

# Tilda

AUTHOR  
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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary



## SYNOPSIS

*You have a big heart. And people blessed with a big heart have a choice to make. Do they fill that heart with light and love or do they fill it with darkness and hate? This is your choice to make, Matilda. Make it wisely.*

Tilda Moss refuses to believe her papa has abandoned her and left her, alone and orphaned, in Brushwood Convent and Home for Girls, no matter what Sister Agatha says. A promise is a promise and Papa promised he would be back for her as soon as he returns from the war.

But Tilda is convinced the dreadful Sister Agatha is out to get her. Why is she so hateful all the time? She insists that Matilda declare to all at the convent that she is an orphan. She is not an orphan and she will never say it! Something is amiss and Tilda and her best friend Annie need to find out what before it is too late.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue Whiting is an award-winning children's and YA author and editor who has worked in publishing for over twenty years. Sue was senior commissioning editor and publishing manager for Walker Books Australia for many years before leaving in 2016 to concentrate on her writing. As a storyteller and schools' performer, Sue has informed, inspired and entertained thousands of kids across the country. She is also a freelance children's book editor and writing coach, and the author of numerous books, including the bestselling *Missing*, the acclaimed *The Book of Chance* and a number of CBCA Notable Books. Sue's latest books are *Pearly and Pig and the Great Hairy Beast*, the first in a new junior fiction series, and the narrative nonfiction picture book *The Echidna Near my Place*, illustrated by Cate James.

## STUDY NOTES

- Tilda is set in Norwood, SA, in 1901. Do you think the book felt distinctly Australian? How do you think author Sue Whiting has done this? You could consider the language and landscapes, among other elements. What elements of the story, if any, could only happen in Australia? How would the book feel different if it were set in another country?
- How are right and wrong presented in the novel? Are some characters presented purely as 'good' or 'bad' or are there shades of grey in everyone? Did you find yourself forgiving some characters for their actions easier than others? Which character did you connect with the most? Can you explain why?
- Tilda is a historical novel—inspired by Sue Whiting's own grandmother's experience—but primarily a work of fiction. Which parts of the book do you think can be seen as historically accurate, and where do you think the author has

creative licence to invent or embellish? How reliable do you think this novel is in presenting a realistic portrait of life in 1901?

- How was life different in 1901, compared to now? What aspects/things were different? Think about clothes, schooling, food, entertainment, technology, transport, etc. Would you like to live in 1901 Adelaide? Why/why not? Some people think that life was much simpler and less complicated in the past—do you agree?
- How does Tilda shape and define her identity and sense of self after arriving at Brushwood Convent, and then again at Norton Hall? How does she change as a character as a result of the events of the novel?
- The book is told entirely through first-person narration, from Tilda's perspective. How did that make you feel? How would the story be different if it was told in third person, or from another character's perspective? What might they have experienced that Tilda was unaware of? How might they see things differently to Tilda?
- How has her family life affected Tilda? Make sure you think about her connection to both her father and her mother. Do you think Tilda's father is a 'good' parent? Why or why not?
- 'Hope? Boyo, I am sorry, Sister Geraldine, I have given up on hope. There is no hope for the likes of me – the daughter of a lying-good-for-nothing rogue, who has filled her heart with hate...' (p 151). Do you agree with what Tilda says about herself? Why or why not? Despite what she says, how is Tilda's life affected by hope?
- Tilda suffers greatly throughout the novel. Would you consider her a resilient character? Is there a point in the novel where she is less resilient? What causes this?
- Discuss the ups and downs of Tilda's relationships with the various Sisters. Did you like (or strongly dislike) any Sister more or less than the others? Discuss the idea that the adults in this story (and in your own life) don't always say the right thing and are just as affected by emotions and stress as yourself. What should you do if you realise you've said something hurtful to another person?
- Tilda and Annie are great friends. How do they look out for each other? Why do you think they have such a strong bond? How important is this friendship to the overall story?
- There are several moments in the book where Tilda feels that she is doing the 'wrong' thing. Did you find yourself mostly agreeing or disagreeing with Tilda's decisions throughout the book? Why or why not? Were there any of her actions or choices you found yourself on the fence about?
- How are Tilda's 'Facts of Brushwood' presented differently to the rest of the book? You could consider both visual and textual elements. How did these sections (including of course, Annie's opinions) affect you as a reader?
- While some people like Sister Agatha are cruel to Tilda, she is also shown empathy and kindness from many characters, both minor and major. Consider how both positive and negative sides of human nature are demonstrated through the characters and how they're treated in *Tilda*. Which side do you think we can see clearest in the novel and why?
- There are a number of moments of deep sadness and/or suffering in the novel. Which moment affected you the most and why? How do different characters work through their own experiences of sadness and loss? Is there a right or wrong way to process it?
- Tilda is no orphan—but the rest of the girls at Brushwood are. Who are some famous orphans you've seen a movie or read a book about? How are their characters and stories similar or different to the girls at Brushwood?