
- What do you think is the intention of the headline Act of War 270 Miles from London
- Where is Prussia? Check using reference sources.
- What do you think about Archie's reaction to Mr and Mrs Schoenfeld? Would you have reacted differently?
- What is Archie most concerned about when he hears Britain is at war?

War Games (p 12-13)
- What is Archie's attitude to the war?
- Why do you think Archie is so worried about being attacked by Germans?

My Life is Slowly Changing (p 14-15)
- What do you like best about this page?
- What effect does the poster 'Britain Needs You' have? How is this effect achieved?
- What do you learn about the war from Uncle Teddy's letter? Is it different to the way Archie imagined it?

Christmas in London, Christmas in The Trenches (p 16-17)
- What are the similarities and differences in the way Christmas was celebrated in wartime and the way Christmas is celebrated today?
- What are Archie's reactions to the Zeppelin bomb and the dogfight on the Thames?
- Why do you think the German and British soldiers ceased fighting on Christmas day?

Zeppelin Airships Bomb London (p 18-19)
- Archie writes that Count Ferdinand Von Zeppelin is not a hero. What do you think a hero is in Archie's eyes? Share ideas the children have about what makes a hero. Are their ideas similar or different to Archie's
- What do you think life was like for Germans living in Britain during the war?
- What do you think about Aunt Agatha and Uncle Derek's reaction to the German bombing?

Pluck (p 20-21)
- Why does Archie write 'At first, being at war was like being in a comic strip. It ain't like that now ITS REAL?'
- Read the list of articles that are contained in the soldier's kit. Are there any words that you don't understand? Can you work out what they might mean from the context? Use the internet and other reference sources to find out.
- What have you learnt from reading Archie's War about the roles played by women during the war?

Archie's Dad Home on Leave (p 22)
- What sorts of work did young boys do during the war? Why did they leave school early? Use reference sources to find out about any of the jobs with which you are unfamiliar e.g. rag and bone man
- Why do you think Archie's Dad knocks at the door? And why doesn't he whistle when he walks down the road?
- Why do you think Archie crosses-out 'cried' and then writes 'hated him going again' instead?
- Do you think you would have enjoyed eating war bake? Why? Why not?

Nurse Edith Cavell (p 24-25)
- In what way will Christmas 1915 be different from Christmas 1914 for Archie?
- What did you learn about Edith Cavell from Archie's scrapbook? Does her story remind you of any other stories that you know? Acts of selfless behaviour are called altruism. Do you think people are capable of acting in completely selfless ways? Can you think of any instances of this?
Conscription (p26-27)
• Why was Ron given a white feather?
• How does Grandma Albright respond to Ron's decision to sign up? Why do you think she reacts in this way?
• What did you learn about fighting in the First World War from reading these pages?

Ron Returns From the Front (p 28-29)
• In what ways were animals used in The First World War? Why do you think animals were used to do these jobs?
• Do you think it is a good idea to train animals to help during a war?

Christmas Special ( p 30-31)
• What are the differences between the way the rich and poor live during the war?
• Why do you think Dad's card just says, 'Love Dad'?

Good News at Last ( p 32-33)
• What good things happen to Archie in these pages?
• What is a censor? Why does Archie think his Dad's censor had his eyes closed?

Toms Street is Bombed (p 34-35)
• How does this page make you feel?
• How is it different to the earlier pages in Archie's scrapbook?

News from the Sky (p 36-37)
• What does Archie feel about Old Georgie's disappearance? What steps does he take to try and find him?
• Why does Mum decide to take the family away from London?

Spring in the Country (p 40-41)
• What does Archie think about life in the country?

The Red Baron (p 40-41)
• How does Archie's story about the Red Baron show that he has changed his thoughts about Germans?

Country Chuckles (p 42-43)
• What did you most enjoy about these pages?

Victory Day (p 44-45)
• Compare the main image with page 34-35 (Tom's Street is Bombed). Discuss how different moods conveyed in these two pictures?
• How do you think Old Georgie survived when he was missing? Why does he choose this moment to return?
• Do you think wars can be won?
• How has Archie changed during the war years?
After reading

Attitudes to the War

Members of Archie’s family have different responses to news that Britain is at War.

- Invite the pupils to share their thoughts about the views expressed by Ethel and Grandma Albright.
- Define new terms: patriot, ally, pacifist, conscientious objector and consider how these relate to members of Archie’s family
- With older children, read war poems that provide different points of view about the war such as Jessie Pope’s ‘Who’s For the Game?’ and Wilfred Owens ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’.
- Find out how conscientious objectors were treated in the First World War.

Aliens in Britain

The Schoenfelds, local shopkeepers in Archie’s neighbourhood, are suspected of being spies when war breaks out. Their son Peter is bullied until he no longer goes to school. This seems harsh and unjustifiable but was not uncommon at the time.

- Investigate what happened to aliens during the war years
- Note that some people changed their names so that they were more anglicised. The Royal family changed their name from Saxe-Coburg to Windsor
- Aunt Agatha and Uncle Derek get rid of their German made piano and music (p18)

Food in Wartime Britain

There are lots of mentions of food in Archie’s War. He mentions his favourite food (p.7) Christmas dinner (p.16) Chocolate (p19) War Bake (p23) Queuing for food (p36) Potato flour (p38) Self-sufficiency (p38) bread and dripping (p32) Try this recipe for War Cake:

**War Cake**

This simple cake recipe was made during First World War. It was made with dried fruits and lard.

- 2 cups of sugar 1 1/2 cup of raisins 2 tablespoons lard 1 tsp. cinnamon 1/2 teaspoon cloves 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg Pinch salt 2 cups hot water Nuts and fruit mix as desired 3 cups of flour 1 teaspoon soda Mix fruit and nuts in a large bowl with the flour; put aside.
- Put the rest of the ingredients in a pan; bring to the boil and blend well;
- Cool down, then pour over the fruits, nuts and flour and mix well.
- Pour into a greased loaf tin
- Bake for 1 hour at 350 degrees.

War Effort and Women at Work

During the First World War, work that had hitherto been done by men had to be done by women, and children left school early to help support the family. Archie’s Mum works in the munitions factory and his brother leaves school to take on his father’s scrap business. Voluntary work was also undertaken. Mum and Aunt Agatha have knitting and bandage rolling parties (p19) to support the war effort.

- Research the new jobs that were undertaken by women for the first time during the First World War. (e.g. ambulance driver, womens land army, bus conductors, clerical workers, engineering, ship building)
- How did the new roles that women undertook during the war affect their status in society after the war? Research the women’s suffrage movement. When were women given the vote? Why do you think it happened so soon after the end of the war?
Acts of Courage and Bravery
Wartime can elicit acts of great bravery and courage. Archie writes about two people who display different kinds of courage, one English, one German: Edith Cavell and The Red Baron. Although the Red Baron is German, Archie respects his skill and bravery, (he would have been unlikely to admit his admiration at the outset of the war). Find accounts the lives of Edith Cavell and The Red Baron. Can they both be regarded as heroes even though one saved lives and the other was involved in fighting?

What do you consider to be the definition of a hero? Does anyone display these qualities today?

Animals in War
Archie's brother Ron draws animals involved in the war when he is away at the front. Animals were trained to run messages, pull heavy gun carriages, deliver first aid equipment to wounded soldiers. Animals could also be awarded medals for bravery or be shot for desertion.

- Use the internet and other sources to find out about the different uses of animals at the front.
- Read Michael Morpurgo’s *War Horse* which tells the story of one horse's adventures and misadventures at the Western Front.

Children's Pastimes
Re-read *Archie's War* and make a list of the different ways in which Archie and his friends amuse themselves. (e.g playing cricket in the street (p10) war games (12) comics (p5) )

Compare Archie's games to games that children play today. Are there any similarities? Differences?

Search the British Library archives to find comics of the period e.g. Playbox which featured Tiger Tim

www.bl.uk/collections/comlist.html

Spreads can be displayed on the interactive whiteboard and compared with modern comics.

Propaganda
Investigate propaganda material such as posters. How did they aim to persuade different audiences (single women, young men, older men, wives) to 'do their bit'.

There are several examples of posters and postcards expressing the sentiments of the day and encouraging citizens to 'do their bit' for the war effort:

- Your Country needs You (p14) See Archie's Tiger Tim poster Rally Round the Flag (p15)
- The King at the Front (p21)
- Hooray for the King (p36)
- The language of news headlines can also be studied
- German Pirates Sink the Lusitania (p23)
- Uncle Sam Joins John Bull: partners in the league of honour (p32)
- Victory headlines (back endpapers)

Autobiography
Make a collection of books which show diverse ways in which people write about their lives. Include books written for adults, as well as those written specifically for children. (Photographic stories, chronological accounts, thematic accounts, a collection of stories about critical incidents, comic)

The scrapbook form can be used as a model for children writing their own autobiographies or fictionalised biographies of characters from literature (e.g. Harry Potter) or history (Queen Victoria).