

Teacher  
Notes

# RED DAY

A NOVEL BY

SANDY FUSSELL

## TEACHER NOTES

written by  
**LEONIE JORDAN**

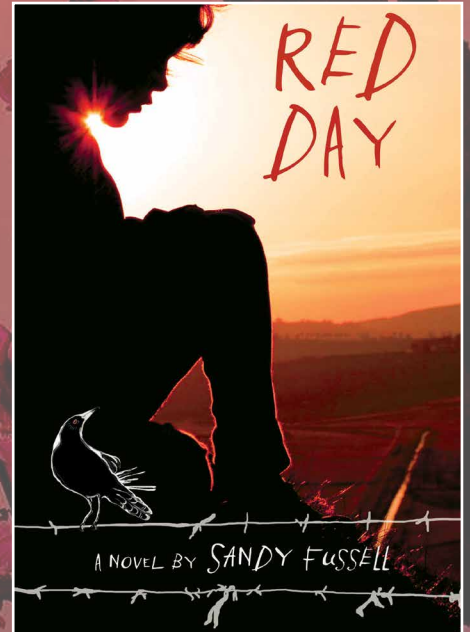
WALKER BOOKS

# RED DAY

Set in a modern-day small town among the remnants of a Japanese POW camp, this is the story of Charlie. Charlie has synaesthesia and hence sees and hears differently: people have auras; days of the week are coloured; numbers and letters have attitudes.

But when Charlie meets Japanese exchange student Kenichi, her senses intensify and she experiences flashbacks, nausea, and hears unfamiliar voices in her head pulling her back to the town's violent past. This is heartfelt contemporary storytelling at its best.

*Red Day* is influenced by Sandy Fussell's longstanding love of Japanese culture and history and childhood memories created on school-holiday visits to Cowra while visiting her grandparents' farm. There she became acquainted with local landmarks, including the remains of the Camp 12 site, the Japanese Gardens and War Cemetery, and the town's historical displays. *Red Day* is also based on Cowra High School's annual exchange program with Seikei High in Tokyo, which has been running for forty-five years.



## Sandy Fussell

Sandy Fussell loves words, numbers and the internet. She lives on the NSW south coast with her family, a Scottish deerhound and four cats, one of which likes to eat manuscript pages. She has been awarded four CBCA notables, a Younger Readers CBCA Book of the Year shortlisting, the Sakura Medal in Japan, an international IBBY award and her picture book was praised by the New York Times. Her books are published in Australia, the UK, the US and Asia. Sandy is often found in a school library wielding her Samurai

Kids books or teaching a Minecraft-based writing workshop.

## About the Author of these Notes

These resources were created by Leonie Jordan. Leonie Jordan is a former Secondary School English Teacher and Children's & Youth Librarian who has presented at the State Library of NSW on numerous occasions. She has worked for a number of publishing companies including Walker Books Australia and Allen & Unwin, and regularly reviews and creates test material for Educational Assessment Australia, writers of the NAPLAN, ICAS and GAT assessments.



## Level

- Primary: Years 4-6 / Ages 9-12

## Learning Areas

- English
- Humanities & Social Science – History

## General Capabilities

- Literacy
- Information and Communication Technology Capability

- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Personal and Social Capability
- Ethical Understanding
- Intercultural Understanding

## Cross-Curriculum Priorities

Australia & Australia's Relationship with Asia – Organising Ideas OI.5-OI.8

		Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
<b>ENGLISH</b>				
Language		ACELA1488 ACELA1489 ACELA1491 ACELA1492 ACELA1494 ACELA1498	ACELA1502 ACELA1504 ACELA1512	ACELA1517 ACELA1518 ACELA1522 ACELA1525
Literature		ACELT1602 ACELT1603 ACELT1604 ACELT1605 ACELT1607 ACELT1794	ACELT1608 ACELT1609 ACELT1795 ACELT1610 ACELT1611 ACELT1612 ACELT1798	ACELT1613 ACELT1614 ACELT1615 ACELT1617 ACELT1800
Literacy		ACELY1688 ACELY1690 ACELY1692 ACELY1694 ACELY1695 ACELY1697	ACELY1698 ACELY1796 ACELY1701 ACELY1702 ACELY1704	ACELY1709 ACELY1816 ACELY1711 ACELY1713 ACELY1801 ACELY1714
History	Humanities & Social Sciences	ACHASSI074 ACHASSI076 ACHASSI077 ACHASSI080	ACHASSI094 ACHASSI095 ACHASSI1097 ACHASSI099 ACHASSI101	ACHASSI122 ACHASSI123 ACHASSI125 ACHAI127

Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian Curriculum ([www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au)). However, this is not an exhaustive list of Australian Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text. Information is current as of December 2019.

## Discussion Questions & Learning

### Activities

Use the following questions and activities to explore the novel.

### Themes

A range of themes are presented in *Red Day* including:

- Family
- Friendship
- History and the past – local history, national history, time travel
- World War II – the war within Australia
- Enemies and allies
- Student exchange programs
- Cultural understanding
- Death and grief
- Secrecy
- Healing and forgiveness
- Individuality and uniqueness
  - synaesthesia
- Rural life

### Plot

- Discuss the title of the book. What does it refer to? Does it have more than one meaning? What significance does the colour red have in Japan?
- In the novel, the past is revealed intermittently through Charlotte's persistent flashbacks to the time of the breakout. Why do you think Sandy Fussell has chosen to reveal events in this way?
- Identify the various subplots of the novel; for example, the present-day mystery of the photograph, the growing friendship between

## Style and Structure

Kenichi and Charlotte, the rift between Nana Ruth and Coralie, and the breakout in 1944.

- Create a graph or diagram depicting the main events of the story. Use different colours to represent the various subplots and the points where these subplots interconnect.
- Write a plot outline for a sequel to *Red Day* set three years in the future when Charlotte goes to visit Kenichi in Japan. Remember to include an inciting incident or problem, a series of events which increase the tension, a plot climax and a resolution. To make your story more complex, you might also choose to include a number of subplots.
- Choose an arresting title for your sequel; one which commands the reader's attention, gives them an idea of what the story will be about and creates a particular mood. Use word processing software to select an appropriate font for the title. Write a 1-2 sentence explanation of why you have chosen this font.

### Setting

- *Red Day* is set in Cowra, a rural town in NSW. What do we learn about Cowra from the novel? In what ways is Charlotte's life, as a highschool student in a farming community, different to the life of a student in the city?
- Locate Cowra on a map.
- In chapter 5, Coralie gives Kenichi a tour of Cowra. Using information from this chapter and other parts of the book, create a map of the town.
- Download the "Cowra Voices" app at <https://www.cowravoices.org/> Use this app to take a virtual tour of the town and hear residents talk about local landmarks and Cowra history.

- “Old people, like Mum, are always talking about rain. Reminiscing about when it last rained or looking up and wondering when it will rain next. I can see forever across the lucerne fields, a crisscross of brown and bore-watered green where the crop struggles to flower, and as usual, there’s not a cloud in the sky.” (pp. 33-34) Drought is an underpinning reality of life in a rural community. What other challenges might such communities face? Would you like to live in a country town?
- “My mother said Elsie was an exceptional woman, way ahead of her time. ... She managed that farm much better than her father did. And to think, if it wasn’t for the lads off serving the country, she would never have had the chance. It’s a different world for women now, thank goodness. My niece Nina is a lawyer in Orange.” (p. 109) The novel is set not only in the present-day, but in Cowra during WWII at the time of the prison breakout. How have both the town, and Australian society, changed over time?
- Write an account of the breakout from the point of view of a guard OR a Japanese soldier who escaped.
- Use Kiddle (<https://www.kiddle.co/>) or ABC Education ([education.abc.net.au/](http://education.abc.net.au/)) to research life in Australia during WWII.
- Choose an event in the novel and retell in it from the point-of-view of a different character; for instance, when Ikeda gives Elsie the photograph in the barn.
- Look at the early descriptions of Kenichi in chapters 1-2. What clues do these give that Charlotte might eventually come to like him?
- Draw a Venn diagram showing things that Charlotte and Kenichi have in common, as well as things that make them different.
- “It’s a poem. I don’t need many words if I have the right ones.” (p. 22) Compose the poem Kenichi writes in his diary on his first night with the Cartwrights. You may like to make it a haiku, which Charlotte wonders if he’s writing!
- “Miss Beadle is hoarding a treasure that doesn’t belong to her and that’s what dragons do best.” (pp. 169-170) Imagery is used to present Miss Beadle as untrustworthy and covetous, metaphorically depicting her as a spider and a dragon, among other things. Find examples of how imagery is used to create Miss Beadle’s character and present these on a poster with an appropriate illustration.
- “You might like these stories Kenichi told me about being a young, hot-shot airman. Mostly they’re his words. I try to write them exactly the way I’m told.” (p. 204) Write one of the stories Kenichi’s great-grandfather told Missy, the landlady at his boarding house.

## Characters

- Imagine that you were casting actors in a movie or television version of the book. For each of the main characters, make notes listing their name, age, general appearance, personality traits, quotes that give insight into their character, and how you would like the actor to bring them to life through their voice, movement, facial expressions etc. Include pictures of how you would like each character to look.

## Genre and Style

- *Red Day* has elements of a range of genres including coming of age story, family drama, historical fiction, time-travel fantasy, mystery, adventure story and teen romance. What do you consider the main genre of the book?

- The novel incorporates a range of text-types including text message between Lucy and Charlotte and diary entries by Elsie and Ikeda. How do these help make the novel more absorbing? What other text-types could you incorporate into the novel? Choose a text-type and craft an appropriate fragment. Explain where you would include this in the book and how it would add interest for the reader.
  - The majority of the novel is written in the first-person from Charlotte's perspective. Discuss the moments in the novel where the point-of-view changes. What is the effect of these changes?
  - "He's here somewhere. The house feels different." (p. 7) Discuss how the opening of the story intrigues the reader. What questions does it make you want to ask? How would you describe the tone or feeling it creates?
  - Look at the opening and closing sentences of other chapters in the book, exploring the ways these capture the reader's attention and compel them to keep reading. Choose 3 which you find particularly effective and share them with a partner, explaining why you think they work well.
  - Write the opening pages of a sequel to *Red Day*, using a style similar to that of Sandy Fussell. (See bullet point 5 in the "Plot" section.) Think particularly about ways of hooking the reader so that they want to read more. Share your openings with the class.
- (p. 234) What other examples can you find? Given the role colour plays in Charlotte's life, what might be the relevance of the final sentence of the book, "Today is clear as cling wrap and if I try hard, I can see all the way to Japan."? (p. 237)
- Choose a chapter of the novel and analyse the author's use of language techniques such as simile ("bark peeling like sunburnt skin" p. 33), metaphor ("English manicured with an American accent" p. 9), alliteration ("the thin thread of words" p. 16) personification ("the world is still bleary-eyed and half-asleep" p. 24), rhetorical questions ("But what about tomorrow? And the next day, and the next?" p.17) and imagery ("It rattles and shakes and bumps" p. 81).
  - "The cake tin is chock-a-block with freshly baked lamingtons. Mum is waving the Australian flag right from the start" (p. 12) What might a visitor to Australia find confusing in this sentence? Find other examples of idiom in the novel. How would you explain each to a non-native English speaker? Discuss the way idiom helps establish setting and character.
  - "Carnage is a certainty. Death is a definite. I can't move. Can't speak." (p. 219) Sandy Fussell uses short, sharp sentences to heighten tension and further immerse the reader in Charlotte's emotional experience. Choose an episode of the book where Charlotte slips back in time and study the author's use of sentence structure and imagery.
  - Discuss the way humour contributes to character and tone in the novel; for instance, "It's duelling coffee mugs from close quarters" (p. 41), "You can get a big Mac with a side serving of Cowra history" (p. 57), Charlotte's ironic reference to "cosmopolitan Cowra" (p. 187) and Kenichi's persistent pronunciation of Charlotte's name as "shallott".

## Language and Literary Techniques

- Vivid sensual imagery rich in colour and emotion is used to evoke Charlotte's unique synaesthetic view of the world. For example, "The trees are always happy" (p. 43); "The world is bright lemon-squash yellow and the sun is green and beaming."

## Visual Literacy Activities

- Research colour symbolism and create a poster showing what different colours represent in different cultures. With a partner, discuss what feelings you associate with each colour. Do you have different responses?
- Create a self-portrait using only one colour. For inspiration, you may like to look at portraits from Picasso's "blue period" and "rose period"; for example, "Autoportrait" (1901).
- In 2019, a memorial was erected to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Cowra breakout. Design your own memorial and present it to the class, explaining the main ideas you were trying to convey. Then, look at photos of the actual memorial and compare it with yours. (Photos of the memorial are available at <https://placesofpride.awm.gov.au/news/history-not-forgotten-75-years-cowra-breakout>)
- Graphic novels are a popular form of narrative in contemporary Japanese culture. Choose a section of the book to present in graphic novel format.
- Kenichi says, "Blue is the world's favourite colour." Conduct a poll of class members favourite colours and represent the results as a pie chart and bar graph.

## Research

Research one of the following topics on the internet or in the library. Focus your research by first posing a question you would like to answer, then finding information which helps you do this.

- Cowra prison camp
- WWII's impact within Australia
- The life of Japanese soldiers in WWII

- Japanese culture: food, fashion, art, music, film, literature, recreation, school and education, gender roles, children's lives, history etc
- The local history of your community
- Synaesthesia
- Student exchange programs

## Key Themes

- Create a mind-map depicting the main themes of the novel. Draw a picture or icon to represent each theme.
- Locate quotes to illustrate each of the themes. Use these to write an essay exploring the main ideas of the novel.
- Create an alternative cover for the novel. Present your cover to the class, explaining how you used visual elements such as colour, contrast, composition, framing, font and symbolism to engage readers and convey the key ideas of the novel.

## Family

- Interview family members then share a favourite story from your family's history with a partner.
- Draw your family tree.
- "It's a tradition in my mother's family for the eldest son to keep a journal. Do you have any family traditions?" (p. 21) Discuss the traditions your family has. These could be personal or cultural. Why are traditions important in keeping a family together? If you can't think of any family traditions you have, then do as Kenichi suggests and "create one"!

## Friendship

- Trace the way Charlotte's attitude towards Kenichi gradually changes over the novel. Select quotes to illustrate the shifts in her attitude.
- While Kenichi and Charlotte at first seem to be from different worlds and have little in common, over the course of the novel they come to recognise their similarities. Lucy and Charlotte, however, are best friends despite being extremely different in personality and in their interests. In your opinion, how important is it for friends to have things in common?
- Have you ever made friends with someone who at first seemed very different to you? Share your experiences with the class.

## History and the Past

- "History has opened a window into my world and I'm helping Kenichi climb through it." (p. 47) Discuss the ways history helps us understand others and learn more about ourselves. What are some things you've learnt through studying history?
- "I've studied the photo hundreds of times. It's my personal puzzle piece, marking the spot where history connects to me. Lucy thinks history is boring but that's because she can't see the interlocked shapes, stretching forward and back through time, like a virtual reality jigsaw." (p. 60) Come up with your own simile or metaphor to describe the way you see history.
- Sandy Fussell uses time-travel as a way of exposing history. Find another book that features time travel and present a book review on it for the class. Some ideas could be *Playing Beattie Bow* by Ruth Park, *A Traveller in Time* by Alison Uttley, *Tom's Midnight Garden* by Philippa Pearce and Eoin Colfer's WARP series.

- If you were able to go back in time, what period of history would you choose? Use this as the starting point for a short story about time travel.
- Visit your local history society or have a guest speaker visit your school to tell you about the history of your local area.

## War/Enemies & Allies

- "War doesn't let ordinary people make choices." (p. 44) "War changes all men, no matter what country they come from." (p. 159) "Harry wrote that he'd seen terrible things he could never tell me about and made me promise never to ask him about the war. He said sometimes it was impossible to know who was a friend and who was an enemy." (p. 159) Using the above quotes as inspiration, write a journal article from the perspective of a soldier who has recently returned from WWII.
- "My great-great-grandfather called the Camp straight away. My great-great Grandmother was kinder. She gave him tea and scones while they waited for the soldiers." (p. 47) Characters in the novel respond to the Japanese soldiers in different ways. What would you do if you encountered an escaped enemy soldier during war time?
- Have a class debate arguing the following statement: "Elsie betrayed her country by helping the escaped Japanese prisoner."
- Kenichi says, "It's good our countries are friends now." (p. 45) How has the concept of enemies and allies changed over time? Can you think of examples where countries or individuals that used to be allies have turned against each other, or where enemies have become allies? Why do you think such changes occur?



- “Mum’s treading carefully. My school provided advice on how to handle sensitive topics, like not making an issue about allies and enemies. That stuff was generations ago, but it can still hurt.” (p. 38) Imagine that you were the counsellor at Charlotte’s school. What advice would you give to host families of exchange students?
- Create a timeline of events leading up and after the prison breakout. (You may need to do additional historical research.)
- Use Trove, the National Library of Australia database, (<https://trove.nla.gov.au/>) to look up digitised newspaper articles written at the time of the breakout. (Note: make sure you select 1949-1949 in the panel on the left). For each article, discuss the following questions:
  - What is the author’s attitude towards the Japanese prisoners?
  - Is the article biased in any way? If so, what words or phrases tell you this?
  - How does the author of the article want the reader to feel?
  - Did you learn any additional information about WWII or the breakout?
  - Would you expect to see this type of article in a paper today? What would expect to be different?

## Cultural Understanding

- Create a poster with useful Japanese phrases.
- Throughout the novel, Kenichi is introduced to many aspects of Australian life including wildlife (magpies, rosellas), food (pavlova, ANZAC biscuits, lamingtons) and recreational activities (cricket). For one day, keep a list recording all aspects of your daily life which would be unfamiliar to an overseas visitor. Try to include experiences from all 5 sense groups.
- Kenichi tells Charlotte, “Japan isn’t full of people making origami, just like your streets aren’t full of kangaroos.” (p.17). How are Charlotte’s ideas about Japan and Japanese people challenged by Kenichi?
- When Kenichi observes, “All Australian names are odd”, Charlotte reflects, “That’s a fair comment. I think all Japanese names are odd.” (p. 112) Can you relate to this at all? With a partner, discuss the way that we often equate normality with what we are used to.
- Aunt Mandy is more Japan-crazy than Mum. Not only has she been to Japan too many times, but she teaches Japanese in my school.” (p. 40) Is there a particular country you’re fascinated by and would like to visit? Share your experiences in small groups.
- Discuss the ways the characters in the book are shaped by their culture; for example, the Japanese soldiers’ desire not to dishonour their families and the way that Charlotte follows her mother’s example of secrecy by not talking about Eli’s death or her synaesthesia with Lucy.
- Write a journal entry reflecting on the way you’ve been shaped by your culture. Some aspects to consider could be family, school, nationality, ethnicity and religion.
- Design a brochure for a student exchange program at your school. What local places would you highlight? What activities would students do? What would they learn? Remember, your goal is to persuade students and their parents to participate in the program!

## Death and Grief

- “It’s getting harder to keep his memory bright and shining. Every year I feel him fading, just a little. ... That’s why I wanted to his room to stay untouched and the door shut forever, keeping everything in its place. I’m holding onto his room because I’m afraid if I let it change, my brother won’t exist any more.” (p. 99) Explore the ways different characters in the novel experience grief.
- “You’re lucky to be the only one”. I struggle to keep my face blank. No-one has ever said that. Everyone in Cowra knows there’s not just me. There’s also Eli’s memory.” (p. 31) Discuss the way that Kenichi as a newcomer helps Charlotte confront her grief. How important is change in helping create healing?
- “Sadness never feels the same. This time it stretches back through time until I feel it tighten and break with a heartrending sound like a violin bow scraped too hard across the strings.” (p. 153) Write a poem exploring the theme of grief.

## Healing and Forgiveness

- Charlotte uses the metaphor “We’re a family of secrets” (p.50) to highlight the way women in her family keep themselves closed off and refuse to talk about their problems. How important is openness and communication in allowing people to heal?
- “It’s not fair to blame her.” Mum’s sobbing slowly eases. “I don’t want to blame myself.” (p. 230) Discuss the way that guilt and self-blame are presented as barriers to healing in the novel.

- “I’m so hopeful,” he says. “It’s like a gap in my family is closing.” It’s not as simple for me, but my gaps are closing too, like wounds healing.” (p. 193) While Kenichi is unable to meet his great-grandfather, by finally uncovering the true story of what happened to him, he is able to achieve peace. Discuss the way that knowing the truth, even when its difficult, can ultimately be a positive thing.

## Individuality and Uniqueness - Synaesthesia

- “I see colours everywhere, even in things that aren’t physical, like bird calls, numbers and days of the week. People always have auras. My best friend Lucy is pink and Mum’s yellow, the same as Fridays.” (p. 8) Make a short video for primary school students explaining synaesthesia. You may like to look at Youtube videos for inspiration; for example:
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkRbebvoYqI>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNy23tJMTzQ>
- “My life is full of questions my friends will never need to ask. Why do birds sing when they’re sad? Why does the letter “s” get so cranky that sometimes it hisses at me? And why does green sound like falling water when blue should be the wet colour?” (p. 24) What would be some of the challenges of having synaesthesia?
- “Maths is just numbers and numbers are just colours and patterns. Easy-peasy.” (p. 18) In what ways is Charlotte’s synaesthesia an asset, or something which helps her? Would you like to be synaesthetic? Why or why not?



- “I’d be thinking I was crazy now if I didn’t know here all the mixed-up signals came from. It’s just my brain. It’s wired differently to most people’s. It’s not a good thing or a bad thing. Or some kind of superpower. It’s just who I am.” (p. 25) What are some other ways people’s brains are “wired differently”?
- Draw, paint or collage a portrait of the four generations of Cartwright women as seen through Charlotte’s eyes.

