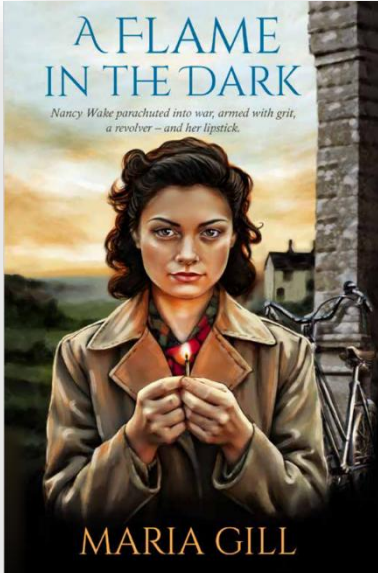


Teaching Resource: Discussion & Analysis Questions for *A Flame in the Dark: Nancy Wake's Story*



They called her the White Mouse. She called herself a fighter.

Nancy Wake never set out to become a hero. But when war broke out, she refused to stand by.

As a courier in the French Resistance, Nancy carried secrets. As a saboteur, she blew up bridges and trains. As a soldier, she commanded hundreds and led them into battle. From escaping Nazi agents to surviving behind enemy lines, Nancy's war was one of nerve, grit, and impossible choices.

*Based on the incredible true story of one of WWII's most daring spies, *A Flame in the Dark* is a tale of fierce loyalty, impossible choices, and the spark of hope that refuses to die.*

Maria Gill is an award-winning New Zealand author of over 60 children's books. Known for her meticulous research and compelling storytelling, Maria brings real-life heroes to the page. She retraced Nancy Wake's wartime journey across France to bring this novel to life.

"I wrote this story for young adults because I believe Nancy Wake is a fierce, funny, and fearless role model every teenager should know." Maria Gill



Themes: Resistance, Identity, Courage, Loyalty

Aligned with NZC Levels 4–6 / Australian Curriculum Years 7–9

Discussion Questions by Theme

Resistance

1. What motivated Nancy Wake to join the Resistance? How did her reasons evolve over time?
2. How did the actions of the Resistance groups in France challenge Nazi control? Were all their actions justified?

3. In what ways do small acts of resistance (e.g., hiding messages or forging papers) contribute to larger change?
4. Compare the French Resistance to modern-day movements. What qualities make resistance effective?

Identity

1. How did Nancy's identity as an Australian, New Zealand Māori, a journalist, and a woman influence how she was treated during the war?
2. Nancy Wake often had to hide her true identity. What effect do you think that had on her sense of self?
3. How does the novel explore the idea of personal versus national identity in times of war?
4. Nancy adopts code names and disguises. What does this say about identity being fixed or fluid?

Courage

1. What does courage look like in the novel? Is it always loud and action-based?
2. How does Nancy deal with fear? Are there moments when she doubts herself?
3. Who shows unexpected courage in the story? What makes their bravery stand out?
4. Is courage always heroic, or can it be reckless? How does Nancy walk this line?

Loyalty

1. Who is Nancy loyal to throughout the story — and how does this loyalty shape her choices?
2. Were there moments where loyalty came into conflict with survival? How did Nancy respond?
3. How do the Maquisards show loyalty to each other — and to France?
4. Can you be loyal to more than one country, person, or cause at a time?

Character Analysis Prompts

Nancy Wake

- How does Nancy change from the beginning to the end of the novel?
- What values drive her decisions?

- What internal and external conflicts shape her journey?

Henri Fiocca

- What role does Henri play in shaping Nancy's emotional resilience?
- How does his absence or loss affect her later actions?

Supporting Characters

- Which secondary character has the most influence on Nancy?
- How do their interactions reflect larger wartime tensions or alliances?

Comparing Fact with Fiction

1. Compare a scene from the novel with historical records (e.g., her parachute drop, courier missions, or marriage to Henri). What artistic liberties did the author take? Why might these changes have been made?
2. Research one real historical figure who appears in the novel. How closely do their actions and personality in the book match primary or secondary sources?
3. The author chose to present Nancy's story for a young adult audience. How does this affect what is included, emphasised, or omitted?
4. What are the ethical responsibilities when fictionalising a real person's life, especially someone as complex as Nancy Wake?

Extension Activities

Debate: "Fiction can reveal emotional truths better than facts alone." Argue for or against using historical fiction to understand the past.

Creative Writing: Rewrite a key scene from the perspective of another character (e.g., a German soldier, a civilian, Henri).

Timeline Task: Create a dual timeline — one for the historical Nancy Wake and one for the fictional events of the novel. Identify where they diverge and discuss why.

Creative Writing Activities

1. Diary Entry from Nancy's Point of View

Write a diary entry from Nancy's perspective after parachuting into France or during a tense moment with the Maquis.

- Focus: inner thoughts, fear, courage, sensory detail
- Extension: Compare student entries with excerpts from SOE memoirs

2. Blackout Poetry Using WWII Texts

Use Churchill's speeches, Resistance flyers, or news clippings to create blackout poems exploring key themes (e.g. bravery, fear, resistance).

- Skills: identifying tone, mood, and symbolism
- Printable: page with ready-to-blackout text

3. Alternative Endings or Spy Scenes

Rewrite the ending or create a suspenseful new spy mission for Nancy.

- Optional: format as screenplay or graphic novel scene
- Focus: narrative structure, historical plausibility, tension

Historical Research Tasks

1. Mapping Nancy's Real Journey Across France

Plot key locations on a map from her Marseille escape to operations in the Auvergne.

- Tools: France map, timeline research
- Optional digital tool: Google MyMaps

2. Investigating Resistance Groups

Research different Resistance movements: FTP, Maquis, Gaullists.

- Create a comparison chart (ideology, methods, figures)
- Optional: present as a "recruitment pitch" poster

3. Timeline and Primary Source Analysis

Create a dual timeline showing Nancy's life against WWII events.

- Add quotes or images from primary sources
- Skills: sequencing, cross-referencing, critical source analysis

Visual Literacy Activities

1. Propaganda & Recruitment Poster Analysis

Study WWII posters for message, design, symbolism, and emotion.

- Scaffold: analysis template (colours, symbols, slogans)
- Extension: Design your own modern "Resist!" poster

2. Book Cover Deconstruction

Compare covers of Nancy Wake biographies and the YA novel.

- Discuss tone, imagery, target audience
- Task: Design a new cover that reflects the story's themes

Media Literacy Extension

1. Exploring Nancy Wake Across Mediums

Compare Nancy Wake's portrayal in:

- A biography (e.g. *The White Mouse*)
- A documentary
- The YA novel *A Flame in the Dark*


Task: Complete a comparison chart analysing tone, facts vs emotion, target audience

- Extension: write a critical review of the most impactful version

Blackout Poetry Activity – Nancy Wake

Blackout poetry turns prose into poetry by blacking out words you don't need. Think about Nancy Wake's themes: resistance, bravery, courage, identity, fear.

1. Read the excerpt carefully.
2. Circle words or phrases that speak to you.
3. Black out the rest to reveal your hidden poem.
4. Add a title and, if you like, an illustration that matches your theme.

 Use a black marker to cover unused words.

Excerpt 1:

The wireless crackled in the dark.

Nancy pressed the headphones tighter against her ears, catching snippets through the static.

Orders.

Locations.

Voices she didn't recognise.

Her heart thudded as she wrote them down, knowing any mistake could cost lives.

Outside, the moonlight touched the frost-covered ground.

Somewhere out there, the enemy listened too.

Excerpt 2:

Gunfire rattled the windows.

Nancy didn't flinch.

She grabbed the suitcase, stuffed with forged papers, and slipped through the door.

Every second counted.

The Maquis needed her.

Across the field, shapes moved — friend or foe, she couldn't tell.

She kept running.

Her boots soaked through in the morning dew.

Sample Blackout Poem:

Headphones – voices – heart.

Moonlight touched frost-covered ground.

Enemy listened.

She ran.

Boots soaked.

Brave.