

Hass
Year 4

A STORY OF THE RAJAH QUILT

My Name is Lizzie Flynn

CLAIRE SAXBY & LIZZY NEWCOMB



TR
SAX
Teacher
Reference



ALL I OWN in this world is my name: Lizzie Flynn.
It is all I take with me as we are hustled aboard the *Rajah*,
a cargo of convict women.

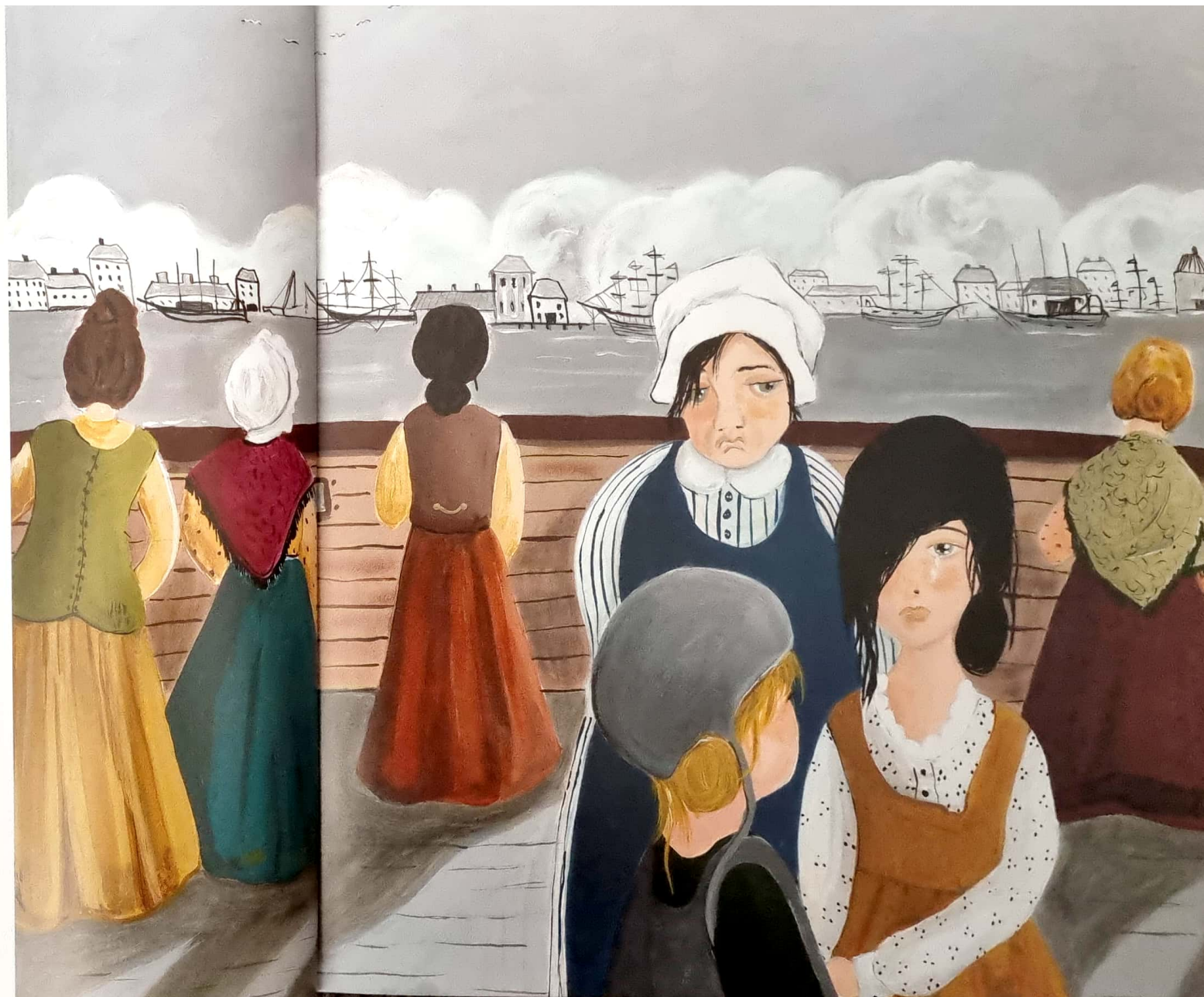
We leave London today, bound for Van Diemen's Land.
My sentence – seven years for stealing a shawl – might as well be life.
I'll never see home again.

I CRY AS they raise the anchor
and ease away from the pier.

Big Martha Woodhouse tells me
to stop blubbering – what has
England ever done for any of us?
Except banish us to the other side
of the world. And for what?
For being poor, she says.

The women are squabbling like
seagulls. What does it matter
where we sleep, when everything
we know is left behind?

It is the end for all of us.



MOLLY SAVED A space for me next to her but Big Martha took it.

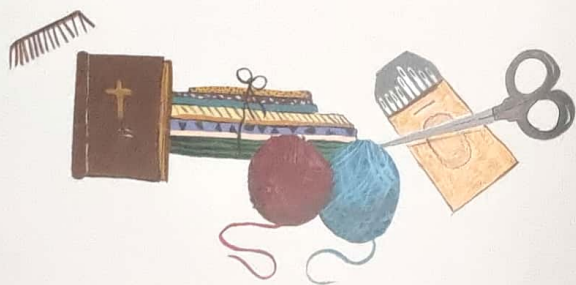
On deck a lady is talking. We climb up just as they are giving out the bags. There are needles and cotton, scissors and a comb, a bible, some big bits of fabric and some little bits too.

The little bits are for a quilt, the lady says, that we will make together. I hear groans and Big Martha says they'll fly kites before *she* sews for anyone.

I say nothing.

The little bits are such pretty colours: reds and blues, creams and blacks. I pull out a handful and arrange them on the deck, making patterns.

Molly says I have an eye for colour and won't I help sew? I shake my head.



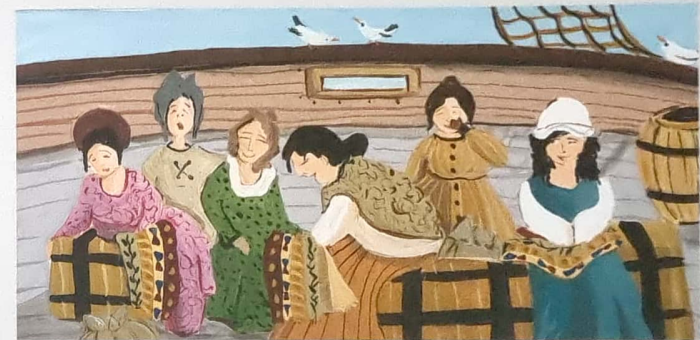
THE DAYS ARE getting warmer.
We stop at a port but are locked
in the hold and see nothing.

I lay out colour pieces in the
half-light, first this way, then that.

We hear the crew thump-thumping
above.

Molly coughs. They'll be loading
fresh water and meat, she says.





I CREEP UP to the deck where women are clustered, stitching. They talk about the sailors and the laughter gets louder until the quilt lady appears with the captain. He frowns and bids them all put their energy into their stitches.



MOLLY ASKS ME again to join them so I have to tell her I can't sew.

That sets the women laughing anew and my face flushes. But Molly doesn't laugh. She shows me how to begin. I'm sewing!

I feel good until I see her stitches, neat and tiny like a baby's eyelashes. Mine look like someone has thrown kindling wood, all higgledy-piggledy. And the cloth puckers like Big Martha's mouth. I'll never be able to do it. But Molly says try again. So I do.

I sew until the light is gone and begin early in the morning. The pieces grow into patterns, into strips.





THEN BIG MARTHA sees us sewing and curses. "Fancywork for a fine lady when we have nothing." She rips fabric from my hand and howls when the needle bites. She flings it overboard and reaches for my bag. I kick her hard, though I know I'll regret it. She is four times my size and mean as a tethered bear.

Three sailors haul her off and I hug the bag. I shiver. We have a long way to go and Martha won't forget. Molly squeezes me tight.

I wish they would keep Martha in the brig until we reach shore, but know it will only be for a day or two.






I SIT BY as the sailors roughly
stitch a canvas shroud for Molly.
They bury her in the heaving waters.



The past is a misted memory.
The future has no shape.

Only one thing I know. I do not
want to pass from this world as if
I had never been here.

An illustration depicting a storm on a ship's deck. The scene is filled with a sense of chaos and distress. In the foreground, a woman with long black hair, wearing a white bonnet and a dark blue dress, is bent over, her face buried in her hands. To her right, another woman in a white bonnet and a dark dress is also bent over, appearing to be in pain. In the background, a woman in a blue dress with white stars is hunched over, and another woman in a white bonnet and dark dress is visible. The overall atmosphere is one of suffering and helplessness. The background is a mottled, brownish-yellow color, suggesting a dark, stormy sky. The style is a soft, painterly illustration with visible brushstrokes.

A STORM BEGINS. The sky darkens and roars.
The sea churns and so do our stomachs.

They secure the hatches above us and the hold
becomes a groaning mass of writhing bodies,
souped in a mix of vomit and filth.

The smell takes away the breath I have left.
It feels like we are buried alive and will never
again see the sky.



A LIFETIME LATER the hatches are thrown wide and we clamber up to the deck. I douse myself in sea water; sluice the stench from my clothes.

I am happy to be alive.

I am stitching for Molly too now. The strips stretch and the quilt grows.



LAND APPEARS AND eventually we enter a broad river. Forest crowds the shore on both sides, then retreats to show a township.

Martha scowls as she and others are escorted to the Female Factory. I think they are deluded if they expect walls to contain her.

I WILL WORK in a laundry here. just like at home.

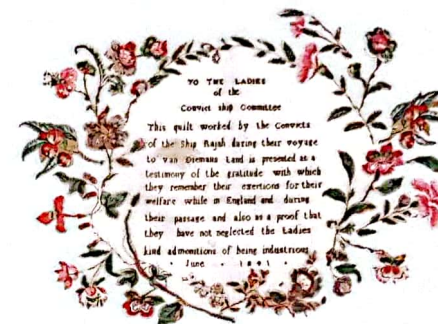
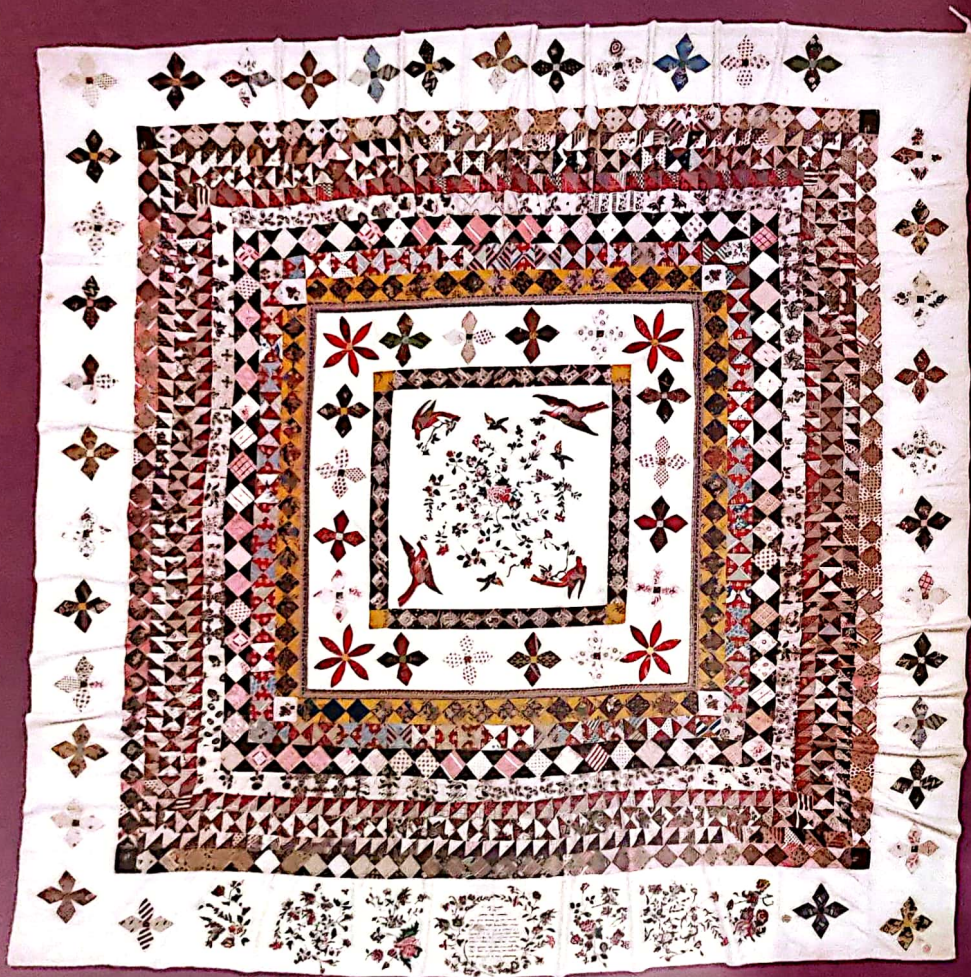




THE QUILT IS done now.

No matter what happens,
we have made this.

It will remember Molly and me,
even if only I know it.



THE RAJAH QUILT was made by convict women on board the *Rajah* during their voyage from England to Van Diemen's Land in 1841. It includes 2815 pieces and was stitched by more than 20 women.

The unbacked quilt was presented to the Governor's wife. She sent it back to England, possibly to Elizabeth Fry, a prison reformer who headed the committee that provided the Useful Bags for the women. It's not known whether the quilt ever reached Elizabeth. It was lost for 147 years before being rediscovered in a Scottish attic.

The Rajah quilt returned to Australia in 1989 and is now housed in the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra.



PREVIOUS DOUBLE PAGE SPREAD (LEFT, PAGE 30)

Unknown female convicts on board the Rajah

under the direction of Kezia Hayter

The Rajah quilt (1841)

pieced medallion style unlined coverlet

cotton sheeting and chint; appliqué, silk thread embroidery

125 x 337.2 cm

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Gift of Les Hollings and the Australian Textiles Fund 1989

PREVIOUS DOUBLE PAGE SPREAD (RIGHT, PAGE 31)

Detail from the *Rajah* quilt

dedication inscribed in stitching with appliqué decoration

*To Leonie, who was there at the beginning.
Keep on quilting.*

CS

*To my family Marty and James.
Dream your biggest dreams. I know you can fulfil
them, I will be there beside you.*

LN

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When convict Lizzie Flynn
is escorted aboard the *Rajah*,
bound for Australia,
she has no idea what to expect.

Will it be the end of her life,
or a new beginning?



"Saxby cleverly brings the quilt's story to life
through Lizzie's eyes ..." *Sydney Morning Herald*

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