

## These notes are for:

- Primary
- Years 3-6

## Key Learning Areas:

- English
- History

## Example of:

- Narrative nonfiction
- Picture book/visual text
- Historical narrative
- Biography
- Persuasive language

## National Curriculum Focus\*:

### English Content Descriptions

Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
ACELA1478	ACELA1489	ACELT1608	ACELA1517
ACELT1594	ACELA1491	ACELT1610	ACELA1518
ACELT1599	ACELA1492	ACELT1612	ACELA1522
ACELY1675	ACELA1496	ACELY1698	ACELA1525
ACELY1676	ACELA1498	ACELY1701	ACELT1615
ACELY1678	ACELT1605	ACELY1703	ACELT1618
ACELY1680	ACELT1607	ACELY1704	ACELY1709
ACELY1682	ACELT1794	ACELY1705	ACELY1711
ACELY1683	ACELY1690		ACELY1712
	ACELY1692		ACELY1713
	ACELY1694		ACELY1801
	ACELY1695		ACELY1714

\*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.

## Themes:

- Truth & lies
- Deception
- Storytelling/tall tales
- Celebrity, fame & notoriety
- The Victorian era

\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

Walker Books Australia Ph +61 2 9517 9577  
 Locked Bag 22 Fax +61 2 9517 9997  
 Newtown, N.S.W., 2042

For enquiries contact: [educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au](mailto:educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au)

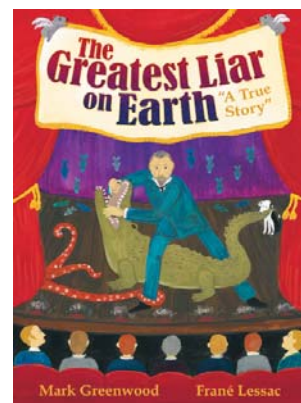
Notes © 2012 Mark Greenwood, Frané Lessac & Walker Books Australia Pty. Ltd.

All Rights Reserved.

## The Greatest Liar on Earth

### The Greatest Liar on Earth

Author: Mark Greenwood  
 Illustrator: Frané Lessac  
 ISBN: 9781921529856  
 ARRP: \$29.95  
 NZRRP: \$32.99  
 April 2012



## Synopsis

In 1898 a penniless Frenchman arrived in London with the most amazing story “a man ever lived to tell.” His extraordinary tale was stranger than fiction. He is feted by audiences across the land. The Royal Geographical Society greet him with thunderous applause. The Association for the Advancement of Science toast him with an approving clink of crystal.

His responses to questions from the Empire’s most brilliant minds are persuasive, with a meticulous recollection of his adventures. His confidence is unshakeable. Dignitaries are struck by his charm. Experts are satisfied that the Frenchman’s narrative is of the very highest scientific value. His gripping story, printed in the press, creates a sensation. His public appearances are accompanied by a clamor of curious onlookers. Queen Victoria herself is a fan.

But is this intriguing man who he claims to be? Are his ripping yarns the concoction of a charlatan? Is he, as skeptics claim, the greatest liar on earth?

## Author/Illustrator Information

**Mark Greenwood** is a musician and award-winning children’s author. His books aim to foster a greater appreciation and understanding of Australian myths and legends. Mark enjoys working with students of all ages, inspiring and developing their natural curiosity about books and writing. He has twice won the Western Australian Premier’s Award for children’s books. *Simpson and His Donkey* was Honour Book in 2009 at the Children’s Book Council of Australia Awards. He is married to Frané Lessac and they live with their two children in Western Australia. For more information about Mark’s work, please visit his website: [www.markgreenwood.com.au](http://www.markgreenwood.com.au)

**Frané Lessac** is originally from New Jersey and is an artist of international renown having exhibited in London, Paris, New York, Los Angeles and the Caribbean. Residing in Western Australia, Lessac now has over 40 children’s books published throughout the world. Her work has won Australian and international awards and has been translated into numerous languages. In 2010 she was awarded the Muriel Barwell Award for Distinguished Service to Children’s literature. For more information about her work, please visit her website: [www.franelessac.com](http://www.franelessac.com)

## How To Use These Notes

These notes provide a variety of discussion questions and activities that can be used with *The Greatest Liar on Earth*. Please select according to the level, learning style and targeted outcomes of your students.

*“Australian history is so curious and strange.  
It does not read like history, but like the most beautiful lies.”*

**Mark Twain**

## **Classroom Activities**

The following activities were developed by Mark Greenwood.

### **Comprehension Questions**

After reading the book, write out answers to the following questions. You may need to use a dictionary or the internet for some.

- What is an eclipse and what might it foreshadow (i.e. what hints might it give about future events in the book)?
- Where did Louis go to study?
- Where did Louis get his ideas from?
- What was the name of the book Louis wrote?
- What was Louis seeking when on his first expedition?
- Who saved Louis's life?
- How did Louis survive on the deserted island?
- How did Louis steer turtles?
- What is a gondolier?
- What is Madame Tussaud's?
- What does Louis wear around his neck after wrestling the crocodile?
- What did newspapers claim was the real name of Louis de Rougemont?
- When Louis left the island how many days was he at the mercy of the sea before a sliver of land appeared?
- What did Louis say “rose at dusk in great clouds”?
- Louis discovered mountains of what?
- What was the plan Louis had that would assure him fame and fortune?
- What was the name of Louis's vaudeville act?
- What did Louis mean when he asked: “Who has not walked in the woods, seen a cat, and called it a wolf?”
- In 1887 what did five boys discover on a beach?

- Is it true it can rain fish?
- Who was with Louis through all his sufferings?
- What delighted Bruno most?

### **Discussion Questions: Tall Tales**

- Mark Twain was a master at creating tall tales. He would begin with an ordinary and very believable situation and gradually embellish it until it had grown into something extraordinarily funny. What did Mark Twain mean when he said: “Do not tell fish stories where the people know you; but particularly, don't tell them where they know the fish.”?
- A “fish” story is a story that exaggerates the truth – the fish gets bigger every time the fisherman tells the story. What's the best “fish” story that you've ever heard?
- Experiment with your own tall tale-telling: Write down two things about yourself that are true and one thing that is made up. It can be anything – adventures you've been on, music you like, a fact about your family, people you met, etc. The idea is to use your skills of persuasion in the words you choose or, if sharing them out loud, in the way you tell these statements. After you share your three statements, the class has to guess which two are true and which one is a lie.
- What makes people believe a good story? Is it the subject matter or the way the person tells it?
- After we have been entertained by a story, and we have been told it is true, does it matter in the end if it is actually true or not?
- Look up the word “fabulist”. What does it mean? Would you use it to describe Louis's behaviour. What are some other words you might use?
- Perhaps Louis did not deliberately delude his public, but rather, he himself was deluded. Discuss this idea as a class. What are delusions of grandeur? (You may need to look this up on the internet or in a book.) Could this idea be used to explain Louis's behaviour?
- Can you name another famed teller of tall tales? Tell the rest of the class about them.

### **Writing Activities**

- Write the news article accompanying this headline: “Truth is stranger than fiction! Shipwrecked! Amazing true-life adventures of a castaway! Read all about it!”



- Write a newspaper article exposing Louis as a fraud or questioning the facts of Louis's adventures. Then, write a second article in defence of Louis's story.
- Write a report about Louis's meeting with Queen Victoria. At the end of the nineteenth century, Australia – and the world for that matter – contained many undiscovered territories, launching risky expeditions that would be written and talked about for decades. Explorers sought gold, new species, trails and a little spot of fame. Write a story labelled "The Young Explorer" about your adventures as a young explorer in the wilds of Australia.
- Create a journal called "Explorations in Australia".
- Put your storytelling to the test by taking four items found in your classroom or home and weave them into your own tall tale. Remember that a tall tale takes what's real and believable and "grows" it into something funny. How will you "grow" your story? Record the development of your story during the editing process.
- Take factual information and create a tall tale about:
  - a character who accomplishes great feats
  - a character with an animal or object that helps him or her
  - an author who uses exaggeration and describes things greater than they really are
  - a character who does not like what others call progress
  - a famous person.

### LOUIS DE ROUGEMONT'S GREAT STORY STARTERS

#### The Waterhole

"The waterhole shrunk until it was dry as dust. I dug a shaft into the parched bed of the lagoon. A daily trickle filled a trough, and one by one they came to drink from my well ... "

#### The Lost Explorer

"I found the famous explorer face down, arms outstretched, fingers dug into the sand. He'd suffered terribly from the burning sun. He told me ... "

#### The Apparition

"One night an apparition appeared at my fire. I watched it take shape in the smoke. I learned afterwards, about the caves nearby .... "

#### The Creature

"Whatever it was that infested the lagoon made a huge commotion when caught in my net made of strips of hide and stringybark ... "

#### The Discovery

"I found it in the hot hush of noon, when a dust storm sprung up and danced on the sunbleached bones ... "

### Further Research: Learning About the Past

- What was the name of the magazine that serialised the "Adventures of Louis de Rougemont"?
- What did the magazine's motto, "Truth is Stranger than Fiction", mean?
- What was the name of the London newspaper that ran a piece of investigative journalism, which revealed Louis de Rougemont's story as a hoax?
- What is the biggest squid ever caught?
- Research places where fish have fallen from the sky.

### Visual Literacy Activities: Studying the Illustrations

The following activities were developed by Frané Lessac. For a close visual analysis of the book cover, please visit the Walker Teachers' page.

- Frané Lessac's style of art is called naïve art. What is naïve art?
- Frané Lessac used primary colours on the front cover. Name the primary colours.
- Describe the clothes that Louis wears in the book. Does the clothing show his circumstances? Is there a connection between the first and last pictures?
- Looking at the illustrations of Louis on stage, compare a theatre of the early twentieth century with one of today.
- Make a list of the differences you can find in Piccadilly Circus, London today, as compared to the painting of Piccadilly Circus by Frané Lessac.
- When Louis said he saw flying wombats, what might he have seen? Draw a flying wombat.
- Louis claimed he saw an evil monstrous fish that carried a deadly sword in its mouth. Does a fish like this exist? If you find one, draw it.
- Create a school of gruesome fish with bulging eyes and hairy moustaches.
- Frané Lessac disguises one of her pets in her books. What is it and can you find it in the book? Does the real pet get any acknowledgement?
- Where do you think Frané gets her ideas for the paintings in the book?
- Using a tissue, dip it in water and white paint and see if you can create a foggy scene over one of your own paintings.
- Redesign the cover putting yourself onstage with some different whimsical props.

## Mark Greenwood on Writing *The Greatest Liar on Earth*

*The Greatest Liar on Earth* is, on the surface, an adventure story – a remarkable tale of shipwreck, catastrophe and miraculous events.

But beneath the surface it is the “true story” of an unusual character, perhaps an overly enthusiastic dreamer, perhaps a charlatan, who is forced to confront the consequences of his storytelling.

There was a time when his incredible tales took audiences to places they could only imagine. His popularity grew as people turned to his adventures to enrich their lives. Dignitaries were struck by his charm. He was overwhelmed by invitations to lecture from every corner of the globe.

But when he is disgraced and fame and glory has been stripped from him, Louis de Rougemont earns a meagre living telling stories to anyone who will listen.

In *The Greatest Liar on Earth* we are left to ask – after we have been entertained by a ripping yarn – does it matter if it is actually true or not?



## Frané Lessac on Illustrating *The Greatest Liar on Earth*

Creating whimsical fish with hairy moustaches, witty flying wombats and a hilarious scene with cannibals was out the normal spectrum of my subject matter. I tried to imagine Louis de Rougemont’s tall tales could be true. In the process of creating the art I found myself, like many others, struck by the charm of one of history’s colourful characters – a loveable dreamer – a master of “beautiful lies”.



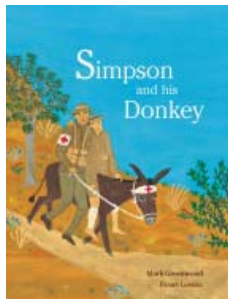
## Discover the past with these other great picture books!

Teachers’ notes available for all titles at [www.walkerbooks.com.au/Teachers](http://www.walkerbooks.com.au/Teachers)

### **Simpson & His Donkey**

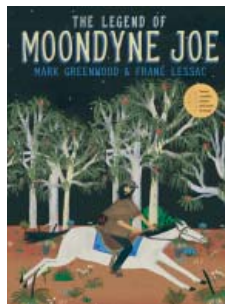
Mark Greenwood & Frané Lessac (illus)  
9781921529542 (PB)  
AU\$16.95/NZ\$18.99

\*Also available as HB and Big Book



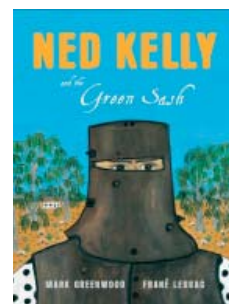
### **The Legend of Moondyne Joe**

Mark Greenwood & Frané Lessac (illus)  
9781921720123 (PB)  
AU\$16.95/NZ\$18.99



### **Ned Kelly & the Green Sash**

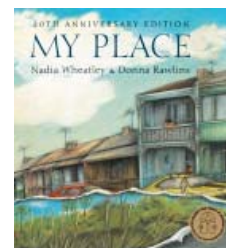
Mark Greenwood & Frané Lessac (illus)  
9781921150876 (HB)  
AU\$29.95/NZ\$31.99



### **My Place**

Nadia Wheatley & Donna Rawlins (illus)  
9781921150654 (PB)  
AU\$19.95/NZ\$27.99

\*Also available as HB and Big Book (July 2012)



### **Song of the Dove**

Errol Broome & Sonia Kretschmar (illus)  
9781921529245 (HB)  
AU\$29.95/NZ\$31.99



For information about new releases,  
the latest book news and links to a range of fabulous Teacher resources,  
sign up to our **free education newsletter** at [www.walkerbooks.com.au/Teachers](http://www.walkerbooks.com.au/Teachers)



# Write Your Own Newspaper Article

Write a newspaper article about Louis de Rougemont on the newspaper front page below. You might like to also include advertisements, pictures and openings of other articles.

Hints:

- Make sure you write in a formal register and use a mixture of informative and persuasive language.
- Include the most important information in the opening paragraph of your article. Remember the five Ws: “who”, “what”, “where”, “when” and “why”.
- Get inspiration by looking at some real 19th century newspapers first. The British Library “British Newspapers 1800-1900” website is a useful starting point: <http://newspapers11.bl.uk/blcs/>

## The Walker Times

*The Greatest Liar on Earth* by Mark Greenwood and Frané Lessac

# LOUIS DE ROUGEMONT: THE GREATEST LIAR ON EARTH?

