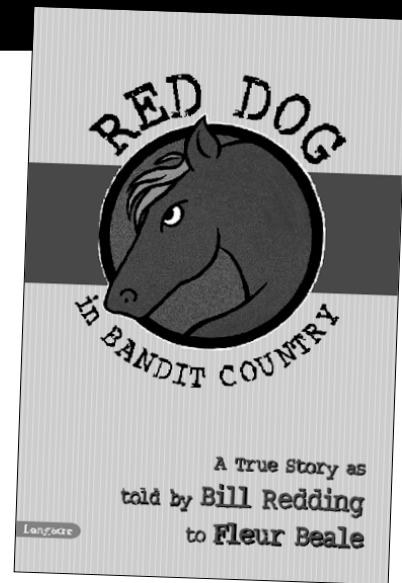


Resource Kit: RED DOG in BANDIT COUNTRY

A True Story as
told by **Bill Redding**
to **Fleur Beale**

**Warning: This area is
frequented by paramilitaries,
guerillas and bandits.**



But danger only fires the blood of Bill (Red Dog) Redding. He flies a perilous payroll delivery to the heart of Colombian bandit country, then takes explosives work with a construction company where 'safety last' seems the motto.

With a nose for adventure and an instinct for survival Red Dog quickly makes his mark. He gentles a man-killing horse, defuses a potential explosives disaster and dines weekly with the Bandit Queen and her twelve excitable, gun-toting sons.

However, before long Red Dog makes a surprising and hazardous discovery. This, along with complicating factors, sets his shoulder blades twitching and suddenly he must flee for his life through bandit-riddled mountains.

Red Dog's extraordinary real-life exploits are told in his own laconic vernacular to writer, Fleur Beale. His entire life is the stuff of adventure novels and this story is guaranteed to keep all enterprising daredevils reading till way past lights out.

Note: Sadly Bill Redding died while this book was in production. He was working in Mozambique at the time, clearing land-mines.

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197 X 130mm • 240pp • Young Adult Non-Fiction
paperback • maps and a glossary

RESOURCE KIT for use in schools

Contains:

- author statement
- comprehension questions
- wider discussion & creative responses
- media/technology activity
- research activities

ISBN: 1 877135 86 0 ©Longacre Press

NB. New Zealand NCEA Standard 8808. Reading Beyond Your Nose. *Red Dog in Bandit Country* fits perfectly into this standard. Students are required to read and record six written texts which must include one non-fiction text.

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RED DOG in BANDIT COUNTRY

Author's Statement

In 2000 I taught a class in creative writing as part of a community education programme. Bill Redding had enrolled in it because he desperately wanted to tell the stories of his adventurous life. However he was more used to report writing and was finding it difficult to change styles. I gave him a couple of individual sessions but it wasn't working. By this time, his stories had taken root in my mind and fired my imagination. After some thought I asked him how he'd feel about us collaborating, with him supplying the raw data and me doing the polishing. He was delighted with the idea and we settled on telling the stories of the year he was a tunnel rat in the bandit-ridden mountains of Colombia in 1954.

Bill went by the name of Red Dog for all his working life. He got the name, a corruption of his surname, from his Cherokee Indian partner when they were working collecting the remains of crashed military aircraft from the New Mexican desert. Bill's friendship and working partnership with Black Bear would have made a great book:

Two young men in their early twenties

Their job – to retrieve the shattered remains of aircraft that crashed on training flights over the New Mexico desert. Many aircraft were crashing and killing their crews of around 15 men. It was later discovered the early morning air currents were responsible for abrupt changes in conditions that a green crew didn't have the experience to handle.

To get the remains of the aircraft out, Red Dog and Black Bear must build roads through difficult terrain.

They develop their own language based on Indian dialects. They use this later in the war when they are stationed in the Pacific.

Bill wrote each episode of *Red Dog in Bandit Country* and sent it to me. I wrote it up, then we went through it together, with him correcting things and me asking for more information where it was needed.

He bubbled with excitement over the project and his mind raced ahead to other books we could do together. I have a note from him attached to a list of 30 countries he'd worked in, which says:

Each place has its own experiences that could develop into a book or two (if I should live so long). If I was able to write a book every 6 months I'd be 92 years old – Hey!

I am very glad that Bill knew, before he set out on his final adventure, that his book was to be published. What did he say when I rang him with the news? "Dear lady, I could hug you till your ribs crack!"

Comprehension Questions

These questions are designed to help you build a plot outline and to keep a record of your reading.

1. Ticket to Adventure

- What is it about 'wild places' that appeals to Red Dog?
- What does Red Dog notice about the territory the DC4 flies over, and why?
- What do we learn about Red Dog's background in the first two pages?
- How does Red Dog get his first job in Cartagena, the Colombian coastal city?
- What do you think Red Dog means by 'a New York minute'?
- What two types of bandits does Red Dog think there are?
- What makes Red Dog think the bandits have inside information on the payroll flights?
- Why is there no local bank at El Salto?
- What does the phrase 'laundering money' mean?

2. Bullets, Bandits and Pesos

- What makes Red Dog think the whole of Cartagena knows about the payroll flight?
- What were the payroll clerk's experiences during the last payroll delivery?
- According to Red Dog, why do the bandits shoot?
- What advice does Red Dog give José?
- What is the surprise at the end of this chapter?

3. Decision for Danger

- What risk does Red Dog 'hightail it' away from as soon as he gets back to Cartagena?
- Red Dog only delivered \$30,000 of the payroll, but his employer, Señor Shaw, is happy. Why?
- Why is Mendez distressed about Red Dog's new job?
- In your own words, what is the US consulate's warning about Medellin and the surrounding terrain?
- What choice does Red Dog make at the end of this chapter?

4. Convoy Ride Through Bandit Country

- What is the first thing that Red Dog does when he arrives anywhere new?
- What is a gringo?
- Re-read page 31, and Red Dog's list of survival gear for the journey to El Salto. Is there anything you would consider inessential, or anything you think the list is missing? If you were able to prepare for this trip in your own town, what would you alter?
- Why does Red Dog decide to take the middle truck in the convoy to El Salto?

5. The Job Nobody Wanted

- What are Red Dog's first impressions of Phil Coleman?
- What are the security arrangements like at the El Salto camp?
- What advantages does Red Dog see in being in at the start of any construction, mining, or tunnelling project?

- What is a desk jockey? List other slang terms with the same meaning.
- Why is Red Dog in a dilemma over the drinking session he is brought into as soon as he arrives?

6. A Hell of a Way to Run a Railroad

- What is the main action in this chapter?

7. A Belt from the Belt

- Why does Red Dog conclude that the second day on the job is a good one?

8. Explosives Bunker

- How are Red Dog's preparations of the explosives bunker generally received?

9. Taylor's Revenge

- What are all the conditions surrounding the tunnel which partly explain people's avoidance of it?
- Coleman says he's set up an 'off-sider' (deputy/assistant) for Red Dog. What is wrong – according to Red Dog – with Coleman's choice?

10. Mama Gomez, Bandit Queen

- What type of horse does Red Dog want to buy?
- What is the unusual division in the Gomez family?
- Why does Red Dog decide to stay on-side with the Gomez clan?

11. Lopez Shows His Mettle

- What does Red Dog think Lopez's version of the tunnel blast probably is? What does a blast really involve?
- Why aren't all the drill holes filled with explosives?
- What is the difference between 'production pay' and a salary?

12. The Devil's Thunderbolt

- Summarise what techniques Red Dog uses to calm Thunderbolt.

13. Payroll Showdown

- What is the problem the Gomez family faces over the payroll? How does Red Dog solve it?

14. Taylor's Mistake

- Why does Red Dog decide on the restrained spending strategy on page 121?

15. Boulder in the Sky

- How does Red Dog's jungle warfare training come in handy after the discovery at the sand plant?

16. Consuelo

- What is a dynamite headache?
- How does Red Dog's life alter when Consuelo arrives? How does this compare to his previous comments about the relationship?

17. Golden Problems

- Why is the discovery of gold not a totally positive event?
- How does Red Dog deal with Consuelo's concern at the start of the chapter?
- Outline Red Dog's strategy for dealing with the gold discovery.

18. Goodbye, El Salto

- What warning does Consuelo receive at the Gomez wake?

19. Escape Trail

- Why does Red Dog assume that the figure he spots at the end of this chapter intends harm?

21. Treachery

- What is the betrayal of this chapter title?

22. Goodbye, Thunderbolt

- How does Red Dog allay the villagers' suspicions about how he and Consuelo came to be in possession of Thunderbolt and the other horses?

24. River Rogue

- Is there more than one thing the title of this chapter could refer to? Explain.

25. What You Don't Know Can't Hurt You

- Summarise the incidents that Red Dog has to keep quiet.

26. Journey's End

- There is probably more than one reason behind the way the Sergeant at the port of Buenaventura relents with Red Dog and Consuelo. What are these reasons?

Epilogue

- What are the questions resolved by the epilogue? Is anything left unresolved, in your view?

Wider Discussion and Creative Responses

True Stories

When an autobiography is co-written or 'ghost-written' by another person, what questions about truth, judgement, and imagination are raised?

What does the fact that Red Dog needs a co-writer tell you about the craft of any writing, even non-fiction?

Compare the style of the Red Dog account to – for example – a history textbook or any other non-fiction work: e.g., newspaper, magazine, government or job report. What are the major differences?

How would you characterise the writing style of this book?

Below is part of the episode about Thunderbolt as Bill wrote it. Compare it with how it appears in the book.

All of a sudden he became nervous again. Red Dog looked around and saw a small well dressed Colombian Don a person more like a Spanish nobleman than a dark skin Colombian. He said in perfect English. I see you and Thunderbolt have met. Would you like to ride him?" I am Juan Martinez

the owner of Thunderbolt and you must be Dave Hammet friend, Red Dog.”

Thunderbolt’s eyes were wild eyed and he danced around like he was walking on hot coals. “That’s correct, Senior Martinez. Is thunderbolt for sale?” Red Dog noticed Thunderbolt was watching Martinez and not him. He got the message that this Colombian had treated Thunderbolt badly and this horse would kill him if he got the chance.

“You don’t want to ride him, do you? I don’t think you should try even if you are a good horseman. He’s mean and a killer. We intend to do away with him today. But if you think you would want him we’ll give him to you if you can ride him.”

Red Dog said you’ve got a deal and swung up on Thunderbolt’s back. The response was quick. Thunderbolt made a few ‘crow hops and took off like greased lightning. He matched his name. Thunderbolt.

This is first draft writing and Bill wasn’t worrying about punctuation or spelling. What punctuation needs fixing? He calls the Colombian Senior Martinez. What title should he have used? What other word uses the wrong spelling for the meaning?

Is there anything in this draft that you think Fleur Beale should have included in the final story? Give reasons.

Do you think it is ethical of Fleur Beale to re-write Bill’s story (even though he was delighted with the idea)?

Can a book still be non-fiction if it doesn’t relate exactly what happened?

Do you think Bill would have remembered exactly what was said and done?

What techniques from fiction does Fleur Beale use in her retelling of Red Dog’s experiences?

Rewrite one of the dramatic Red Dog scenes as a newspaper report.

Retell – in writing – a real-life ‘close call’ anecdote from your own experience, giving it as much individuality of style as possible.

In pairs: tell each other about a separate real-life incident that has made a strong impact on you. Write up the other person’s account, trying to create a sense of their character through your choice of language, pace, style, etc.

Imagine you are an investigative journalist working on a profile of Red Dog for a magazine or a Sunday newspaper. You have managed to track down Consuelo and 2–3 other people from Red Dog’s past. How would they describe his personality? Write up the interviews.

Red Dog’s experiences seem larger than life; they are the kinds of encounters that frontier or adventure legends are made from.

What other popular adventure or culture heroes does Red Dog remind you of? Describe similarities and differences.

Write a 500–1000 word adventure story set in New Zealand EITHER with Red Dog as the main character, OR with yourself as a larger than life persona.

The following is an episode in Bill’s life when he was working drilling for oil, again, in Colombia.

I stopped by a rival drilling company’s outfit on my way to my new job. I found they needed help to start the camp generators and move their rig. Their mechanic was sick and had been sent to town for medical treatment. They were in a bind for electric power. I spent two days sorting out the problem and getting things right. I returned to my own project and didn’t report to my bosses that I’d done a favour for their competitor. I didn’t want them to send a bill for my efforts and time. Field people had to work together in this difficult environment to get by. The office people are a different breed of cats and would never truly understand fieldmen’s ways of doing things; they never would.

Can you find any evidence of Red Dog’s attitude of office people being “a different breed of cat” in the book?

Visual Media

Design a billboard for 'Red Dog' Beer: use a phrase or two from the novel as your advertising copy.

Design a 'Red Dog' action man doll: use a phrase or two from the novel as your advertising copy.

An outdoors adventure/camping/survival equipment store has decided to start up a line of 'Red Dog' products. What might these be? Design an advertising leaflet for the Red Dog range.

Break down the narrative into a scene outline for a movie script or a TV series.

Turn the whole Red Dog narrative into a Marvel Comic book: i.e. break down the narrative into illustrated frames.

Design a new cover for the book, or a poster advertising the movie version.

Audio/Theatre Responses

Plan out the music soundtrack for the film version of *Red Dog in Bandit Country*.

Imagine you are part of a band called Red Dog and the Bandits, which takes inspiration from Colombian folk songs and Red Dog's experiences for its lyrics, image and song style. Design an album cover and write the lyrics (and music if possible) to a hit song.

There has been a mix up of schedules at the local branch of Radio Heartland. A woman who runs a Sunday morning religious slot has to interview Red Dog about his Colombian experiences. In pairs, write and perform the dialogue that happens when these two face each other over the microphones.

Turn one of the chapters from the book into a theatre script. Perform this for the class.

Write a role play where Consuelo and Red Dog talk about their marriage plans, Red Dog's wish to move to Alaska, and then Consuelo's wish to have children.

Taste-bud Responses

Re-read page 56. Write up a recipe for Huevos Rancheros in the language style Red Dog would use. (Then cook 'em up for your team.)

Hunt down a Colombian recipe for beans. Re-write this in the language Consuelo would use. (Then cook 'em up and get 'em down.)

Research

Using the internet and/or printed library sources:

Research Colombian culture: find out about the ethnic mix of people there, the music, dress, religion, beliefs, food, dance, crafts, social practices....

Research the hazards associated with the New Zealand wilds (bush, mountains, coastline). Write a comparison to the dangers in the Colombian setting Red Dog found himself in.

Research the American OR Latin American 'frontier'. Write a 300–600 word summary of its conditions and values. Compare it to the interaction between Maori iwi and white settlers in NZ during the 1800s–1900s.

Red Dog and Consuelo brought 1200 troy ounces of gold out with them. What is a troy ounce? How much is an ounce of gold worth today? How much was Red Dog and Consuelo's gold worth when they had sold it?

Find out more about the Paso Fino horse breed.

Look up the MFAT web site. Is there any advice for New Zealanders wanting to travel to Colombia?

Red Dog said when talking about supplying his escape route, that he'd read where General Rommel laid in supplies all over the Libyan Desert for that same reason. Find out what you can about Rommel.