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Best Mates by Philippa Werry, illustrated by Bob Kerr

Publisher: New Holland Publishers

RRP \$19.99

Three lads who grew up together on the same street in a small New Zealand town signed up to serve in the First World War. Young men who had never left home thought it would be a great adventure.

The experiences of the three friends are shown from the time they leave home, their troopship journey to the Middle East, their preparation for the ANZAC invasion of the Gallipoli Peninsula, and the eventual outcome. The empathetic storyline shows the reality of war, the loss of life, the courage of individuals, and the humanity of soldiers on both sides of the battlefield.

The author's sensitive writing encapsulates the spirit of comradeship. It's a poignant and well-told tale. In a restrained and honest way, young readers learn the true price of war.

Illustrator Bob Kerr portrays young Kiwi men with great skill. The three friends are a united trio. The war brings them even closer together and this is seen in the way they share everything. Yet, in their initial farewell, Harry is shown behind a closed window of the train while the other two lean out another window.

A double page spread showing the three Kiwis in the trenches on one page and three Turkish soldiers digging on the opposite page, highlights the similarity and common background of the combatants. The ochre-coloured scenes are contrasted by the deep-blues of the ANZACs departing at night from Anzac Cove. The lone soldier standing in the boat to catch one last glimpse of his fallen friend is very effective.

The final pages tie the story together with family life for the two survivors and how they at last find peace with their memories. Two fact pages at the end give more details about New Zealand's involvement at Gallipoli. A valuable book for family and classroom discussion.

Reviewed by children's book author, Jean Bennett

Author's website:

<http://www.philippawerry.co.nz/>

Interview with illustrator:

<http://christchurchcitylibraries.com/kids/childrensauthors/bobkerr.asp>

