



The White Ship

By Jackie French

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They were searching for a place to call home.

Michel was happy living with his family on a remote island off the coast of France. Even if he sometimes dreamt of sailing the ocean on a wonderful ship like the Captain's *White Ship*, his days were too full of fishing and chores to think about it much. But one day disaster strikes the island. Michel and the other children are forced to flee from Catherine de Medici's soldiers on the *White Ship* and look for a new land to call home.

Finally Michel's dream has come true — but at what cost? And, what's more, something strange has begun to happen to the *White Ship*: the ship never weighs anchor, no one grows any older, and they never sight land. What's happening to them? And why is Michel haunted by bizarre dreams of an island in a distant southern land and a girl called Rachel?

It takes a catastrophe for Michel to discover the truth behind the *White Ship's* endless journey and to solve the mystery of Rachel and the strange southern land.

The White Ship is a story of religious persecution, friendship, and an idealism that stretches over four hundred years; but most of all, it's a story about the search for safe harbour and a place to call home.

(See back of book for historical details)

Discussion Points:

1. Name six countries that allow religious freedom.
2. Name three countries where there is war or violent conflict between religious groups.
3. What laws in Australia ensure religious freedom?
4. Australia has islands all around its coast. Where might Jacob's Island be?
What passages in the text give you clues?
5. What sort of fruit and vegetables might Michel have seen on the island in his dream?
6. How would Rachel's family have coped with their sewerage, garbage, power, phone, tv and email on the island?
7. The design of the White Ship is based on the Mary Rose. Search the internet - or contact the Australian Maritime Museum in Sydney - to find out exactly
 - (i) what the Mary Rose looked like
 - (ii) how big she was
 - (iii) what happened to her
 - (iv) why she still exists today
8. What do you have to prove, and what procedures do you have to go through, to be given 'refugee status' in Australia? (Try contacting the Department of Immigration for information.)
9. How many people do you think Australia can support?
Who do YOU think these people should be?
10. If you were going to have a dream friend, what would they be like?
Write a story about them...
11. What would make you leave Australia? Where would you go?
12. If you were the Minister for Immigration, would you let the White Ship people settle in Australia? What other solutions might there be to find a home for them?
13. If you were Michel, would you keep sailing till you found a perfect world or would you come ashore?
14. If you were a child on the White Ship, would you rather make your own decisions or would you have the Captain decide for you so you didn't have to worry? Give reasons why.
15. If you were searching for your perfect land, what would it be like?
16. Write a sequel to the White Ship on what happens next.