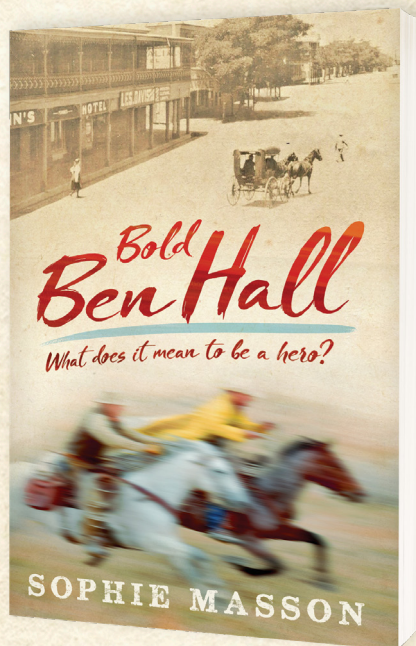


TEACHER NOTES

Teacher Notes by Belinda Bolliger

WALKER BOOKS



OUR HISTORY: BOLD BEN HALL
CREATOR: SOPHIE MASSON
ISBN: 9781760658403 PAPERBACK
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ABOUT THE BOOK

Lily and her parents are travelling performers. They are delayed in Canowindra just as famous bushranger Ben Hall and his gang – who have pulled off the biggest gold robbery ever – arrive. The gang takes everyone in town hostage – but instead of threats, they hold a strange, giant three-day party, and Lily is enthralled. She writes a secret play 'Bold Ben Hall' and dreams of sending it to a famous theatre company in Sydney or Melbourne ...

Meanwhile, in Forbes, stable boy Sam works for Sir Frederick Pottinger, Ben Hall's nemesis. Sam who dreams of helping Sir Fred catch Ben Hall ...

When Lily and Sam meet, the two are soon at loggerheads about their heroes, determined to prove the other wrong ... and to try any means to do so!

A gripping and unusual adventure, set against a background of the hectic, action-packed atmosphere of the booming Gold Rush towns. The story asks important questions: what is a hero, what is a villain? And how do we separate fact from fiction?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sophie Masson is the author of more than 50 novels for young people and specialises in historical fiction. Her work is published in many countries across the world. Sophie won the NSW Premier's Literary Awards: Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature for *My Australian Story: The Hunt for Ned Kelly* (2011). She lives in rural New South Wales with her husband and has three grown-up children. She is also the author of the recent best-selling adult novel, *The Paris Cooking School*, written under the name Sophie Beaumont.

ABOUT THE TEACHER NOTES AUTHOR

Belinda Bolliger worked as an editor and publisher of children's books for over twenty-five years. She was the Children's Publisher at Hodder Headline (now Hachette Australia) and Children's Commissioning Editor and Publisher for ABC Books/HarperCollins. She has worked with many award-winning authors and illustrators, including Libby Hathorn, Garry Disher, Frances Watts, Judith Rossell and Matt Ottley. Belinda was editorial manager for Australian Standing Orders (Scholastic) for over 11 years, reviewing and selecting the most suitable new releases from Australian publishers to send to schools around the country. Belinda now works as an associate agent at Key People Literary Management and as a freelance children's editor and project manager.

CURRICULUM LINKS

English (language, literature and literacy) • Humanities and Social Sciences (historical knowledge and understanding, civics and citizenship) • The Arts (media arts, drama, music, visual arts) • Technologies (design and technologies) • Health and Physical Education (personal, social and community health)

Learning outcomes: Understand the historical context of the Australian gold rush and its influence on society • explore themes of heroism, villainy, and moral ambiguity • develop critical thinking about the role of perspective in storytelling and history • enhance creative writing and drama skills through character analysis and role-play activities.

Cross-curriculum priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

THEMES

Family, friendship and community • early Australian history
heroes and villains • personal responsibility

Teacher Notes

Background Reading and Research

This novel explores life during the Australian gold rush, highlighting the lives of bushrangers such as Ben Hall and their impact on communities. Through the eyes of Lily, a young aspiring playwright, and Sam, a stable boy. The story contrasts differing perspectives of heroism and villainy, prompting critical thinking about history, morality and storytelling.

The story is set in 1863. Using resources from the library and the internet, discover and discuss what happened in Australia during the mid-1800s. Here are some topics to consider:

Gold!

- What was the Australian gold rush? How did it change life in Australia? In your answer, consider the economy, population and national identity.
- Many of the gold rush diggers brought with them different skills and professions. How would this have changed Australia?
- What was life like for people who moved to Australia to find gold? Where did they come from?

Daily life

- What was daily life like in Australia in the mid-1800s?
- What kind of houses did people live in during the 1860s in Australia? How were they different from houses today?
- What chores would children have been expected to do in 1863? How does that compare to your chores today?
- What kinds of food did people eat in the 1860s? How was food cooked and stored without electricity or refrigerators?
- How did people travel in 1863? What were the roads like, and how long did it take to get from one place to another?

School days and work days

- What was school like during this time? How were lessons taught? What subjects were important?
- Did all children go to school in the mid-1800s? Why or why not?
- What kinds of jobs did people have in Australia in the 1800s? What jobs did children sometimes have to do?

Leisure

- How did people get news and information in 1863, before television, the internet and modern newspapers?
- What games and activities did children in 1863 play for fun? What toys did they have?
- What kinds of music, books, or entertainment were popular in 1863?
- Lily's parents are part of a travelling theatre company. Find out more about this form of entertainment in Australia in the 1800s.

Indigenous Australians and settlers

- How were Indigenous Australians living in 1863? How was their way of life impacted by European settlement?
- What were relationships like between Indigenous Australians and European settlers in the 1860s?
- What do you think Indigenous Australians might have thought about the changes happening to their land?
- Who were the key political figures during this period?
- Discuss the status and rights of Indigenous Australians during this time.

Bushrangers

- Bushrangers are a big part of Australia's early history. Who were the Australian bushrangers? Why were they both feared and admired?
- What kinds of crimes did bushrangers commit and how did they survive in the bush?
- Why did police and settlers try to stop bushrangers and why were they difficult to catch?

Timeline

- Create a timeline of significant events in Australia during the mid to late 1800s.

Setting

Much of the story is set in the town of Canowindra. Use the internet to find out more about this historic township.

- Find the town on a map of Australia. Mark the other towns mentioned in the book, such as Carcoar and Forbes.
- What does the name 'Canowindra' mean?
- Who were the first inhabitants of the land there?
- When did European settlement occur?
- Why did a settlement spring up here (consider position, resources and so on)?

Quote: *'Canowindra wasn't exactly a large town. In fact, it was little more than a village. It had a general store just across the street, and a few other small businesses close by – a butcher's, a blacksmith, and others, as well as the post office which doubled as a stop for the weekly mail coach from Carcoar. A little further back there was also a straggle of low-roofed wooden houses.'* (p. 8).

- Create a piece of artwork that illustrates how Canowindra looked when Lily was there. Find some recent images of how the town looks today. What changes have occurred?

History

- The story is based on a real event when Ben Hall and other bushrangers held the township of Canowindra hostage. Find primary and secondary sources that tell you more about the hold-up. What have you discovered about this incident that you didn't know from reading the novel?
- As a class, come up with a name for a newspaper that was written and produced in the mid-1800s. Break into small groups. Each group is assigned a topic on which to write an article for your newspaper. You might like to look at a real newspaper to decide what these topics are (for example, the weather, the news of the day, advertisements, opinion pieces, etc). Base your articles on the events that took place in Canowindra when Ben Hall and his gang took over the town.

Cobb & Co

Quote: *'Sam loved it when the Cobb & Co mail coach came in. Even before the bell announcing its arrival sounded, you could hear in the distance, faintly, the thunder of the horses' hooves and the creaks and groans of the big wheels.'* (p. 75).

- Why do you think Cobb & Co has become such an iconic part of Australian history?
- How did Cobb & Co coaches change the way people travelled and communicated in Australia during the 1800s?
- What challenges might passengers and drivers have faced on long journeys?
- In what ways did Cobb & Co contribute to the development of rural and remote communities in Australia?
- How might life have been different for people living in isolated areas before Cobb & Co existed?

Heroes and Villains

The author uses her story to ask compelling questions about what is a hero and what is a villain.

- Brainstorm the meaning of the word 'hero' and the meaning of the word 'villain'. Write answers on a whiteboard. Brainstorm people who are well-known heroes, and those we consider villains.
- As a class, do you all agree with the classifications you've given these people? For example, if you chose Greta Thunberg, the environmental activist, does everyone in the class agree that she is a hero?
- Can someone be both a hero and a villain? What determines how we see them?
- Can you think of modern examples of people who are seen as both heroes and villains? How do they compare?
- How do the actions of historical figures get shaped into legend?
- Choose one of the people you brainstormed as a hero or villain and set up a class debate. One team argues that the person is a hero and the other team argues that they are a villain.
- What does the word 'anti-hero' mean?
- Who are your personal heroes? For example, it might be a family member, a teacher, your football coach, etc. Write three paragraphs about this person explaining why they are a hero to you.

- Find quotes in the story to show how Lily views Ben Hall. Find quotes in the story to show how Sam views Ben Hall. Why do you think their views are different? Have their views changed by the end of the story?

Quote: *“And no wonder, when the traps are led by Blind Freddy! . . . It’s what we call the toff who’s in charge of the police hereabouts, Sir Frederick Pottinger, she said his name slowly and scornfully, ‘we call him that because he can never seem to find them, even when they’re in plain sight. And he’s obsessed with catching the boys. Especially Ben.’”* (p. 46).

Quote: *‘And though Sir Frederick wasn’t all that popular (even with his police colleagues) and Sam could see that he was a bit of a boaster, he still admired Pottinger greatly for his dashing horsemanship. Besides, he’d been kind to Sam . . .’* (p. 77).

- In the story, Sir Frederick Pottinger is another character who polarises people. Why is this the case?
- Discuss how Sam’s loyalty to Sir Frederick influences his view of Ben Hall.
- How do personal experiences shape how we view historical events?
- Polly says that people think it was Pottinger who turned Ben into a bushranger (p. 46). Do you agree? Why or why not?
- How does the book challenge readers to think critically about fact versus fiction in history?
- Create a two-column chart comparing ‘facts’ versus ‘legends’ about bushrangers. Discuss where myths might have started and why.
- There are other villains in the story. Who are they? How do they compare to Ben Hall? How does the author show that villains come in all guises?
- What devices does the author use to show both sides of the story?
- How does the book make you think differently about history?
- What qualities make someone a hero in your eyes? Have your views changed after reading the book?
- Why are some bushrangers, like Ned Kelly, celebrated as folk heroes while others are remembered as dangerous criminals?
- What factors might have driven people to become bushrangers? Do you think their actions were a result of personal choice, societal pressure or a mix of both?
- How do you think the stories and myths about bushrangers differ from what really happened? Why might these legends have been exaggerated or romanticised?
- In what ways are bushrangers similar to or different from criminals today? How might modern society view bushrangers if they existed now?
- Research a famous bushranger and present their life story to the class, focusing on their motivations, actions, and legacy. Focus on how they were perceived by different groups of people at the time.
- Create a ‘Wanted’ poster for a famous bushranger. Include details about their crimes and their appearance. Don’t forget to offer a reward!
- Write a fictional short story or poem from the perspective of a bushranger, a victim of a bushranger, or a police officer during the 1800s.
- Create a map showing key locations where famous bushrangers operated, including their hideouts and robbery sites. Discuss how the geography of the bush affected their activities.
- Find a ballad or song inspired by the lives of Australian bushrangers and perform it for other classes or in assembly.
- Monsieur Nicolas explains that they have ‘voleurs de grand chemin’: ‘robbers of the big road or highway’ in France. Research other types of outlaws from other countries. You might like to look at China, Ireland, Mexico, the United Kingdom and the USA.

Bushrangers

- Why do you think bushrangers became such prominent figures in Australian history? What does this say about the time period in which they lived?
- How did bushrangers impact the lives of settlers, Indigenous Australians and authorities during their time?

Ben Hall

- Find primary and secondary sources about Ben Hall. What were his reasons for becoming a bushranger?
- Considering his history, do you think it’s understandable that he became a bushranger?
- Debate: Is Ben Hall a hero, a villain (or something in between)? Divide the class into groups to argue different sides using evidence from the book and historical accounts.
- What do you think about Ben Hall after reading the story? What evidence is your answer based on? Write an expository or persuasive piece that explains how you have reached your opinion.

- How did Ben Hall and his gang affect the lives of people living in the areas they operated?
- How did Ben Hall's relationship with the police shape his life as a bushranger? Do you think the authorities handled him fairly?
- Why do you think Ben Hall continues to be remembered in Australian history? How do films, books or songs shape our understanding of his story?
- How was Ben Hall similar to or different from other famous bushrangers, like Ned Kelly or Captain Thunderbolt? Research another bushranger and compare their life story, motivations, and actions to Ben Hall's. What similarities or differences do you notice?
- Write a diary entry from the perspective of Ben Hall that helps to explain his motivations.
- Act out a scene where Ben Hall and his gang confront settlers or the police. Discuss how each character might have felt during these moments.

Quote: *“Why don't you write a report trying to persuade me that Sir Frederick is in the right, and I'll write one trying to persuade you that Ben Hall is in the right? Then we can compare them and see if one of us will change our mind.”* (p. 110).

- Did either Lily's or Sam's report convince you to change your mind? Why or why not?
- Choose an Australian bushranger and write a report similar to Lily and Sam's reports to convince a reader that the bushranger was a hero.
- When Lily is talking to Monsieur Nicolas (pp. 130-131), she asks him if he thinks that Ben Hall has been wronged by Pottinger. He replies that he thinks in the old days they would have fought a duel: *“But I think, Monsieur Nicolas went on, that in our day, their duel is still being fought, but in a different way. And perhaps the rest of us are their seconds, lining up on either side.”* What do you think this means?

Lily and Sam

Write a character study of Lily and one for Sam. Include the following:

- What traits make them unique? How do they show these traits in their actions or words?
- How do their dreams shape their actions and decisions?
- How do they deal with the challenges they face in pursuing their goals?

- How does their character change or grow?
- What is one thing you like or dislike about the character?

What is a moral dilemma? As a class, think of some examples of a moral dilemma.

Both Lily and Sam are confronted by a moral dilemma when Lily is given the parcel of money to give to Mrs Clarke. Discuss.

What would you have done about the money if you were Lily? What do you think about the solution? Brainstorm some other solutions for Lily.

Drama

- How might traveling theatre shows have influenced Australian culture and storytelling during the 19th century? Do you think they helped create a sense of connection between different parts of the country?
- How does Lily's play, *Bold Ben Hall* show her perspective of the bushrangers?
- Imagine you are Lily and in small groups, write a scene from Lily's play. Perform your scene for the rest of the class.
- Role-play a conversation between Lily and Sam, debating their views on Ben Hall.
- Design a theatre poster for *Bold Ben Hall*.
- Design a poster to advertise the play *Macbeth* as performed by the travelling theatre show that Lily's parents belong to.
- Write a short play or story inspired by one of the characters' dreams (e.g. Lily's playwriting, Sam's desire to work for Cobb & Co).





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