

# GAOLBIRD

## SIMON BARNARD

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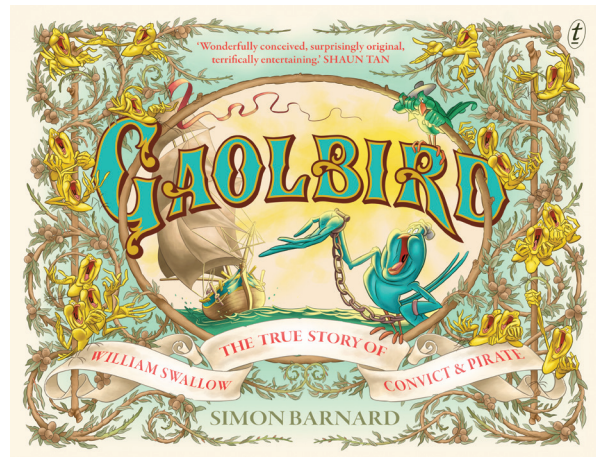
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Non-fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 9+

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### CURRICULUM GUIDE

*Gaolbird is a multimodal text, combining language and visual images to tell its stories. The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of the text through speaking, listening, reading, writing viewing and representing. Learning activities for the upper primary **English** curriculum, encompassing literature, language and literacy are included in these teaching notes.*

*Learning activities designed for the **History curriculum** allow students to explore the convict experience through William Swallow's adventures. Historical chronology and concepts, research skills, analysis of sources, historical interpretation and communication are amongst the skills covered in the activities. There are also teaching activities linked to the **Geography curriculum**, with William Swallow's journey forming the basis of mapping and spatial activities.*

*Simon Barnard's vivid and original artwork and design is explored in **Visual Arts curriculum** activities. Students will describe how the artwork enhances meaning for readers, and go on to make their own artworks inspired by Gaolbird.*

### SYNOPSIS

William Swallow was the pseudonym adopted by convict William Walker. Convicted for burglary in England he was sentenced to seven years and transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1821. William was determined to avoid his punishment and *Gaolbird* tells of his many escape attempts en route to the colony and after his arrival in Hobart Town.

Swallow's most ambitious and successful escape was when he and some fellow convicts seized the Cyprus on its way to the notorious prison on Sarah Island. Swallow and his fellow convicts became pirates, sailing the Cyprus to New Zealand, Tahiti, Japan and China before abandoning the ship.

The convicts were eventually captured and sent to trial for piracy in the Old Bailey in London. Swallow escaped the hangman's noose by persuading the jurors he was innocent. He was returned to Van Diemen's Land to serve out his original sentence and eventually died at Port Arthur of tuberculosis.

*Gaolbird* is a text with multiple narratives. It tells the story of William Swallow, but also the convict Popjoy, whose adventures are told in parallel. Other characters, stories, historical sources and anecdotes sit alongside Swallow's, telling us much of convict life. This story is also inspired by the Tasmanian Gothic tradition, with its accounts of convict life, horror and mystery set against the rainforests, the mountains, isolated camps and the neo-gothic colonial architecture that dots the landscape.

Simon Barnard represents his gaolbirds as yellow canaries, a reference to their nickname canary birds, derived from their distinctive yellow convict uniforms. Popjoy, a nickname derived from popinjay, is a parrot and William Swallow is represented by a swallow, a bird that, like William, made long journeys over the sea. Simon Barnard's distinctive and colourful

images enhance the meaning of the words; words and pictures work together to evoke the drama, adventure, tragedy and humour of William Swallow's adventures.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simon Barnard was born and grew up in Launceston. He spent a lot of time in the bush as a boy, which led to an interest in Tasmanian history. He is a writer, illustrator and collector of colonial artifacts. He won the Eve Pownall Award for Information Books in the 2015 Children's Book Council of Australia's Book of the Year awards for his first book, *A-Z of Convicts in Van Diemen's Land*. His second book *Convict Tattoos*, was published by Text in August 2016. He lives in Melbourne.

### BEFORE READING

1. What is a gaolbird? Draw a picture to represent this word.
2. As a class discuss everything you know about convicts and pirates. Think about what you want to find out and then finish the sentence stems.
  - I know that convicts and pirates...
  - I think that convicts and pirates...
  - I want to find out...

### WHILE READING

1. Find five things the first page tells us about life as a convict in Hobart town. Look at the words and the pictures.
2. As you read the book collect words that you are unfamiliar with, or words that we don't hear very often today.

For example:

- Coracle
  - Capon
  - Coxswain
  - Zeal
3. The artist and author Simon Barnard, uses words and pictures to tell the story of William Swallow. Sometimes he uses symbols to represent people and ideas. Explain the meaning of the following images as you read the book together.
    - The bird's cage
    - The swallow
    - The parrot
    - The canaries
    - The Union Jack flag
  4. What led William Swallow and the gaolbirds to steal the Cyprus?
  5. Why did Popjoy decide not to escape with William Swallow?
  6. How are the soldiers and officials drawn in *Gaolbird*? How do they look different from the

gaolbirds, and why do you think they are shown this way?

7. How did William Swallow escape the hangman's noose?

### AFTER READING

1. Draw a character map for William Swallow or Popjoy. At the centre of the page write the character's name. Divide the page into four squares. Write one of these headings in each box. And write down what you have learnt about these aspects of William Swallow or Popjoy's life.
  - The character's problem
  - The character's traits
  - How the character solved the problem
  - How the character changed over time
2. In *Gaolbird* we find many sayings. What do each of these these sayings mean? Are any of them similes? Use each of these phrases in a sentence.
  - They feather their own nest
  - They foul their own nest
  - His story didn't fly
  - Sang like a canary
  - The weight of the world
3. What challenges did William and the canaries face on their journey on the Cyprus?
4. What challenges did Popjoy, the convicts, Lieutenant Carew and his family face in their journey back to Hobart after the Cyprus was taken by Swallow?
5. Put these events in order.
  - The Cyprus sinks in China
  - Swallow dies in Van Diemen's Land
  - Swallow was charged with piracy in the Old Bailey
  - Popjoy paddled to Hobart Town in a coracle
  - The convicts become pirates
  - The Japanese fire cannonballs of the Cyprus
  - Swallow's true identity is discovered
  - Swallow fights in the Napoleonic Wars
  - Swallow is transported to Van Diemen's Land for seven years
6. Do you think William Swallow was a hero or a villain? Finish one, or both of these sentences.
  - William Swallow was a hero because...
  - William Swallow was a villain because...
7. The Ballad of the Cyprus (p.36) was sung by convicts. A ballad is a song or poem that tells a story in short stanzas. Often ballads are not written down, but are shared orally over time and passed down from generation to generation. Read through (or sing) the verses of the ballad.
  - Which verse do you like best?

- Which verse best celebrates William Swallow the convict adventurer?
- Can you see any differences between the ballad and the story of William Swallow? Have any events been added or left out? You could make a flow chart to demonstrate this.
- Why do you think William Swallow became a convict legend?
- Write your own verse and add it to the ballad. It could describe an event not included in the ballad.

## HISTORY

1. Make a glossary of convict words and places you find in the book
  - Muster master
  - Leg-irons
  - Convict
  - Gags
  - Traps
  - Chain gang
  - Sarah Island
2. Read the author's note on page 37. Here Simon Barnard tells us *Gaolbird* is a true story. List the sources of historical evidence Simon Barnard has used in this book.
3. Simon Barnard also writes that William Swallow's story became 'the stuff of legend'. What does this mean? Discuss the relationship between a legend and the truth.
4. The convicts listed on page 8 all escaped on the Cyprus with William Swallow. Choose TWO convicts and research their lives. Find out as much information as you can about these historical figures.
5. Many of the illustrations in *Gaolbird* were inspired by historical pictures. In this research activity you will try to find some historical paintings and drawings from the period 1778–1868. Go to the National Library of Australia TROVE website to the image collection. Do a search and try to locate images of
  - The Cyprus
  - Convicts in canary bird uniforms
  - Hobart Town
  - Macquarie Harbour
  - Sarah Island
  - Port Arthur
  - Gould's wood cut of Popjoy and Carew building the raft
  - A trial at the Old Bailey
  - Convicts in leg irons

Now match the historical image with the picture in the book. Display your pictures.

6. In small groups find three facts about convict life in *Gaolbird*. Find three opinions about convict life in *Gaolbird*.

## GEOGRAPHY

1. On a map of the world identify the different places William Swallow visited during his escape attempts over his lifetime.
2. Sarah Island is an island off Van Diemen's Land where convicts who broke the law or tried to escape were sent for punishment. It was known as a place of secondary punishment, where convicts were treated harshly. Locate Sarah Island on a map. Find out about its history. Find some pictures.
3. Discuss what would be the environmental advantages and disadvantages of using an island like this to hold convicts? (Think about Popjoy's journey back to Hobart Town.)

## VISUAL ARTS

1. In pairs students choose a double page opening to analyse and share their understanding how Simon Barnard constructs the story using colour, images, perspective and size in *Gaolbird*. Use some of the following questions to scaffold the discussion.
  - How does Simon Barnard show us how the characters feel in these pages?
  - What mood is portrayed in these pages?
  - How does Simon Barnard use perspective and size in these pages? Look for examples at the size of the convicts compared to the officials?
  - What is the mood of these pages? How do we know this?
2. Simon Barnard drew William Swallow as a swallow, a bird that flies far across the sea. Popjoy as a parrot and the convicts as canaries, yellow like the convict uniforms. Draw yourself as a bird. Which bird would you chose to be represented by and why?
3. In an interview Simon Barnard discussed what influenced the style and design of his illustrations.

*My illustrations are influenced by contemporaneous cartoonists (Gillray, Hogarth, Rowlandson and Cruikshank) and present-day cartoons (Looney Tunes, Asterix and Mad Magazine) to suit the rebellious, irreverent and theatrical nature of the story. Fonts and flourishes are based on styles used at the time, found in sheet music, bill-heads and newspapers, which accentuate the story's themes and 'Tasmanian Gothic' roots.*

- Find an example of a cartoon created during the convict period by one of the cartoonists who influenced Simon Barnard.
- Find an example of a present-day cartoon style, that influenced Simon Barnard.
- Choose your favourite font and flourish in the book and present your name in the same style.
- What is your opinion of the illustrations in *Gaolbird*? Use examples from the book to explain your ideas.