

Nelson English Usage

Digital resources for the Australian Curriculum

Worksheet - The Jerilderie Letter

In 1879, Ned Kelly dictated a letter to Joe Byrne, another member of the Kelly Gang. In it, Kelly swore his innocence of the many things he was accused, asked for justice, and spoke at length about his life. The letter became famous and survives today, housed in the State Library of Victoria.

Your task is to rewrite the following passage in the space provided. The passage is an extract from the surviving Jerilderie Letter. You need to correct the spelling, punctuation and grammar. You must also break the letter into paragraphs. You might want to experiment with point of view, tense and tone. It is up to you to choose whether you adopt a casual voice or a more formal one.

'Mr. Johns had a horse called Ruita Cruta although a gelding was as clever as old Wombat or any other Stallion at running horses away and taking them on his beat which was from Greta swamp to the seven mile creek consequently he enticed McCormack's horse away from Greta. Mr. Gould was up early feeding his horses heard a bell and seen McCormack horses for he knew the horse well he sent his boy to take him back to Greta. When McCormack's got the horse they came straight out to Goold and accused him of working the horse; this was false, and Goold was amazed at the idea I could not help laughing to hear Mrs. McCormack accusing him of using the horse after him being so kind as to send his boy to take him from the Ruta Cruta and take him back to them. I pleaded Goulds innocence and Mrs McCormack turned on me and accused me of bringing the horse from Greta to Goolds waggon to pull him out of the bog I did not say much to the woman as my Mother was present but that same day me and my uncle was cutting calves Gould wrapped up a note and a pair of the calves testicles and gave them to me to give them to Mrs McCormack. I did not see her and I gave the parcel to a boy to give to her when she would come instead of giving it to her he gave it to her husband consequently McCormack said he would summons me I told him neither me or Gould used their horse. he said I was a liar & he could welt me or any of my breed I was about 14 years of age but accepted the challenge and dismounting when Mrs McCormack struck my horse in the flank with a bullock's shin it jumped forward and my fist came in collision with McCormack's nose and caused him to loose his equillibrium and fall postrate I tied up my horse to finish the battle but McCormack got up and ran to the Police camp. Constanable Hall asked me what the row was about I told him they accused me of and Gould of using their horse and I hit him and I would do the same to him if he challenged me McCormack pulled me and swore their lies against me I was sentenced to three months for hitting him and three months for the parcel and bound to keep the peace for 12 months.'

Instructions

1 Identify the topic of the passage.

2 Kelly was publicly responding to allegations made against him. Could his letter have been more effective? How so?

3 Did Kelly convince you of his innocence in the passage? Why or why not?

4 Rewrite the passage. Make sure you correct the spelling, grammar and punctuation. Remember, you're free to experiment with point of view, tense and tone.

Teacher comments

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