

Dusty in the Outwilds

AUTHOR

RHIANNON WILIAMS

ILLUSTRATOR

MARTINA HEIDUCZEK

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

Dusty has grown up hearing whispers about her mysterious aunt Meg, who went off to live ‘out wild’ and never returned. Yet Dusty’s father refuses to discuss what happened—and her only clue is a photograph of her aunt as a young girl with a strange, monkey-like creature on her shoulder.

But when Dusty learns that her family’s beloved bushland property might be sold, she’s convinced that only Meg could stop it happening. So Dusty sets off to find her...and that’s when she discovers what ‘out wild’ really means.

The Outwilds are beguiling. Dangerous. And full of creatures Dusty half-remembers from old bedtime stories—beautiful, but deadly. Is Meg still out there? And even if she is, how will Dusty bring her home?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Originally from Taradale, Victoria, Rhiannon Williams writes magical books for kids. Her Ampersand Prize-winning debut novel, *Ottolie Colter and the Narrowway Hunt*, was named a CBCA Notable Book, an Aurealis Awards finalist, and shortlisted for the Readings Children’s Book Prize and the Speech Pathology Australia book awards. The complete Narrowway Trilogy has also been released in German and Dutch.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Martina grew up in a small village on the Baltic Sea in Germany. Here you could find her mostly galloping through the forests with flying piggy tails on her Shetland pony, drawing or reading.

These days she is an illustrator and graphic designer and lives in Australia.

Martina’s illustrations are a mixture of digital and traditional media. With a passion for colour and textures she works with layers of scanned materials, coloured pencils, watercolour and gouache.

Her works are inspired by nature, people, places and the emotionally moving and silly things she sees out there...Magic is everywhere.

THEMES

- Friendship and family
- Growing up
- Saying goodbye

- Truth and lies
- Imagination

STUDY NOTES

- The author, Rhiannon Williams, writes in clear, third person prose. She does play with language and understanding in the book, exploring the way we mishear, misunderstand or misremember things and the way that this shapes our relationships with other people. Ask students to think about different types of language—spoken and unspoken—and think about a time when they've been unable to articulate how they felt, or have been misunderstood by someone else. How did this make them feel? Discuss as a class.
- Williams also explores the link between language and our imagination, bringing the language of bedtime stories to life in the Outwilder. Here, creatures like beochi bears and sundrakes become real, taking elements of the familiar and mixing them up in strange and wonderful ways. Ask students to share their own imaginary creatures and friends from childhood. Think about a magical place and draw a map of it. What kind of creatures might live there? What special names might they have?
 - Write a scene set in this magical place that begins with the line 'I stepped through the doorway and was amazed to discover...'
- Did you like the book? Why/why not? Write a review of the book and present it to the class.
- Think about what you liked best in the story and why. What emotions did you feel as you read?
- Which character did you relate to the most?
- Gus gets angry at Dusty because he thinks she doesn't understand him. Rewrite a scene from the book from Gus's perspective. How does he feel about what's happening? What would he like to change or say or do?
- Choose one of the creatures from the Outwilder and draw a picture of it based on the descriptions in the book. Compare your interpretations with other people's from your class.
- Turn one of the chapters from the book into a short play. Which chapter will be the most interesting or fun to act out? What roles will you need to cast? Design the costumes and a set and write a short script to perform to the class.

COMPREHENSION

- After reading the book, answer the following comprehension questions:
 - How does Bones react to Uncle Buck? Why does Dusty think this is?
 - How does Dusty imagine the wilds? What do they represent to her?
 - What makes Dusty decide to ask Meg for help? How does she know where to find her?
 - Where does the special tree lead? Why does Dusty feel betrayed when she discovers it?
 - What is your first impression of Meg? What are Dusty's first impressions of her?
 - Why does Gus get cross with Dusty?
 - Why did Dusty's dad keep the Outwilder a secret from her? Do you agree with his reasons? How do you feel about adults keeping secrets from kids?
 - Why does Carmen Creed want to catch Spook? Does anyone have the right to hunt and sell other animals? How does Dusty feel about it? Do you have any sympathy for Carmen?
 - Why does Bones come back?
 - How does the ending of the story make you feel? Is it a happy ending? Why/why not?