ANZAC Day

A play reading that reflects on war

4 characters: Mum, Dad, son Jamie, daughter Amber.

Jamie is sitting by the table engrossed with his smart phone; Mum stands behind the table, she wears an apron and holds a cloth (or other kitchen item) and looks busy;

Amber enters wearing a uniform, or a symbol of uniform (hat scarf etc), she removes her back-pack with a thud.

Jamie: Why are you wearing your Girl Guide (or Girl’s Brigade) uniform?

Amber: I’ve been selling red poppies in the mall. Our company was asked to help. (sits at the other end of the table, chair turned towards audience)

Jamie: Yea! It’s ANZAC day tomorrow, we get a day off school.

Mum: We will be going to the Citizens Service at the War Memorial in the morning.

Amber: I’m going to be in the parade. There is going to be a band and I am going to be carrying the Girl Guide flag.

Mum: That is an honour. We will be proud of you.

Jamie: I like the parade but the speeches get really boring. They go on and on.

Mum: Those speeches are important, you should try listening. If we don’t know our history we are in danger of repeating it.

Jamie: I know what ANZAC is about - old soldiers who died years ago. We learn that stuff at school. Hundreds of New Zealand and Australian soldiers died at Gallipoli in Turkey. But it was ages and ages ago.

Amber: It was exactly (102) years ago.

Jamie: You are such a know all. History is full of wars but we don’t have them now.

Amber: There are wars now.

Jamie: Are not!

Amber: Are so!

Jamie: Are not!

Amber: Are so!
Mum: Stop it you two. I won't have a war in my kitchen! But Amber is right, there are wars happening now. In recent times there have not been large numbers of Kiwis killed overseas. But there have been some, and ANZAC Day remembers them too.

Amber: If there have always been wars why is the ANZAC war called the First World War?

Mum: That war was not just about the ANZACs. It involved soldiers and citizens from many, many countries. It was called The Great War and was expected to end all wars, but a generation later, with new technology The 2nd World War made an even bigger impact on the whole world.

Jamie: I don’t know why we make such a fuss about the First World War. It didn’t happen here and it’s got nothing to do with us.

Dad: (Arriving home from work) Hullo everyone, what has nothing to do with us?

Jamie & Amber: Hi Dad.

Mum: Hullo James. Jamie thinks the First World War has nothing to do with us? (Dad puts down his briefcase and sits behind the table)

Dad: Does he indeed! Well, perhaps young James needs a little history lesson. Why, my son, were you named James George?

Jamie: Because James is your name.

Dad: Correct, but it is also the name of my father and his father. Your great-grandfather was called Jim and he fought in the 2nd World War. Jim was captured and spent two terrible years in a prisoner of war camp in Italy. His father, your great-great grandfather was also called James. This James had a brother called George. George went to the First World War and never came back. He died in France. He was a brave man, and that is where your second name comes from.

Mum: We should show the children George’s name on the War Memorial.

Amber: Can we see it tomorrow?

Dad: No it's not on our local memorial it is on the memorial in my home town. We will show it to you next time we visit Granddad.

Amber: Are there a lot of war memorials in New Zealand?

Mum: Almost every town in New Zealand has a war memorial. When WW1 broke out young men from every town were encouraged to join the armed forces. New Zealand ended up sending more soldiers to that war than any other county on a proportional basis.

Dad: Every Kiwi family that has been here for more than 3 generations is likely to have a relation on a war memorial somewhere in New Zealand.
Jamie: It would have been exciting going to war.

Dad: That is what a lot of young men thought but they soon changed their minds. Ordinary soldiers spent much of their time digging ditches, called trenches, to give protection from the enemy guns. They had to sleep in wet clothes that were infested with lice, and there were rats trying to get at their food. Soldiers could be shot for disobeying orders, or even for appearing frightened. Most who survived were so traumatized they couldn’t talk about it when they got back.

Mum: In my opinion the only way to stop wars is for everyone to refuse to fight.

Dad: The trouble with that is not everyone will refuse, and then the bullies win.

Mum: It is a moral issue that people have to deal with in their own way. My grandfather and his brother refused to fight. They believed killing people was wrong – their consciences objected to killing. ‘Conchies’ was the common name for them. They were called cowards and locked up for years. Some were only fed bread and water. You had to be brave to be a Conchie.

Amber: I think it all sounds horrible. I’m glad women didn’t have to go to war.

Dad: Ah, but some women did volunteer – not as fighters, they went as nurses. Nurses were needed to care for the wounded but of course some of them got killed along with ordinary people who lived in the countries where it was happening. It’s not just soldiers who suffer.

Mum: And it is important that you know about it. I think we could have a little competition to see who can find out the most facts before dinner.

Dad: Good idea. I’ll award $1 for each WW1 statistic you find...

During a suitable pause of 1-3 minutes - Amber gets out her phone and both children do vigorous tapping and scrolling while WW1 marching music is played and (if practical) WW1 photos are shown on power-point.

Dad: OK, what have you found out?

Children deliver their facts in a competitive sounding way

Jamie: The war began in June 1914 and lasted until November 1918.

Amber: In 1914 the total population of New Zealand was just over one million.

Jamie: 120,000 New Zealanders enlisted in the Armed Force

Amber: 103,000 Kiwis served overseas.

Jamie: 18,500 New Zealanders died in the war.
Amber: More than 2,700 died at Gallipoli.

Jamie: 12,500 died on the Western Front. That’s where great-great-great Uncle George was killed.

Amber: 550 nurses served with the New Zealand Forces.

Jamie: 41,000 New Zealanders were wounded.

Amber: There are about 500 civic war memorials in New Zealand.

Jamie: That’s all the statistics I could find.

Amber: Me too.

Dad: And just as well or I would be broke. (Takes out wallet)

Mum: Great work kids.

Amber: When we go on holiday I’m going to look out for War Memorials. I can take photos ... I might make a War Memorial scrapbook.

Jamie: I’m named after a war hero. I’m going to find out more about my truly great Uncle.

Dad: A good place to start would be our family tree on-line. You can access war records from genealogy sites.

Mum: I intend to do some research on my family’s Conscientious Objectors and write their story. All brave stories need to be heard.

Amber: If we don’t know our history we are in danger of repeating it!

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Additional ending to play
Cast stands and is joined by the Worship Leader who reads the 1st verse of Hymn for ANZAC Day, Jamie reads 2nd verse, Mum 3rd verse, Dad 4th verse, Amber 5th verse.

R. M. Sugrue, 2013

Hymn for ANZAC Day
2005 Words: © Shirley Erena Murray; Music: © Colin Gibson
Tune: ANZAC 2005; No 65 in Hope is Our Song, NZ Hymnbook Trust
(Could be sung by congregation with appropriate permission)

This play and others are published in ‘Ten Plays – short, easy dramas for Churches’
Available on line in hardcopy or eBook from Philip Garside Publishing
Hymn for ANZAC Day

Honour the dead, our country's fighting brave,
honour our children left in foreign grave,
where poppies blow and sorrow seeds her flowers,
honour the crosses marked forever ours.

Weep for the places ravaged with our blood,
weep for the young bones buried in the mud,
weep for the powers of violence and greed,
weep for the deals done in the name of need.

Honour the brave whose conscience was their call,
answered no bugle, went against the wall,
suffered in prisons of contempt and shame,
branded as cowards, in our country's name.

Weep for the waste of all that might have been,
weep for the cost that war has made obscene,
weep for the homes that ache with human pain,
weep that we ever sanction war again.

Honour the dream for which our nation bled,
held now in trust to justify the dead,
honour their vision on this solemn day:
peace known in freedom, peace the only way.

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Tune: ANZAC 2005

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