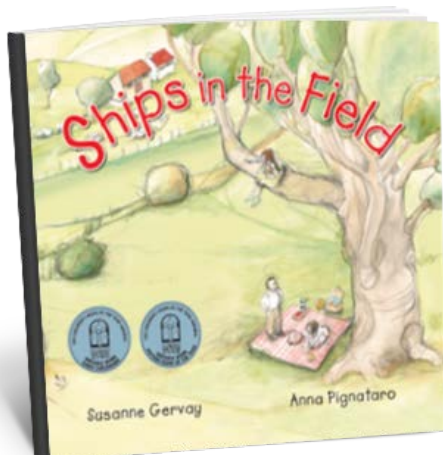


**\*\*GERVAY, Susanne (text) Anna Pignataro (illus.)** *Ships in the Field* Ford St, 2012 unpagged \$26.95 ISBN 9781921665233 SCIS 1539415

A poignant tale simply told and beautifully illustrated by an award winning duo highlighting that everyone has a right to a nationality. Told through the young protagonist's eyes and her foil character, Brownie the small toy dog, we trace the life of before in a war torn environment and after with the reality of a new life. Skills from the old country where Papa was a farmer and Mama a teacher juxtapose with their lives in a foreign country far from home. With a child's delight in the new and her naivety of the underlying ruination experienced by her family she sees joy in their new surroundings. From Mama's silent cries and lives broken the title pokes fun at the language barrier common to new immigrants. A happy ending sends a strong message of hope and survival. Pignataro's wash depictions ring with movement and colour and complement well the story. HM



These are two endearing picture books that are quintessentially Australian. The Gumnut babies beautifully illustrate for the reader the meaning of each word with simple yet cheeky pictures. The pair are mischievously captured playing and exploring their world around them, with a variety of other Australian flora and fauna. May Gibbs' legacy continues to delight children with her seemingly ageless babies. Both books will be enjoyed by toddlers and beginning readers alike. AdJ

**\*\*GOLDFINCH, Richenda** *Big Red*; Based on the True Story of an Australian Stock Horse Self Pub, 2011 29pp \$15.00 pbk ISBN 9780987207203 SCIS 1552636

This is the story of Big Red, the promising young race horse that went lame on the racetrack in Perth. As he was not likely to win big prizes as a race horse he was passed

## **Week-end Book Review: Ships in the Field by Susanne Gervay and Anna Pignataro**

<http://www.papertigers.org/wordpress/week-end-book-review-ships-in-the-field-by-susanne-gervay-and-anna-pignataro/>

Susanne Gervay, illustrated by Anna Pignataro,  
***Ships in the Field***  
ISBN: 978-0-6482035 -7-5

Ages: 8+

“Every night Brownie and I wait for Papa to come home.” – and when he arrives, “Round and round we whirl.” This joyous ritual provides the opening sequence of *Ships in the Field*, a story whose essence is perhaps distilled into the notion of the transcendental power of love. Acclaimed Australian author Susanne Gervay (*I Am Jack*, [\*That's Why I Wrote This Song\*](#)) has based the story on her own childhood as the daughter of Hungarian refugees. Told through the eyes, perception and narrative voice of a likeable, effervescent little girl, we learn that her beloved, funny Papa works in a car factory but used to be a farmer “in the old country, before it was broken”; and quiet, withdrawn Ma, who seems to have forgotten how to smile, was a teacher and now “sews dresses all day long”. The girl's confidante is her soft toy dog Brownie but she also longs for a real dog.

Every Sunday the family goes into the countryside and Papa says, “Look at the ships in the field.” This makes the little girl giggle, for it conjures up a funny image, but it makes her sad too, because other people laugh at the way her father speaks – and so she staunchly joins him in his pronunciation of the word “sheep”. One Sunday, near the “woolly ships”, she finds something very precious that signals a new chapter for all the family.

The undercurrents in the story are felt in the girl's awareness of aspects of her family's past. It is never mentioned in her presence but it weighs on her nevertheless, and she confides in Brownie, “I don't like war.” Anna Pignataro's beautiful watercolour illustrations perfectly capture the emotions – love, pain, joy – that emanate from the

story. As well as the ever-faithful Brownie, vignettes of a real dog appear throughout the story; and two notable sequences merge events from the past, depicting war and flight through the second-hand filter of the little girl's knowledge and imagination. The rough pencil outlines underlying the watercolours imbue the illustrations with energy and a sense of movement that is further emphasised in the variety of page layouts: the use of continuous narrative is particularly effective.

*Ships in the Field* is itself a multi-layered term, from straightforward mispronunciation to providing scope for metaphorical and poetic interpretation – or simply delight in its nonsense. While offering a warm reading experience for young children, the book also poses questions for older readers and adults about how much young children can or should know about painful elements in a family's past; and about the damage that can be caused by not bringing the past into the open, when children have already absorbed more than adults give them credit for. Each rereading of this perfect synthesis between spoken and visual narrative offers something new, through the nuance of the writing or a dawning awareness of a visual motif. Above all, *Ships in the Field* is a very special picture book of extraordinary depth, that carries a message of hope and reassurance that time does and will heal.

Marjorie Coughlan



- See more at: <http://www.papertigers.org/wordpress/week-end-book-review-ships-in-the-field-by-susanne-gervay-and-anna-pignataro/#sthash.rod0SwO1.dpuf>

#### 4MBS reviews 12.09.06

It's a mixed bag of releases from earlier in the year this morning ...

>>>>>>>>>>

Australia is a nation of immigrants yet we often overlook the courage it takes to move countries and cultures. *Ships in the field*, written by Susanne Gervay and illustrated by Anna Pignataro, is the story of a refugee family which has escaped their war-ravaged home, I suspect in the Balkans. In a gentle telling through the eyes of the daughter, the reader can appreciate the thankfulness of the family for the protection their new land gives them, and their loss for familiar things they left behind. This is symbolized in the girl's toy dog, Brownie, her constant companion but not quite the warm snuggle that a real pet used to give. Pets have to be left behind when families seek refuge from the oppression of occupation. The story is told in a wistful way as it relates the daily routines of the family; and the watercolour illustrations provide many more details than are said in the words. The muted colours reflect the subdued mood of the family. At the end, while the family is picnicking, a surprise turns

up which represents a new beginning. And there is an amusing origin for the title which you will find in the text. ***Ships in the field*** is a lovely story for parents and children to share, to grow the tolerance that an immigrant community needs. It is published by Ford St Publishing in hardcover for \$27.

### 11/01 Jenny Mounfield - Good Reads

5 stars to: Ships in the field by Susanne Gervay  
bookshelves: kids-ya, picture-books  
status: Read in January, 2011

Picture book kids 7+

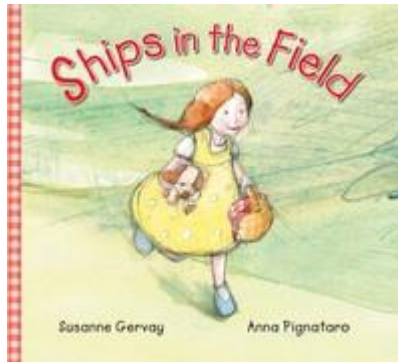
*Ships in the Field* by Susanne Gervay & Anna Pignataro

Publisher: Ford Street Publishing

Format: HB Price: AUD \$26.95

ISBN: 9781921665233

Reviewer: Jenny Mounfield



With issues of immigration featuring heavily in news headlines over the past year, the release of this title couldn't be more timely. *Ships in the Field* concerns one family's experience of migration as seen through the eyes of a child. Forced from their homeland by war, the unnamed child and her parents embrace a new life in Australia. Once a farmer,

Papa now works in a factory, while Ma, a teacher, takes in sewing. Despite the horror of the past and the unknown future ahead, this family is a joyful one—though something is still missing for our child narrator.

In these two heart-felt sentences, Gervay captures the child's perspective beautifully:

“Papa grew up in a village in the old country, before it was broken.  
Ma grew up in a city in the old country, before it was broken.”

By using deceptively subtle wording and misdirection, Gervay expertly conveys the war that still haunts this family as a powerful presence underpinning their outwardly happy lives. But so, too, the hope felt, particularly by the narrator, is just as potent, creating a satisfying emotional contrast that culminates on a high note when the child's heart's desire is realised on the final page.

The title of this book is significant for it highlights what is perhaps the most obvious point of difference between us: language and the way in which we use it.

“ ‘Look at the ships in the field,’ Papa says.  
Brownie and I giggle. ‘Papa, you mean sheep.’  
‘Yes, the ships.’ Papa wiggles his moustache.”

Pignataro's watercolour illustrations reflect Gervay's humour. Smiles abound on almost every page, and the child-like style, simplistic and colourful, adds a sense of levity to what,

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in a different artist's hands, could have been a much darker story.

This is a book that needs to be read more than once. Many of the layers weren't immediately evident on my first read-through. The shadow of war haunting the family is only mentioned in two lines of dialogue between the child and her toy, Brownie, yet its positioning after scenes of family frivolity is stark. This added to Ma's crying behind closed doors and the narrator's fear of night delivers an impact that more graphic depiction could not. It is obvious that author and illustrator have worked hard to get the balance between darkness and light just right. While at first glance this is a deceptively simple story, it soon becomes apparent this balancing act was no easy feat. Hope is very much the prominent theme, but it is only visible because of the darkness behind it. Too much darkness and the light would be snuffed out.

*Ships in the Field* is a book that will never date. It's a story that will be every bit as relevant fifty years from now as it was fifty years ago. A must-have for every classroom.

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Jenny Mounfield is the author of four titles for kids and YA: *Storm Born* (Koala Books), *The Black Bandit* (Lothian), *The Ice-cream Man* (Ford St Publishing), and *Haunted Beach* (Blake). Her short stories have appeared in *Trust Me!* and *Trust Me Too* (Ford St Publishing) and *Picture This 1* (Pearson Education).



<http://www.globalkidsoz.com.au/multicultural/1412/Australia/-Worldwide---Ships-in-the-Field---A-refugee-story>

Australia is an immigrant nation with many stories. Award-winning author Susanne Gervay and award-winning illustrator Anna Pignataro are part of that immigrant and refugee story. Susanne's parents were post-war Hungarian refugees who migrated to Australia. Anna's parents were post-war Italian refugees who migrated to Australia.

In a unique collaboration, Susanne and Anna have created a moving and significant picture book, *Ships in the Field*. It crosses boundaries in a universal recognition that children are part of the journey of war, migration, loss and healing. Through warmth, humour, pathos and story within story, it breaks the silence, engaging children, families and community

### **Australia / Worldwide - Ships in the Field - A refugee story**

*The book 'Ships in the field' is beautiful, heart warming and to me has a little bit of heartbreak and humour. I recommend it to any kid or adult! It has quickly become a bed time favourite (sorry Jack) and Annas illustrations are sweet and delightful.*



## Book Review: Ships in the Field Kids Book Reviews

The story is told by a young girl whose Papa has returned home from work for the evening. As the family, consisting of the young girl's father, mother, and beloved toy dog 'Brownie,' goes about their evening routine, the story reflects on the previous lives of Ma and Papa.

Before the old country was broken by war her Papa was a farmer, and her Ma was a teacher. Now Papa works in a car factory, and Ma makes dresses all day long. The family also enjoys chicken soup for dinner – just like in the old country.

Sundays are picnic days, the girl's favourite day, as the family drives to the forest because Papa loves the trees and rivers. When Pa notices some sheep he tells the family, 'Look at the ships in the field'. The girl giggles, but hates when other people laugh at the way her Papa talks.

This book is targeted for a primary school audience, as it contains many themes that may not be recognised by younger children. Such themes include war, immigrants, and other social justice themes such as respect for diversity and acceptance.

Although the writing seems deceptively simple, it gives an insight into the life of an immigrant family that is still adjusting to life in a country foreign to their home. I believe that this story would be a great tool for any primary school educator, teaching such themes in their classroom.

Review by [Bree Sherd](#)

**Title:** Ships in the Field

**Author:** Susanne Gervay

**Illustrator:** Anna Pignataro

**Publisher:** [Ford Street Publishing](#)

**Format:** Portrait hardback, pp. 32

**ISBN:** 9781876462871

**Type:** Picture books

**For Ages:** 7 +

## Book review- Elephants Have Wings PRACTIALLY PRIMARY Magazine

Subject:

Books (Book reviews)

Author:

Beales, Brad

Pub Date:

10/01/2012

Publication:

Name: Practically Primary Publisher: Australian Literacy Educators' Association

Audience: Academic Format: Magazine/Journal Subject: Education

Copyright: COPYRIGHT 2012 Australian Literacy Educators' Association ISSN: [1324-5961](#)

Issue:

Date: Oct, 2012 Source Volume: 17 Source Issue: 3

Topic:

NamedWork: Ships in the Field (Picture story)

Persons:

Reviewed Illustrator: Pignataro, Anna Reviewee: Gervay, Susanne

Accession Number:

306356490

Full Text:

Susanne Gervay, illustrated by Anna Pignataro (2012) *Ships in the Field* Ford Street Publishing

Students engaging in texts that challenge their understandings, beliefs and normalities is a valuable way of developing comprehension, and the picture story book genre is a great way to do just that. For young readers, or those being read to, picture story books have often been an early means of creating images in the mind and manipulating those images and the messages that have been imbedded in the text. Susanne Gervay's *Ships in the Field* is one such text, brilliantly supported by Anna Pignataro's meaningful and beautifully composed watercolour illustrations.

Susanne Gervay, well known for her Jack books - *I am Jack*, *Super Jack* and *Always Jack*, is widely recognised for her passion for social justice themes, and *Ships in the Field* continues that passion. With the added collaboration of Pignataro's award winning illustrating talents, this is one book that is well worth adding to any classroom, school or home library.

The unnamed young girl, who could be of any number of nationalities, and her toy dog, Brownie, sit patiently waiting for Papa to come home, and she goes on to describe a simple, warm and inviting home life in a new country with Brownie constantly by her side. Although everything seems warm and friendly in the beginning, sad memories are never far away, carried most prominently by her Ma who finds it difficult to find a smile. Images of a war-torn town fill the centre pages with people, exhausted from their turmoil, lining up to catch a ship, and sad dogs. One can only wonder why the young girl yearns for a real dog of her own, with the image of one such pup flying through the air, as they get ready to leave the old country. A dog flying through the air you may ask? I'll leave that up to you to decipher. It is frightening for a young child, but wonderful Sundays in the new country are just the recipe for fond memories and joking with Papa about the way he pronounces, 'Sheeps in the field', add to the charm of this story. To a young child, like the one in this book, any world can sometimes seem like the whole world and simple things can often be the best and most secure. What about Brownie and the girl? Will they get a real puppy to play with? Will Ma find her smile? You'll have to read the book to find out.

This book works well to give a voice to children, parents, and possibly even dogs, from all parts of the world where there is war and dislocation. The first picture, according to Gervay herself, is based on her experience as the daughter of refugees and 'that silence of 'protection' that fragments family.' Gervay and Pignataro tackle real challenges faced by many families around the world with compassion and sensitivity. This is a grand story told in a delightfully simple and poignant way, but don't be fooled by its potential age demographic. This story reaches through the years and nations of the world and puts them directly into the hands of the young or mature reader.

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