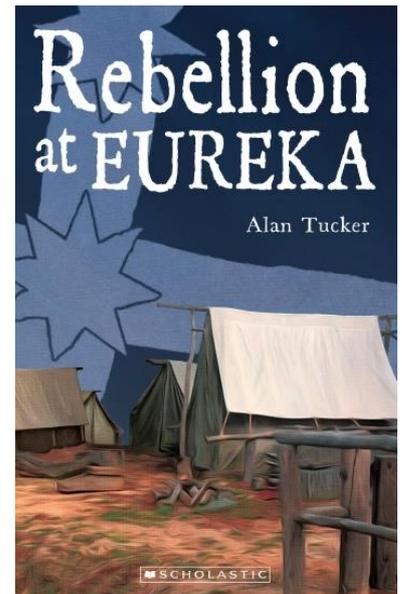


Rebellion at Eureka

Author

Alan Tucker



Synopsis

At just 13 Alf has experienced a lot of changes in his life, and really doesn't want to move again. He has already made the voyage from England to Victoria with his parents, and the last thing he wants is to help pack up the family's general store and relocate from Melbourne to the goldfields near Ballarat. Aside from anything else, how is his wandering father who was stricken with gold-fever four years ago going to find them if he ever returns? Alf's mother, however, has other ideas, and even though Alf has finished school, she firmly makes all the decisions as to where and how she and Alf will live. Arriving at the Eureka diggings filled with resentment, Alf soon makes friends amongst the diggers, and finds himself looking on this new place as somewhere he is happy to call home. Life on the diggings is rough, and energetic, and roiling with tension between the miners and the overbearing and repressive authorities. Before he knows it Alf finds himself an integral part of the Eureka community, is befriended by Peter Lalor, and bears witness to the inexorable escalation of oppressive police brutality and civil unrest which culminates in the rebellion at the Eureka Stockade. Alf's view of events is that of someone within the community, yet slightly insulated from the worst of the brutality and oppression because of his age and position as a storekeeper's son. But when he and his mother are trapped within the stockade, that insulation evaporates and Alf finds himself witnessing the full horror that is a pitched battle between trained soldiers and desperate civilians. Alf's life on the goldfields; how he and his Mother survive the rebellion; and how they move forwards afterwards; is a riveting coming-of-age tale set amidst a series of pivotal events in the history of Australian Democracy and civil rights.

About the Author

Alan Tucker is a previous winner of the CBC Book of the Year, nonfiction award for his illustrated book, *Iron in the Blood*. Since winning that award he has concentrated on writing historical fiction based on Australian history: *The Bombing of Darwin*, *Cyclone Tracy* and *Atomic Testing*.

Themes

War, poverty, family, friendship, honour, the gold rush, Eureka Stockade, government oppression, police brutality, hope, bravery, democratic representation, justice and the legal system.

Writing Style

Written throughout in the first person from the point of view of Alf, the story follows his viewpoint exclusively, and is presented in strict chronological order. Other viewpoints, or pivotal events, are revealed to the reader through conversations Alf has with other characters; explanations the adults in his life give him; and written material to which he is exposed. He hears rumours and reports of happenings, and is an inquisitive and enthusiastic witness to the social unrest and subsequent rebellion at Eureka. Tucker's language choices are colloquial and easily accessible to his late primary and early secondary readership, with enough phonetic depiction of the variety of different accents and dialects found on the goldfields at the time to add historical depth and convey the flavour of the society in which Alf finds himself.

TEACHERS' NOTES

- 1) Before reading the book, as a class discuss the front cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion are:
 - What is the picture on the cover?
 - What are the stars in the background of the cover art?
 - Does anyone know what the *Rebellion at Eureka* was?
 - When do you think that the book might be set?
 - Where do you think the story might take place?
 - What do you think might happen in this book?
- 2) How does life on the goldfields differ from life in Melbourne at the time? Based on the information in the story - mostly Alf's comments on what his life is like now and what it used to be like - create a two column chart comparing daily life on the goldfield to daily life in Melbourne. After you have created your chart, in pairs or small groups research daily life in the 1840s and 1850s on the goldfields and in Australian cities and towns. Add further information to your chart based on your research findings. (Think about things that Alf doesn't mention like taking baths and using the toilet!) Use your chart to help you create a poster showcasing life in the cities and on the goldfields during the Australian gold rush.
- 3) When Alf and his mother travel to Ballarat, it takes them a full week to get there from Melbourne. How long would it take you to travel from Melbourne to Ballarat in a private car today? Think of at least two different things that contribute to the reduced travel time today. What are some other ways you could travel from Melbourne to Ballarat, and how long would they take? Create a travel-time graph to show how long the different ways of travelling would take compared to each other.
- 4) As a class, discuss the impact that modern travel times between Melbourne and Ballarat have on daily life in Ballarat as compared to in the 1850s
- 5) Alf mentions passing through Baccus Marsh on his way to the goldfields. On a map, trace out the route that Alf and his mother could have taken to Ballarat. Choose one of the small settlements that they would have passed through, and research that place. Present your findings to the class as a slideshow or poster.

- 6) Alf and his mother have a store that sells general goods. What sorts of things does he mention as being for sale in their store? What other things do you think they might have sold? If you were travelling to the goldfields to establish a store, what goods would you bring with you to sell and why?
- 7) If you were walking to the goldfields from Melbourne to start a new life as a miner, what would you bring with you and why? Make a list of what you would take with you, and note down why you chose each item. Remember that the you would have to carry everything on your list the whole way, so think about weight as well as usefulness of each item!
- 8) When they get to the goldfields, Alf finds out that while some miners have had big strikes and are now rich, most of the diggers are struggling to find enough gold to buy food and to pay for their mining licences. As a class, discuss why so many people continued to try to find gold when it was a dangerous life filled with backbreaking work and their chances of finding enough gold to get rich were so low.
- 9) Visit a local waterway and try panning for gold. You probably won't find any, but see what other interesting things you can discover in the bottom of your pan. When you return to school, as a class discuss the experience and how it felt to pan for gold. Did anyone think they had found gold? How did they and the people around them react? Write a recount of your experience panning for gold, and focus on the emotions and reactions that everyone in the class had to the overall experience.
- 10) What does the word *Eureka* mean? Why would a goldfield be named *Eureka*?
- 11) Reread the descriptions on page 25, and on pages 40 and 41. Choose one of these descriptions, and illustrate it as accurately as possible based on the description in the book, being sure to include all the details of the view that Alf mentions.
- 12) On page 58 Seamus says that he and Paddy are unlikely to return to Ireland, because in Victoria they are poor but free and have more control over their own destinies. How important, in your opinion, is it for people to feel that they have some control over their own lives? In pairs briefly research what life in Ireland was like in the 1840s and '50s and write a brief piece sharing your findings and hypothesising why so many Irish at the time were willing to emigrate.
- 13) Many of the miners on the diggings could not read or write, and on page 82 Alf is asked to help one of them write a letter home. Choose one of the minor characters in the novel, and write a letter home that describes the events leading up to the rebellion from their point of view. You might choose to write from the point of view of one of the diggers, or of a soldier, a police officer, a judge, or even a local resident of Ballarat.
- 14) On page 131 Mr Johnstone explains to Alf and his mother why so many of the police on the goldfields are corrupt and bullies. Using the information on pages 131 and 132, as well as in the rest of the book, in small groups brainstorm as to how best to create a 'motivation map' that outlines all the different reasons that different groups of people had for acting as they did, and

shows how the conflicts between the needs and wishes of the different groups led to the bullying, licence hunts, police brutality and eventually the rebellion. You should start by identifying the different groups, and listing under each group what they were trying to achieve, what problems they had to overcome, and how their solutions often caused new problems. Share your final product with the class, and as a class discuss which motivation map is the easiest to understand and shows the interrelationship between the different groups the most clearly. Include in your discussion what you found easy about the task, and what you found to be the most challenging aspect.

- 15) After the Rebellion, Peter Lalor went on to play an important role in Australian politics. Research Peter Lalor, and the part he played in Australian history after Eureka. Write a one page biography of him that shares both what you have discovered about his early life, and what he did after the goldfield rebellion.
- 16) Peter Lalor is a famous Australian historical figure who Alf meets in the book. What other characters mentioned in the story are also based on real people from Australian colonial history?
- 17) What is the symbolism of the flag that the rebels flew at the Eureka Stockade? Design a flag of your own that you think symbolises your local area and your community.