

BOOKNOTES

EDUCATORS GUIDE

classroom connections

World War II
Courage and Honor
Death and Dying
Coming of Age

Grades 6 up

about the book

Sixteen-year-old Kak lies about his age and his family to join the Canadian Air Force in World War II because he wants to fly. Kak soon learns that flying a Halifax bomber on missions to Germany is dangerous, and he lives daily with the fear that he will die in battle.

Raised by an abusive, alcoholic father, Kak decides to join the Air Force and is sent to England to begin his duty. Kak worries that the crew will discover his age, and he fears dying in flight; both force him to keep to himself until he meets, Bert, the base pigeonier. Through Bert's concern for him and his understanding of Kak's struggle between his sense of duty and his fear, Kak survives the terrifying bombing missions and begins to take stock of his own moral fiber.

The night that *B for Buster* crashes changes Kak's life forever. After spending time recuperating, he does his best to find Bert, but to no avail. Kak then begins the long journey home and returns as a man—no longer the boy who left with stars in his eyes and the dream of flying in his heart.

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in the classroom

Reading a book about World War II will generate discussion about death and dying, courage and honor, superstition, coming-of-age, and the effects of war both on a country and its people. *B for Buster* will also enable you to make connections with history, geography, language arts, science, and math curriculum.

pre-reading activity

Using the suggested internet resources, ask students to identify the designated task of a World War II Halifax flight crew: pilot, navigator, bomb aimer, rear gunner, mid-upper gunman, flight engineer, and wireless operator. Ask students to write an explanation of the responsibility each member is assigned and to identify their position in the Halifax.



thematic connections

Death and Dying—When Donny was preparing for his last op, he decided to give away his Morris. Kak realized that “all [Donny] wanted was to be remembered, to be famous in a way.” (p. 97) Do you think this a common sentiment for men who risk their lives fighting in a war? How are the vets from previous wars still remembered?

Courage and Honor—Bert says, “Real courage is carrying on though you are scared to bits. It’s doing what you have to do.” (p. 111) Based on his experience, why would Bert have a greater understanding of courage and honor? Do you agree with his definition? Why or why not?

Superstition—All the men in Kak’s flight crew have lucky charms and believe it is their charms that keep them safe. Even Lofty, who says he doesn’t believe in luck, is never without his pipe. Do you think their charms helped them in any way? How was Percy a different kind of good luck charm? Why did the crew come to recognize Percy as one of their own?

Coming of Age—When Kak leaves his home in Canada to join the Canadian Air Force, he is running from an abusive father and a life he hates. He dreams of the glory of fighting a war and flying. What happens to change his attitude about flying and fighting? What regrets does he have regarding his decision to leave home?

Effects of War—While in London, Kak and the crew witnessed the effects of bombs similar to those they dropped on the Germans, and he says, “I was shocked by the destruction that a dozen bombers could bring.” (p. 148) How did the destruction of life and property change Kak’s outlook on war? Did it make a difference in his actions or the actions of the crew?

connecting to the curriculum

History—The CO refers to the Canadian Group in his introductory talk with Kak’s crew. As a class, investigate the Canadian Group and their contribution to the World War II war effort. The following sites will be helpful:

www.ww2.org.uk/links/linklhg.html
www.clic.net/~militar/items2.htm

Ask each student to choose one aspect of the Canadian Group and write a brief explanation to read to the class. Compile the information into an informative book to be shared with other classrooms.

The author makes reference to the Halifax and Lancaster war planes and to *Memphis Belle*, a plane in an American squadron. Assign each student to investigate the planes. Ask them to make a poster with pictures and descriptions of the planes to share with the class.

Geography—The Canadian Bomber Group that the author described was stationed in Yorkshire, and they flew seven hour to nine hour missions to several cities in Germany. On a European map, locate Yorkshire and the German cities that were bombed by these Canadian bombers: Düsseldorf, Bochum, Gelsenkirchen, Krefeld, Aachen, Wuppertal, Hamburg, Berlin, Munchen-Gladbach, Peenemunde, and Mannheim. Ask students to draw a tracer line from Yorkshire to each of these cities to visually comprehend the distance the bombers had to fly.

Language Arts—Read the poem “High Flight,” a sonnet written by John Gillespie Magee, a pilot with the Royal Canadian Air Force in the Second World War. (p. 22). Discuss the meaning of the poem and how the characters of *B for Buster* live its meaning. Then ask students to write a poem discussing a personal hobby or pastime using “High Flight” as a model. Give students the opportunity to read their poems to the class.

Science—Pigeons play a major role in *B for Buster*, and on pages 31 and 64, the author reveals information about pigeons and their use in World War II. Assign students a partner and ask them to investigate homing pigeons: their training, breeding, and uses in current day. Helpful Web sites include:

www.feathersite.com/Poultry/Pigeons/BRKPigeons.html
birds.cornell.edu/ppw/coolfacts.htm

Each pair can report their findings to the class.

Math—Kak figures the odds are against him living through thirty ops, and on pages 84 and 85, he sets out a math problem. He says, “It was impossible, mathematically, that I would ever get home to Canada.” Ask students to write an equation, proving him either right or wrong. Collect the equations and compile them on one page; then, ask the students in pairs to solve the equations.

vocabulary/ use of language

Have students find synonyms for the following words: *swank* (p. 60), *bray* (p. 10), *gawked* (p. 113), *seethed* (p. 285), *talisman* (p. 298). Ask students if the author’s word or their synonym works best in the sentence; have students justify their choice.

related titles

by theme

The Last Mission

Harry Mazer

Historical Fiction (World War II)

Coming of Age • Courage • War

Grades 6 up / 0-440-94797-9

Dell Laurel-Leaf

Under the Blood-Red Sun

Graham Salisbury

Historical Fiction (World War II)

Coming of Age • Courage • War

Grades 6 up / 0-440-21905-1

Dell Laurel-Leaf

Other Bells for Us to Ring

Robert Cormier

Historical Fiction (World War II)

Death and Dying • War

Grades 6 up / 0-440-22862-X

Dell Laurel-Leaf



about the author

Born in Ontario, Canada, **Iain Lawrence** decided to be a writer after his grade three teacher told his parents he had talent. After high school, he wrote short stories while working as a journalist, but it took five years of writing before he had his first book published. He has since published seven books for young adults. Mr. Lawrence loves sailing and spends several months a year traveling by boat. He lives on the Gulf Islands of British Columbia.

internet resources

Halifax Appreciation Society

www.halifaxbomber.com

A description of flying in a Halifax Bomber and honoring all the men and women who served and made the supreme sacrifice.

Halifax Bombers

www.militaryartgallery.com/HTML/halifax_bombers.htm

Picture of Halifax Bombers in flight. The Military Art Gallery offers the most comprehensive selection of aviation, maritime, and military art prints in the world.

on the web

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