



Gilbert and the Guardians of Melbourne

A new digital storybook for primary school students investigates the founding of Melbourne through the eyes of Gilbert, Melbourne's first cat.

Dr Jo Clyme, History Teachers' Association of Victoria

Melbourne Day is held on 30 August every year to mark the day that the schooner *Enterprize* arrived on the north bank of the Yarra River in 1835. The *Enterprize* had travelled from Van Diemen's Land to find new sheep-grazing areas with only a small crew. The ship was captained by John Lancey and among the passengers were blacksmith James Gilbert, his pregnant wife, Mary, and Mary's tabby cat. The landing spot is where the Melbourne Immigration Museum stands today and is commemorated by a small grassed area with a 20-metre flagpole as part of a permanent monument, known as Enterprize Park, and a plaque on the wharf.

To share the story of the *Enterprize* and encourage interest in the history of Melbourne, the Melbourne Day Committee approached the History Teachers' Association of Victoria to help develop some resources for upper primary school students. We came up with the idea of a digital story book that could help students develop their skills in both history and literacy. The plot centres on Gilbert, a talking tabby cat, who meets a group of students on excursion in the City of Melbourne. The students have been given a research question: 'Who founded Melbourne?' Gilbert helps them by introducing them to the statues of famous historical figures who all claim to know the answer.

Bunjil the eagle reminds them that Indigenous communities were here long before settlement and the stone lions of Chinatown urge them to consider the

role immigration plays in shaping a city. The statues of John Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner bicker over who was really the founding father of Melbourne. Even the animals on the City of Melbourne crest chime in with their opinion on who founded Melbourne. In this way, the statues demonstrate historical perspectives, leaving students to weigh up the evidence and come to their own conclusion. The book emphasises that there is no one truth to the founding of Melbourne and that all histories must be interrogated.

The education resource is designed to tease out the historical facts and issues raised in the book. It can be adapted for use by students in Years 3–6 and provides a variety of activities across multiple intelligences. Students start with activities relating to the theme covered by each page of the story, such as transport, immigration, water or Indigenous culture, and then move onto inquiry tasks which are supported by recommended web links for research. Each topic is accompanied by a 'did you know' fact presented by Gilbert the cat. The kit includes a range of final projects, including asking students to add a new page to the existing book or creating a class book titled *Gilbert's Guide to Melbourne* focusing on their own suburb.

The book and education kit were developed in consultation with many individuals and groups, including Melbourne Water and the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council. The

kit was recently tested with St Monica's Catholic Primary School in Footscray. A key member of the project team was Scarlet Sykes-Hesterman, a Year 12 student from Northcote High School who drew the illustrations for the book.

The *Gilbert and the Guardians of Melbourne* free ebook and education kit can be accessed at the Melbourne Day website <http://melbourneday.com.au/education>.

html#gilbert. We'd love to hear from any teachers using the resource and see samples of student work relating to the book – contact Jo Clyne (HTAV Manager of Education and Consultancy Services) at joclyne@htav.asn.au or Sarah Styring (Executive Officer, Melbourne Day Committee) at ExecutiveOfficer@MelbourneDay.com.au.

Below: Gilbert interviews Jo (the author) and Scarlet (the illustrator) about developing *Gilbert and the Guardians of Melbourne*.

Jo – Why do you think that picture story books can be an effective way of teaching students about history?



Well, Gilbert, stories link together information in a way that helps us remember it. By turning the statues of Melbourne into characters, the book encourages students to think about historical perspectives and how much Melbourne has changed over time.



Scarlet – What did you learn about history and publishing from the experience of illustrating my book?

Working on the book was a new and insightful experience for me, as I learnt a lot of things about Melbourne's history that I hadn't previously known, such as that there is a John Batman monument with a plaque. The experience of working on a book collaboratively with a writer was something I have never done before, but I really enjoyed it!

