

Teacher's Notes



Dusty in the Outwilds

Written by Rhiannon Williams

Teacher's Notes by Bec Kavanagh

These notes may be reproduced for use within schools free of charge, but not offered in any part for commercial sale.

Copyright © Hardie Grant Children's Publishing 2022.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary aged readers (ages 9+, grades 5+)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
 - Examining literature (ACELT1610)
 - Creating literature (ACELT1612)
 - Texts in context (ACELY1698)

THEMES

- Friendship & family
- Growing up
- Saying goodbye
- Truth and lies
- Imagination

SYNOPSIS

When Dusty's uncle Buck shows up one morning with a knife and starts arguing with her dad, she knows something bad is going to happen. Dusty is convinced they're arguing because they want to sell Gran's house, which means Gran's sickness is getting worse. Dusty can think of only one solution: to find her long-lost aunt Meg – who went 'out wild' as a teenager and never came back – and ask her for help. Dusty has never met Meg, and Dusty's dad refuses to talk about her. He won't talk about where 'out wild' is, either, even though Dusty always loved hearing stories about it as a child.

So with her best friend, Gus, and his six-year-old sister, Nico, Dusty ventures deep into the wilderness to search for Meg. None of them know what they're looking for – certainly not an enchanted tree that leads them into another world, the Outwilds, where wild, magical animals roam, and a still-teenage version of Meg hides mute among the trees.

Dusty's adventure into the Outwilds opens her eyes to many things – the secrets that have been tearing her family apart, the heartache of growing up, and a world of magic and possibility. *Dusty in the Outwilds* is an extraordinary story about the power of friendship and imagination with contemporary undertones of *Peter Pan*.



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. Her latest middle-grade novel, *Dusty in the Outwilds*, was released in 2022.

THEMES

The central theme of *Dusty in the Outwilds* is growing up. Through this, the author explores how our families and friendships change, how our relationship with imagination and truth develops, and how we start to become more aware of our own identity. Through *Dusty*, readers will be able to ask questions about their own experiences of these issues, such as:

- Navigating conflict in friendships
- Understanding why people act the way they do
- Thinking about who we want to become
- Learning to care for other people
- Saying goodbye

WRITING STYLE

Rhiannon Williams writes in clear, third person prose. She uses words that readers will mostly be familiar with, making this an ideal text for independent reading. 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. Readers might like to think about different types of language – spoken and unspoken – and share times they've felt unable to articulate how they've felt, or have been misunderstood by someone else.

Williams also explores the link between language and our imagination, bringing the language of bedtime stories to life in the *Outwilds*. 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 – did they have special names for them, and where did these come from?

COMPREHENSION

- 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 Outwilds 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?

WRITING EXERCISE

Think about a place you found magical when you were younger and draw a map of it. What kind of creatures might live there? Name them. Write a scene that begins with the line **I stepped through the doorway and was amazed to discover ...**

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- 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 Outwilds 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.

RELATED READING

- *Lenny's Book of Everything* by Karen Foxlee
- *When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead

