

Honey and the Valley of Horses

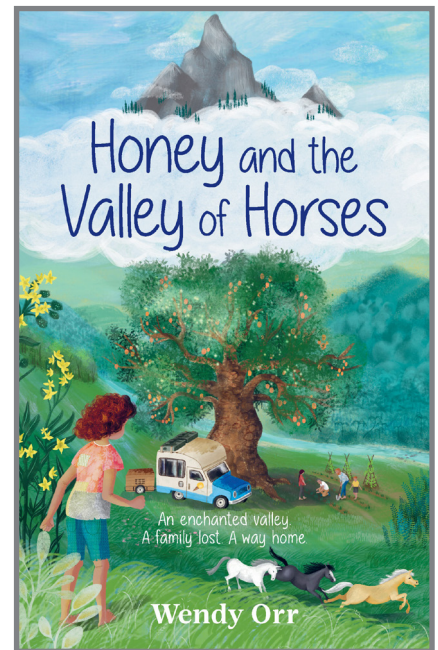
AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

When Honey was four and her brother Rumi was a tiny baby, her family loaded up their converted ice-cream-van-camper and drove away from all they knew, as an illness swept the sad wide world. High in the mountains, they crossed a bridge to follow a mysterious herd of enchanted horses into a sheltered valley. The bridge and the track disappeared behind them—and now they are trapped in paradise.

In the valley of horses, Honey's family becomes self-sufficient, fishing, growing vegetables and using solar power. But no messages from the outside world are ever received. When her father falls desperately ill, Honey is sure there must still be people in the big wide world who can help. She is determined to draw on her resourcefulness, self-belief and courage, but will this be enough to find a way out of the valley?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wendy Orr was born in Canada, and grew up in France, Canada and the USA. After high school, she studied occupational therapy in England, married an Australian farmer and moved to Australia. They had a son and daughter, and now live on five acres of bush, near the sea. Her books have won awards in Australia and around the world and have been translated into twenty-six languages.

Although Wendy first learned to read and write in French, her family spoke English at home. She clearly remembers the excitement of reading a story in her own language for the first time. She immediately started writing stories and hasn't stopped since.

Wendy has had many highlights in her writing career, including winning the CBCA Book of the Year and walking a red carpet with Jodie Foster, but believes that nothing compares to the thrill of the first vision of a new book.

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- What elements in the cover image suggest that this valley might be magical?
- Consider the perspective of the image. Does looking down from a distance add to a feeling of magic? How do the soaring mountain peaks make you feel?
- How do the title and subtitle support this sense of magic? What word or words, in particular, suggest the story might be magical?

- Consider the colours used on the cover. Do they suggest magic to you? If so, what sort of magic, good or evil and menacing?
- Open the story and read the very first sentence. Does the sentence remind you of stories you may have heard before? What sort of stories were they and did they often involve magic of some sort?

WHILE READING

- Foreshadowing is when an author provides hints about what will happen later in a story. Can you find any examples of foreshadowing in the first chapter of the story?
- The end of each chapter is marked by a short message from someone in Honey and Rumi's extended family in the outside world. Why do you think the author, Wendy Orr, included these messages? Did these messages add to an element of mystery for you?
- How does the language in them differ from the language used in the main part of the story? Does the change in language style change the way you read the story?
- From what point of view (POV) is the story told? Can you think of other stories involving magic that had the same POV?
- Choose three adjectives to describe Honey. Now find a scene in the book to illustrate each word you chose. For instance, if you chose the word brave describe a scene or scenes in the novel where she demonstrates her bravery.
- 'Absolutely everything they'd brought with them had been used and reused and mended and used again for something new.' (p 12) After reading this quote, answer the following questions:
 - Name five things that Honey and Rumi's family use and reuse and mend and use again.
 - What would you pack if you were setting out in a camper van like Honey and Rumi's parents and NanNan?
 - How might you use and reuse and mend and use again one of the things you packed?
 - How might you use and reuse something in your classroom?
- The valley provides Honey and Rumi's family with everything they need but they work hard for everything they eat. How does their life differ from yours? Do you think growing, finding, fishing and preparing all your food would change how you feel about food? Would it make it more valuable or less? Might you enjoy it more or less?
 - Find out about Bush Tucker by watching the ABC TV's *Behind the News* program entitled, 'Bush Tucker Garden' [aired on 26 Nov, 2019].
- 'Honey's poem flowed into her mind while she was still getting her feather and ink-dye from their shelf in the van. Even though it was sad it made her feel better.' (p 82) Why do you think writing a poem helped Honey feel better about her torn sleeping bag? What poetic techniques has Honey used in her poem?
 - Try writing a short poem about something that you lost and made you feel sad. Choose the thing that you want to write about. Think of words, rhymes and rhythms that relate to the thing you have chosen. Write down words to describe how you feel about your loss. Edit the poem by taking out any words you think don't need to be there.
- How does Honey's great-great-grandad's experience reflect things that happen to Honey's family?
 - After finishing the story, can you find things that happen to him that also happen to Honey after she finds the letter?
- Research the term 'magical realism' and write a paragraph arguing for or against that *Honey and the Valley of the Horses* is a magical realism novel.
 - Write another paragraph about your response to magical realism. Did you like it when magical things happened in the novel? In your paragraph explain why you felt this way.
- Ice-cream is mentioned many times in the story. Honey and her family live in an ice-cream van, the clouds above the mountain are like ice-cream, the adults talk about eating ice-cream in the world outside and the story ends with Honey trying ice-cream for the first time. If ice-cream is a symbol here—something that represents an idea, place or relationship—then what do you think it might symbolise here?
- 'It started as a breeze, and the leaves rustled. It grew to a wind, and the trees danced. It bellowed into a storm, a howling, shrieking gale, and the trees bent and creaked. Big branches cracked and crashed and small ones flew through the air like bumbling birds.' (p 158) Find examples of the following in the extract:
 - repetition

- personification
- alliteration
- simile
- rhythm.

Why do you think Wendy Orr chose to use these literary techniques at this precise moment in the story?

- ‘His thoughts spun like kaleidoscope windows: Will we find Honey? . . . How can I feel so happy when I’m so scared for Papa and Honey? (p 176) Research the term Stream of Consciousness and write a short paragraph about whether you think the extract is an example of it.
 - Did this passage make you feel closer to Rumi because you could understand the whirl of his thoughts?
 - Did this passage make the story even more dramatic for you?
- Write a book review for *Honey and the Valley of Horses*. Start with a summary of the main characters, outline the plot, then provide an overview of the key themes. Next, include a personal response to the book, identifying and explaining what you enjoyed, what challenged you and what you did not like. Would you recommend the book to other readers of your age group? Why, or why not? Finish by rating the book out of 10.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
CAROLYN WALSH