Digger
By Mike Dumbleton & Illustrated by Robin Cowcher
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$24.99

When her brother, James, went to war, Annie stitched the name Digger onto her toy kangaroo and gave him to James as a farewell present. 'A Digger for a digger,' she said, hugging her brother. 'I'll keep him safe,' James promised. Digger is the story of one toy kangaroo, one Australian soldier and two girls, in two countries on opposite sides of a world at war. It's a quiet reminder of the casualties of war, and a tribute to the French schoolchildren who once tended the graves of Australian soldiers who died on the Western Front in the heroic battle for Villers-Bretonneux in April 1918. A beautiful and heart-warming story set during World War I.

Teacher Notes have been based on those supplied by the publisher. A full version is available on our website.

Themes:
- War
- Loss
- Friendship
- Mementos and memorials
- WWI
- Villers-Bretonneux

Discussion Questions:
- Ask students to bring in or describe their most precious stuffed animal or toy. Would they ever give it to somebody else? Under what circumstances? Make a display of photos of the children with their toys.
- Find images (or, better still, the real things) of a digger’s slouch hat and a red poppy of remembrance. Elicit discussion about the significance of these images and what they represent.
- Explain to your class that authors are very careful about the words they include in a picture book and that every word serves a purpose. Now ask students why Mike Dumbleton might have used the words ‘whizz of bullets’ and ‘crump of shells’ on the page showing James and Digger going into battle.
- Have students research the Battle of Villers-Bretonneux and answer the following questions:
  * How many Australian soldiers died in the battle? How did Australia help rebuild the town after the battle?
  * What is inscribed above the board in the Villers-Bretonneux school classrooms?
- Have your class examine the front and back cover images of the book and in a whole-class discussion ask students:
  * What in the image tells you this story will be about an Australian soldier?
  * What sort of flower is the girl putting in the vase on the back of the book, and what is the significance of this flower?
  * What are the three most prominent colours in the front and back covers? Explain why you think the artist chose these colours.
  * What do you think Annie means when she says, ‘A Digger for a digger? Why does the first use of the word ‘digger’ feature a capital letter and the second does not?
- Ask students to retell the story of Digger in their own words, starting with ‘Digger is the story of a toy kangaroo…’.
- Write a letter from Annie to Colette thanking her for patching up Digger and telling her how she felt when he arrived back home without James.
- In a whole class discussion, point out to students that the copy on the back cover of Digger describes the story as ‘beautiful and heartwarming’ and ask them if they agree and to explain, in their own words, why they think this.
- Children could be involved in craft activities of knitting, making a memorial patchwork quilt (‘friendship quilt’ of the class, based on the endpapers and featuring their own favourite toys) or making stuffed animals.