



BOOKS IN A BAG

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THE WAR NURSES

AUTHOR: Anthea Hodgson

ABOUT THE BOOK

In 1941, country girls Minnie Hodgson and Margot McNee set sail from Perth, Australia, for Singapore in search of adventure, full of excitement and keen to do their part working as nurses to the fallen soldiers in a time of war. What they encounter is an army of new friends and the terrors of a city under siege.

When the Japanese attack and Singapore falls, they are forced to flee aboard the Vyner Brooke. The ship is bombed, resulting in utter devastation. Separated in the mayhem, one group of nurses find themselves in prisoner-of-war camps for the duration of the war, surviving on their wits, with humour, dignity, loyalty and determination. But another group of young Australian nurses – the girls on the beach – are washed ashore on Bangka Island, where they will meet a fate that must never be forgotten. Inspired by the author's own family story, this is an unforgettable novel of enduring friendship and boundless courage, based on the shocking true events of the Bangka Island Massacre. It is both a riveting tale and an important tribute to our brave nurses who sacrificed so much during World War II.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anthea Hodgson is a country girl from the WA wheatbelt. She likes all the usual stuff, from chocolate to puppies, and she loves a coffee, which probably played a large part in her move from the farm to Perth – although she thinks boarding school may have had something to do with it, too. In her previous life she was child free and working as a radio producer, where the coffee was terrible but the people were great, and now she has three brilliant kids, including her husband, a job she loves even more than radio, and a two book deal with Penguin Random House. Because a few years ago Anthea found herself with nothing to do at three am, so she climbed out of bed and wrote her debut novel, *The Drifter*, in five weeks. Told you she likes coffee.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *The War Nurses* is a novel based on a true events experienced by Australian nurses in World War II. How much of this remarkable story was new to you?
2. Why do you think Minnie, Margot, Beth and Lola became such good friends?
3. Did you have a favourite character among them, and why?
4. The nurses aimed to be every bit as brave as their male counter-parts in the war. In what specific ways did you see evidence of this?
5. Can you find examples of instances where the women exceeded their duty as nurses?
6. On the way to Singapore, one of the Australian soldiers says, 'Good luck, girls, I hope you have a good war.' What do you think they might have imagined 'a good war' would entail?
7. Margot's fear of abandoning her patients and her friends is greater than her fear of being harmed herself. Can you understand this?
8. The novel contains some intense and harrowing moments. Which was the most unforgettable for you? Which did you find the most moving?
9. Lola fears that she will never be loved, but one could argue that in Beth she finds the greatest love of all. Discuss.
10. *The War Nurses* is a different genre to the author's previous rural romances, but what similarities did you find the writing style and the theme?

