



**TOM APPLEBY**  
**CONVICT BOY**  
**Jackie French**

**TEACHING IDEAS**

In **Tom Appleby Convict Boy**, Jackie French describes the events that shaped Tom's early life from his time as an only child through to his life as an orphan, a chimney sweep, a convict and finally an independent farmer in his own right. Through Tom's life, Jackie also shows what influenced the early British settlements in Australia.

**Themes for discussion:**

**\* Life in 18<sup>th</sup> century London:**

How would a town without cars, buses, trucks, telephones, supermarkets, refrigeration or compulsory school for kids be different from today?

**\* Courage:**

How is courage important in helping us to take risks and do things on our own?

**\* Orphans:**

What happens to kids who lose their parents today?

**\* Child labour:**

Chimney sweeps -

In Tom's time, country fireplaces mostly had wood fires; city dwellers burnt coal.

Why do you think having a fire was so important and why were chimney sweeps so necessary in homes that had coal-burning fires?

**\* Friendship:**

How do friendships affect our lives and our sense of who we are?

**\* Convict Life:**

How might the life of a convict vary depending on when they were sent to Australia and whom they worked for?

To what did "ticket of leave" refer?

**\* Transportation – Prison Hulks and life at sea:**

How might the sailors and convicts have been affected by poor nutrition and the lack of fresh water?

Why was there a high risk of shipwreck? What did it mean if a ship was stuck in the "doldrums"?

**\* Settlers and their relationship with the Aboriginals:**

How differently did the settlers and the native people of Australia view the land and their relationship to it?

**\* Self-sufficiency through farming:**

What foods would have been available to the early settlers?

Many of the settlers believed that they were starving. Why?

How was the food in their new home different from the food in England?

How would they have distinguished between safe plants and poisonous ones?

**\* Shattered dreams and renewed hope for the future:**

How do people continue to make plans when their dreams are repeatedly dashed?

**\* Ghosts:**

What does it mean when people talk about their ghosts in relation to their past?

**\* Darkness and light – the importance of light to the well-being of humans:**

People in Tom's time used oil lamps, candles made from beeswax or slush lamps. Try spending a night with just lamplight.

How much light does it really give for reading or sewing?

If you didn't want to go to bed when it got dark, what might you have done if you couldn't read or sew?

Ask someone over the age of sixty what they did when they were kids, before TV?

### Ideas for group discussion and units of work:

1. In the beginning of the story, Tom witnessed the death of his father and suddenly became an orphan. Have the students discuss the way in which Tom adapted to the changes in his world and to what extent Tom had control over his own destiny.
2. Discuss the timeline in the story - the many changes that occurred in Tom's life and the ways in which he changed or remained the same.
3. Before his father died, Tom dreamt of following in his footsteps and becoming a printer. When this dream was shattered, Tom became disillusioned but he never gave up hope. Discuss the importance of dreams with the students and the human capacity to rise above adversity towards the realisation of dreams.
4. After his father died, Tom embraced a "courage cloak". Discuss ways in which fear can affect our actions and whether or not wearing the courage cloak allowed Tom to face and conquer his fears.
5. Tom developed many friendships during the course of his life. Discuss the importance of friendship and how his friendships with Jem, Sam, Rob and Sergeant Stanley affected him.
6. The Sergeant was a veteran of several battles by the time he came to Australia. What wars might he have fought in?
7. Also discuss the difficulty Tom had with being a convict and his feelings of inferiority. When Tom felt accepted into the sergeant's family, how did it change his outlook on life and his plans for the future?
8. Discuss what may have happened for Tom in the intervening years between his move to Rose Hill with the sergeant and Rob and his ninetieth birthday. Discuss what it meant to be a new settler, farming the land and building a home and family. This could be written up as a scenario by a group of students working together.
9. Thomas Appleby left the care of his land to his descendants. How do you think Thomas's land should be looked after?

Discuss the way in which Thomas Appleby came to terms with his ghosts and learnt to accept his past for the future generations of his family.

#### Creative ideas based on the story:

1. Make an illustration of the HMAS Scarborough after viewing the following website:  
[www.users.bigpond.com/amitie/firstfleet/scarborough.htm](http://www.users.bigpond.com/amitie/firstfleet/scarborough.htm)
2. Have the class work in teams to design a fully illustrated version of Tom's early childhood in London to his planned move to Rose Hill at the end of the story.
3. Build a small clay or matchstick model of the HMAS Scarborough or the house and farm at Sergeant's Cove.
4. Make a diorama of the inside of the ship using modelling clay and paint to show the details of the hull.
5. Cook a meal using the foods that would have been available to the settlers in the first three years of the colony.
6. Look for wild edible plants in your area. Grow a vegetable garden – but pretend you are a settler and don't have real tools like shovels etc. Try to grow enough food to feed one person.

#### Websites of interest

[www.users.bigpond.com/amitie/firstfleet/scarborough.htm](http://www.users.bigpond.com/amitie/firstfleet/scarborough.htm)

View the *HMAS Scarborough*, its dimensions and a full-colour diagram of the convict transport ship.

[www.jag10.freemove.co.uk](http://www.jag10.freemove.co.uk)

View details of the ships in the First Fleet and passenger lists of each one, including the *HMAS Scarborough*.

[www.convictcentral.com/index.html](http://www.convictcentral.com/index.html)

Check out this site for a thorough overview of the convict era - view a timeline, information about life at sea, arrival in Australia, convict life and emancipation of the prisoners.

To review other titles by Jackie French, check out [www.harpercollins.com.au](http://www.harpercollins.com.au)