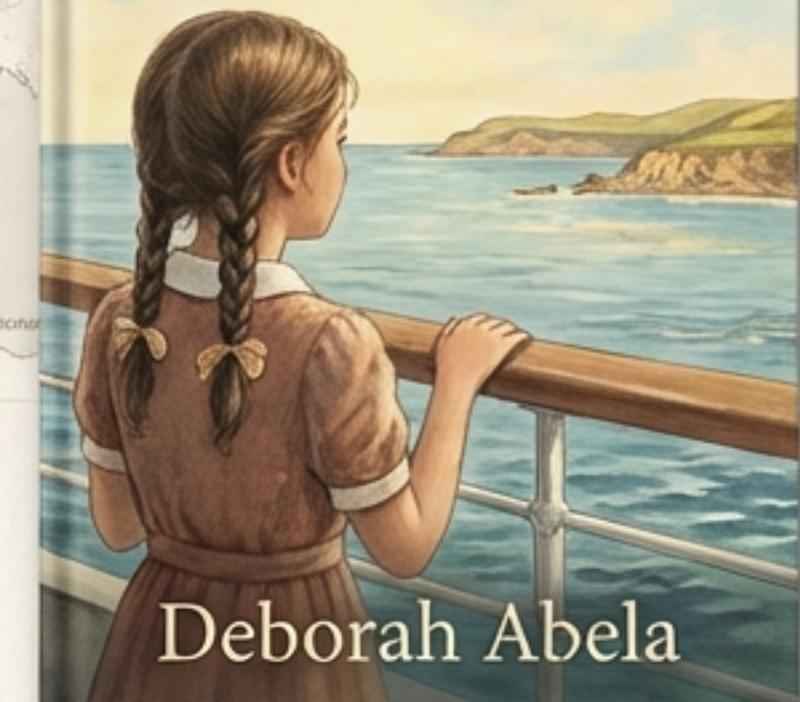


# Unpacking the Past: An Investigator's Guide to *Teresa: A New Australian*

A Journey Through History, Hope, and a New Home.

Deborah Abela  
**Teresa:**  
A New Australian



Deborah Abela



12 OCT 1949

Case File: Teresa P.  
Immigrant Journey



# Where Do Stories Come From? The Author's Spark.



*Deborah Abela's  
Nanna Teresa*

Every story begins with a question. For author Deborah Abela, the question was inspired by her own family history.

"Deb's dad was born in a **cave** during one of the heaviest bombing raids of WW2. When she researched more about the war, she discovered the 'cave' was actually an **underground shelter** built to protect the **Maltese** during Hitler's bombing raids.... After the war, Deb's 7-year-old father and his family made the long journey to **Australia**."



## Author's Connection

The book is dedicated to Deb's Nanna Teresa, a brave woman she never got to meet. The story is a culmination of her own family's history and that of the wider Maltese community.

# Part I: Malta Under Siege

## What does it mean to survive a war?



### Historical Context

- Malta, a rocky country in the Mediterranean Sea, was strategically vital during WWII.
- It was under siege for three years, making it one of the most heavily bombed places in the war.
- To survive, Maltese people of all ages carved shelters by hand out of the rock.
- For their bravery, Malta was awarded the George Cross by King George VI, the highest award for civilian bravery.

*"Through Teresa, Deborah Abela immerses us in the crumbling surroundings of bomb alerts. I felt the ground beneath me shudder with every explosion."*  
- Kids Book Review

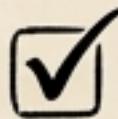


# Author's Field Notes: How do you research the past?

To bring Teresa's story to life, Deborah Abela became a historical detective. Her inquiry-based methods involved piecing together clues from many different sources.



**Personal History:** "My investigation began with my own family. I asked gentle, probing questions about their experience of the war..."



**Primary Sources:** "Archival news footage, radio broadcasts and newspapers... war diaries and journals from soldiers and nurses." (Mention of helpful resources: Trove, British Pathé, National Archives' Destination: Australia).



**Secondary Sources:** "I read historical non-fiction to add to my growing understanding of the period... This enabled me to use historical facts and dates to ensure the novel's timeline was accurate."



**Interviews:** "I was ready to interview other members of the Maltese community who lived through this period."





# Word Detectives: The Language of War

An author's words are their most powerful tool. How does Deborah Abela use language to make the experience of war feel real for the reader?

**Key Idea:** The story makes “the timeless, but terrifying story of suffering and surviving war very real.” (Kids Book Review)

**Student Task:** As you read the first section of the book, collect words and phrases that describe:

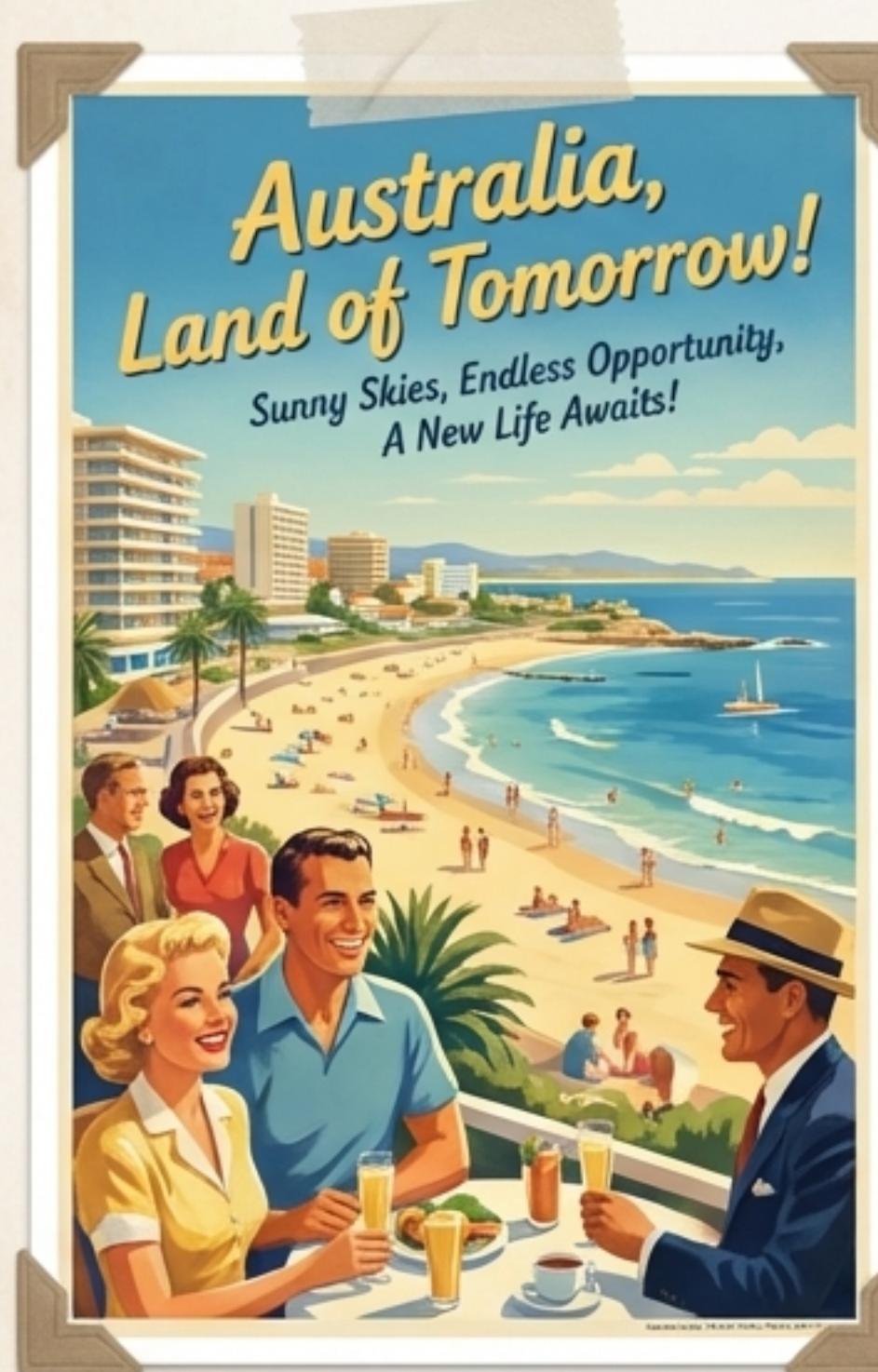
- The sounds of the bombing raids.
- The feeling of being in the shelters.
- The look of the city after an attack.

**Discuss:** How do these specific word choices make you feel? Why are they more powerful than just saying “it was scary”?

**Example Quote:** “She helps me feel what it’s like to be torn between the hope of a new life and the security of staying in the place I know.” - Kids Book Review

# Part 2: The Journey to a New World

## How do you find home when you have left it behind?



### Historical Context:

After the war, much of Europe was in ruins. Over one million migrants sought a new home in Australia.

Australia's first Minister for Immigration, **Arthur Calwell**, knew the country needed a bigger population to build the nation and protect itself. His famous declaration was that **Australia** had to "**populate or perish.**"

However, this push for migration existed alongside the **White Australia Policy**, which meant Australia wasn't always welcoming to new arrivals.



### The Dilemma:

Teresa's family must make a difficult decision. Peace has come, but their home is destroyed and their future is bleak. Australia offers the hope of a brighter future.

# Theme Spotters: Hope and Fear on the High Seas

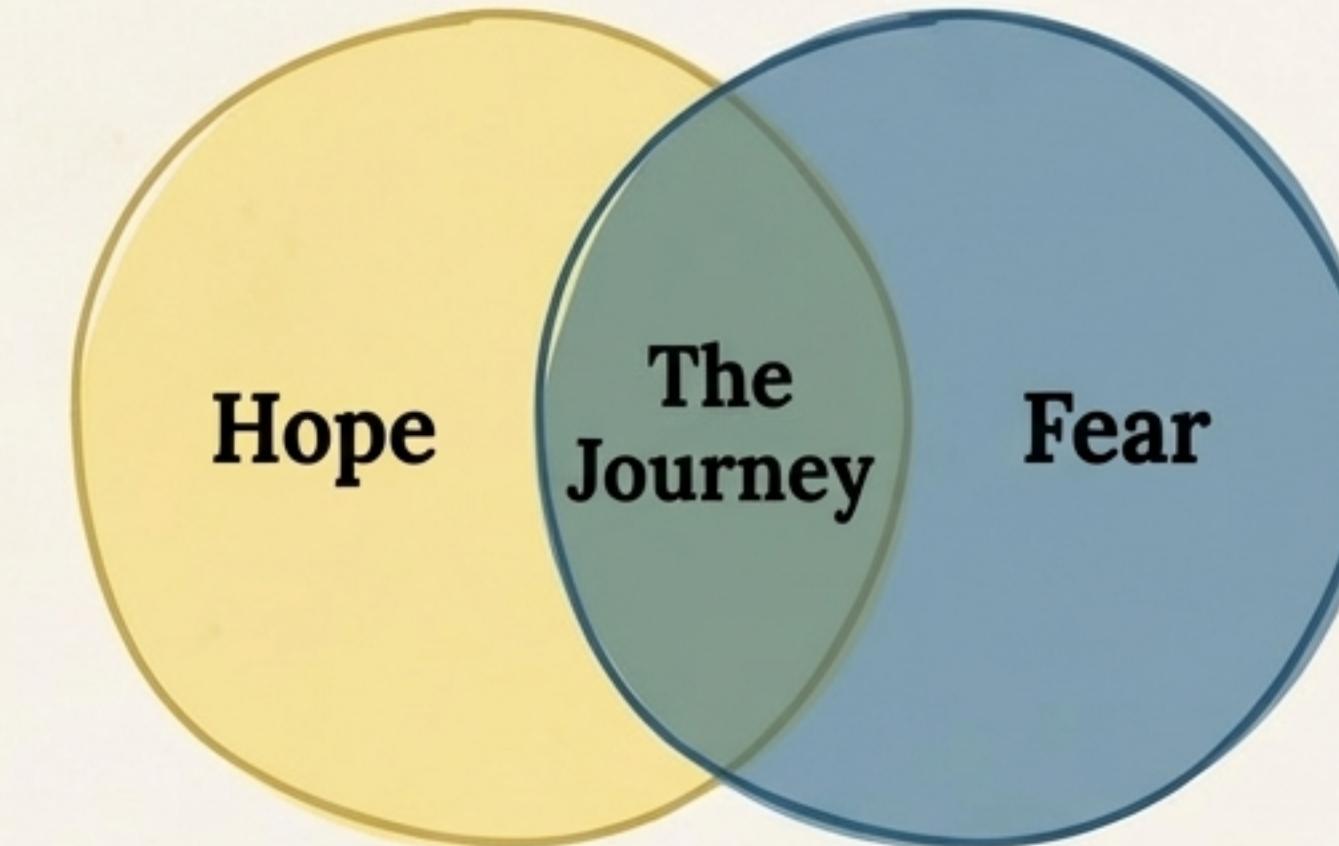
The journey to a new country is filled with conflicting emotions.  
It's a story of leaving, but also of arriving.

**Central Theme:** Hope and Resilience. A reviewer called the book "a tale of hope and resilience for readers of all ages."

## Student Task:

While reading about Teresa's voyage, find examples of moments when she feels:

- **Hopeful** or **excited** about her new life.
- **Sad** or **scared** about what she has left behind (especially her Nanna and best friend George).



## Discuss:

Can you feel both hope and fear at the same time? How does the author show Teresa's internal conflict? Why is this an important part of the migrant story?

"She is devastated that her beloved Nanna has chosen to stay in Malta and her best friend George and his family have not been accepted by Australia. How will she cope on this journey without them?" - Lamont Books Review

# Author's Field Notes: Voices of the Journey

The most valuable part of the research was listening. Deborah Abela interviewed members of the Maltese community, who shared their memories over 'many cups of tea, and the occasional tear.' These personal stories brought the novel to life.



"...the minestra (soup) handed out by the nuns at the Victory Kitchens, which sometimes had goat meat prickled with hair."



"...arriving in Australia, full of hope and fear."

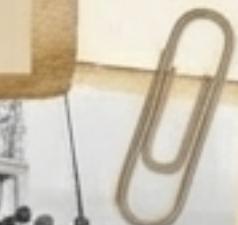


**Key Insight:** "Non-fiction sources helped to add a sense of truth to the foundation of the story, but it was the personal stories that brought the novel to life." - **Deborah Abela**

"...the long, rough sea crossings with bland food – but also the parties and friendships."



"...the bullying, certainly, but what they remembered most was the peace and abundance that Australia offered."



# Part 3: A "New Australian"

## What does it mean to belong?

### The New Reality

After the long voyage, Teresa's family takes their first steps on Australian soil. Life is safer, but there are new obstacles to overcome.

#### Challenges Faced by Teresa

- Trying to learn Australian ways.
- Facing racist taunts from strangers on the street and kids at school.
- Dealing with bullies who don't welcome "New Australians."



"My dad was picked on, bullied, and subjected to racial taunts – not only by other kids, but by adults and teachers, too."  
– Deborah Abela on her father's real-life experience.

## Special Elite: Word Detectives: Words that Hurt, Words that Heal

Lora: Teresa faces a new kind of battle in Australia—a battle of words. Not everyone is welcoming, but small acts of kindness make a big difference.

Special Elite: Column I: Words that Hurt

Lora: List the racist taunts and bullying language used against Teresa and her family.

**reffo** **wog** **GO BACK**  
**unwanted** **foreigner**  
lazy  
**different** **trouble**

Lora: Discuss: How does the author show the power of both cruel and kind words? Which has a greater impact on Teresa in the end?

Lora: Key Insight: “[The author] also shows me how compassion and kindness can break through barriers in unexpected ways.” - *Kids Book Review*

Special Elite: Column 2: Words that Heal

Lora: List the words and actions of compassion and kindness from characters who help her.

*welcome* friend  
let me help you  
you are safe kindness  
belong share care



# Theme Spotters: The Power of Resilience

Resilience is the ability to face challenges and bounce back. Teresa is a powerful example of a resilient character.



## Student Task

- Find one specific scene in the book that you think best shows Teresa's resilience.
- Write a short paragraph explaining *how* her actions in that scene demonstrate courage, determination, or loyalty.
- **Challenge:** How does Teresa's resilience change or grow from the beginning of the book in Malta to the end in Australia?

# A Shared History: Assimilation in Post-War Australia

Teresa's story was not unique. She was one of over 170,000 'Displaced Persons' (DPs) who arrived after the war. The official government policy for both new migrants and Indigenous peoples at the time was **assimilation**.

## Definition of Assimilation

"Assimilation was ostensibly heralded as the mechanism to sweep away racial and cultural differences and divisions and to absorb all Australians – Indigenous, settler and immigrant – as equal citizens sharing a common way of life." - Anna Haebich

## The Reality

- The goal was for everyone to adopt the "Australian way of life."
- New migrants were expected to learn English and Australian customs quickly.
- This policy often ignored or devalued the cultures, languages, and **histories** that people brought with them or already possessed. The migrant was considered more "readily assimilable."



# A Deeper Inquiry: Migrants, Settlers, and First Nations

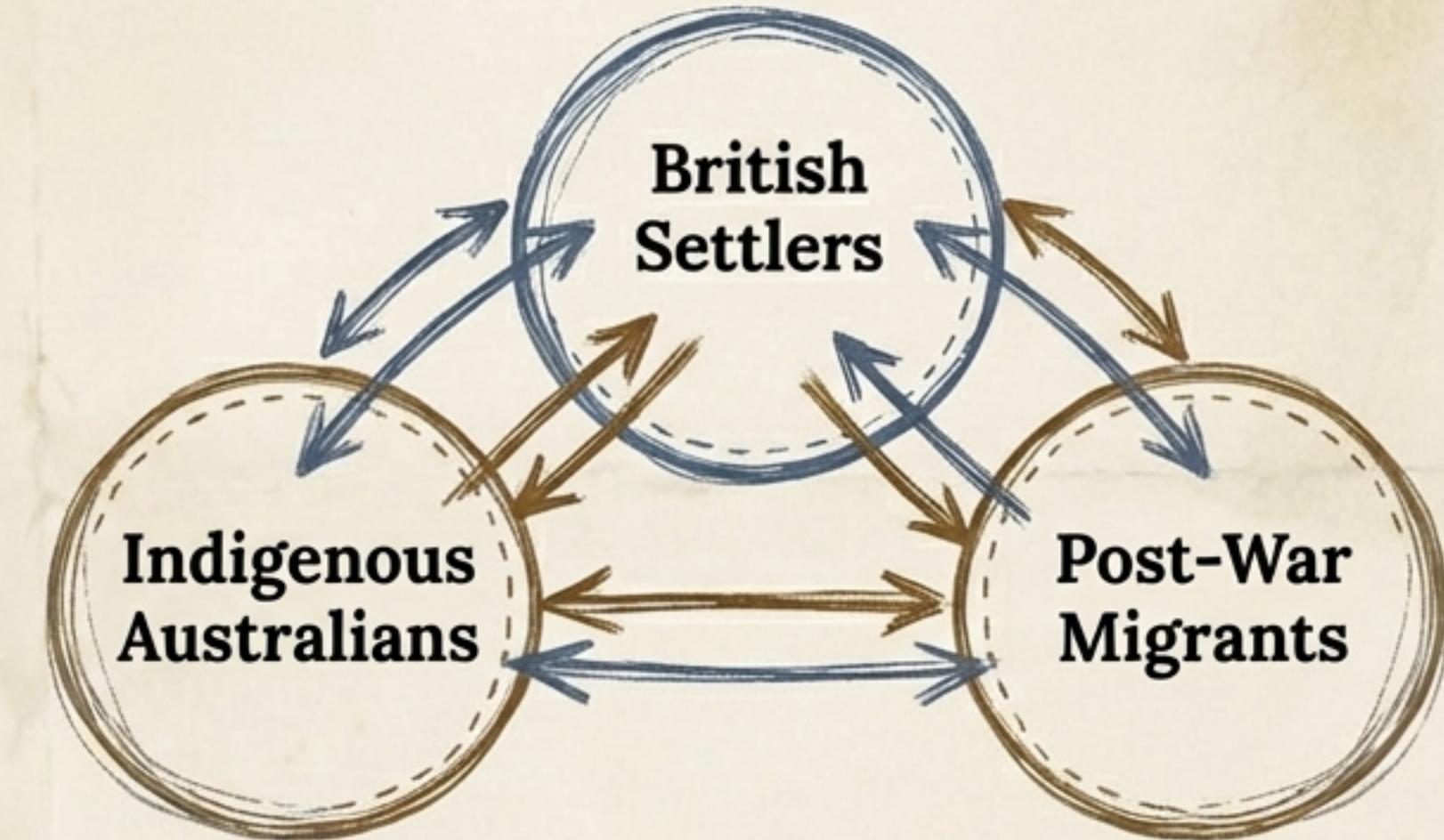
The story of migration in Australia is complex. Historians examine the relationships between three groups: British settlers, non-British migrants (like Teresa's family), and Indigenous Others.

## A Critical Question

"Where are the histories and analyses of 'first contact', with th(e) many non-Anglo-Celtic settler others?"  
- Sneja Gunew

## Points to Consider

- Many post-war migrants were sent to work in remote and rural areas, often in proximity to Indigenous workers and families.
- They entered an existing political order where the 'dirty colonial work' of Indigenous displacement had already occurred (Perera & Pugliese).
- As 'New Australians,' migrants were often caught between the colonisers and the colonised, navigating a new and unfamiliar racial hierarchy.



## Your Turn: Become a Historical Detective

Deborah Abela used historical inquiry to uncover her family's story. You can do the same. Your own family history is a rich primary source waiting to be explored.



### Your Mission

- **Interview a family member** (a parent, grandparent, aunt, or uncle). Ask them gentle, probing questions, just like the author did.

### Suggested Questions:

- What was it like growing up in your town/city/country?
- What stories do you remember from your own parents or grandparents?
- What was school like for you? What games did you play?
- Does our family have a migration story? When and why did we come to Australia?

**“Finding a relationship between the content of books like Teresa and students’ personal lives can be the starting point for their own historical inquiries.”**

- Deborah Abela

# The Story Continues

Teresa: A New Australian is set after World War II, but the themes of displacement, hope, and the search for a safe home are timeless. The story of migration is not just a part of Australia's past; it is part of its present and future.



## A Final Thought from the Author, Deborah Abela:

"Today we are seeing another wave of migrants around the world, fleeing war and starvation, just like Deb's dad and his family. **Every migrant story**, then and now, resonates with questions of **identity, home, determination, hope and fear**... what we have to remember is that **Australia is a stronger, richer nation** because of migration."

- Deborah Abela