

The Hats of Marvello

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid Primary

SYNOPSIS

No matter how much Olive longs for a pet rabbit, it's never going to happen. Not when she lives in an Australian country town where most people think they're a pest.

So imagine Olive's shock when she unexpectedly finds not one, but one hundred and one rabbits. And one of them can talk!

How Olive will ever be able to hide and protect the rabbits is going to be her greatest challenge, and all while preparing for the Year 5 play. At least she has her costume ready, although the old top hat she found in the local op-shop seems very odd . . .

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amanda has enjoyed writing and drawing since she was young. In Year Three she wrote and illustrated her first story. It was about a group of adventurous mice who travelled to the moon. After discovering it was made of green cheese, they ate it.

Later Amanda wrote stories for children while studying to be a primary school teacher. Her first published book, *Arthur*, was illustrated by Donna Gynell. Watching Donna bring words to life through pictures inspired Amanda to study illustration and create the artwork for some of her own stories.

Amanda lives in the Adelaide Hills, South Australia. When she's not working in her studio, you'll likely find her teaching at a local school, puddling about in the back garden, or rambling somewhere through the bush.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Lavanya Naidu is a children's book illustrator and animator, born and raised in Kolkata, India. Over the last decade she has worked on numerous kids' books, animation projects and animation production. She now lives in Melbourne and recently completed her role as the head of design and episode director on the animated kids' series *The Strange Chores* (season 2). In her spare time Lavanya enjoys collecting dinosaur models and tending to her ever-growing collection of plants!

THEMES

- Grief and Loss
- Gender
- Power
- Resilience

STUDY NOTES**BEFORE READING**

- Discuss the cover art and use the images to speculate on the setting and plot. Use the following questions to further your discussion:
 - Why might the girl be dressed the way she is?
 - What is the connection between her costume and the rabbits?
 - Discuss the idea of a magician and the rabbit in the hat trick, and consider why there are so many rabbits, eg. has the trick gone wrong somehow?
 - What about all the rabbits? Are these wild rabbits? What makes that unlikely?
 - Why might there be just one black rabbit?
 - What do students know about magicians and magic tricks? Set up a learning station on magic tricks with books, how-to video clips/instructions and paraphernalia such as playing cards.
 - Has anyone seen a magic show? Do they know of any famous magicians, eg. Houdini, David Copperfield?
 - Can anyone do a magic trick?
 - Does anyone have a pet rabbit? In some Australian states, pet rabbits are illegal. What is the reason for this?
- Establish a class Learning Wall (this could be a physical space in your classroom, or a virtual one that the class shares) to record reflections, questions and answers, relevant information, quotes, examples of writing techniques and speculations.
 - Start with students' responses and speculation about the novel based on the cover.
 - Encourage students to put up any questions they may have both before and during reading, and to contribute responses to those questions as they read *The Hats of Marvello*.

WHILE READING**Plot and Key Events**

- Plot the key events on the narrative on a Learning Wall as the class reads *The Hats of Marvello*. Include important quotes that tell the reader about these events and characters' reactions to them.
- Olive and her mum find the hat in the op shop. 'Small round pellets rolled off the brim . . .' (p 12). The fact that there are rabbit pellets with the hat foreshadows the hat's magical properties, as well as the predicaments of both sets of rabbits. Are there other examples of foreshadowing?
- What is the significance of the hat's label? (pp 29–30)
- Miss Lavender's story of her grandfather (and the hat) is an important link for Olive and her friends. (Chapter 38). How does this provide the next development in the plot?
 - How does the past connect to the present in other ways?
- How does Grandpa's accident relate to Olive's feelings about the rabbits (Chapter 20)?
 - Discuss consequences of actions and attitudes in light of this.

Setting

- This narrative is set in the fictional town and district of Mount Dry, South Australia but also has plot sequences set in England. The contrast between the two landscapes, one drought-ravaged and other in a country with a great deal of rainfall is marked. Find three examples of descriptive language for each setting.
 - What techniques does the author use in these examples?
 - How is the contrast between the landscapes emphasised?
- Do some research into drought in Australia, particularly the Millenium drought of 2000–2009 which affected much of southern Australia. How does drought impact:

- The landscape
- Rural and regional communities
- Farm/property owners and workers
- Food production.

Characters

- Discuss the concept of personality traits using the four categories:
 - feelings
 - actions
 - dialogue
 - thoughts.
- As a class, compose a character profile of Olive to add to your Learning Wall. Include the following elements using quotes to support observations.
 - Character traits: What conflicts does she face? How are these conflicts important to the narrative as well as to her personality and how she develops over the course of the novel?
 - How the character changes or grows over the course of the novel.
- Divide class up into small groups. Allocate another important character to each group so they can create a character profile to be shared with the rest of the class.
- As a class, work together to find new descriptors or synonyms for frequently over-used adjectives. Develop an anchor chart of character traits for the learning wall. This could have ‘banks’ of synonyms, eg.:
 - Funny
 - Amusing
 - Hilarious
 - Witty
 - Hysterical
 - Comical
 - Entertaining.

Encourage students to go back to their character profiles and improve them by changing some of the adjectives to more accurate synonyms.

- Choose two characters to compare and contrast, for example Wilby and Reynard, and record reflections, similarities and differences. A graphic organiser such as a Venn diagram would be useful here.
 - The author uses setting to suggest character traits. Compare the descriptions of Wilby’s shop and garden, with Reynard’s flat and its contents (eg. wilted vegetables). What opinion does the reader form about each character from these?

AFTER READING

- ‘The magician’s skill lay in his ability to redirect attention from the things that are important, to the things that only seem important.’ (p 18) Discuss this quote and how it might apply in other (real-life) situations.
- People sometimes misjudge others, even their friends. ‘Having Del at her side was like wearing an old favourite jumper. Warm and comfortable.’ (p 194) How does Olive misjudge Del and why (Chapter 35)?
 - Have there been instances when students have misjudged another’s intentions?
 - How did they resolve this?
- “‘It’s all right,” said Robbit. “I’ve made mistakes too, quite a lot of them. We can’t go back so let’s do our best and keep going.”’ (p 241) Learning by mistakes is an important concept. Explore this in the light of students’ own experiences. How do they think it might apply to their life as they grow up?
- Olive has great compassion for the wild rabbits (Chapters 12 and 13) and thinks the plan to eradicate their burrows and poison them cruel and inhumane methods of solving the rabbit problem. How does this relate to the following quotes?

‘You’re meant to care for animals and be kind to them, not just use them for your stupid tricks.’ (p 234)

‘Being imprisoned in the cellar had given him time to think—about his magic, about the white rabbits, even

about the poor flaming hamsters. Had these animals wanted to be part of his magic show?’ (p 283)

- However, the rabbits that run wild in Mount Dry (and other parts of Australia) have done enormous damage to the natural environment and native animals. How can we reconcile Olive’s views on cruelty to animals with the damage they have done?

ACTIVITIES

- Create a ‘Wanted’ poster for one of the characters. While Reynard is an obvious choice, challenge students to think of ‘crimes’ other characters may have committed.
- Olive’s class has been learning about biodiversity with a focus on introduced species, after being introduced to some of the issues around this topic your class might like to learn more.
 - Research and write a definition of biodiversity.
 - Research species, both animals and plants, that have been introduced to Australia.
 - Individually, select one of these species and create an information brochure or poster about it, covering:
 - Their effects on native wildlife and terrain
 - Solutions that have been tried
 - The success of various solutions
 - Control measures, if any, that are in place now.
- Ask students to write a persuasive speech to sway opinion on one of the following topics:
 - Solving an introduced species issue
 - Animals as ‘performers’.

AUTHORS OF NOTES

SUE WARREN AND JEMMA MYORS