

## THE REBELS OF MOUNT BUFFALO by Helen Edwards

**AUTHOR:** Helen Edwards

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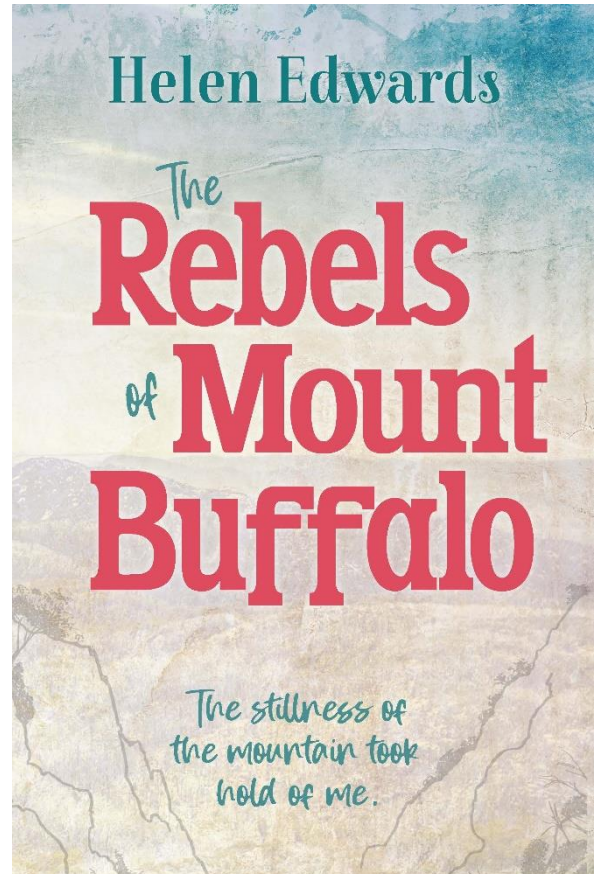
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### SYNOPSIS

It's 1998 and Clara Wilde and her parents are staying at the Mount Buffalo Chalet for the National Park Centenary celebrations. It couldn't be more different from their last visit— they were a family of four then. Now, they are three separate people, making circles around their grief. With her twin brother Darius gone, Clara has no reference point anymore, no guide. It's like being lost in the bush without a compass. Without him, she doesn't really know who she is. After a strange night at The Chalet, Clara wakes up in 1893. There she meets Alice, a girl who lives within the fern-filled valleys at the base of Mount Buffalo.

To her surprise, Clara recognises Alice. She is Guide Alice, a girl considered a rebel of her time, an adventurous non-conformist who spent much of her life boldly leading people along rugged trails between granite tors and misty mountain peaks. The 1890s were a difficult era in Australia's history. The country is in the grip of a terrible Depression, and desperate people can be dangerous. When Alice's life is threatened, Clara must rediscover the courage she has always had, and become the person she was always meant to be.

Bringing in themes of early feminism and issues such as bullying, never being a bystander, managing grief and finding your courage, this engaging middle grade time-slip story draws on the true history of Mount Buffalo and the incredible role the Manfield family—and Guide Alice in particular—played in the preservation of the National Park and the development of tourism in the Mount Buffalo region.





### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Helen Edwards grew up surrounded by books. She ‘published’ her first book at age 6, for which she won the Children’s Book Week prize at her school. Ever since, she has wanted to be an author. She worked for many years in mental health and has a PhD in Psychology. In 2018, she decided to take the leap into becoming a children’s author. Helen writes stories that reduce stereotypes, increase understanding of diversity, and feature Australian history and nature. She includes characters in her stories who are neurodivergent and/or who live with physical and mental health conditions, out in the world, having adventures.

Helen is passionate about inspiring action for our beautiful, fragile planet and nature features in all of her books. She finds history fascinating and uncovers stories that may have been forgotten, or hidden, and brings them into the light. She also believes that fantastical things can happen and sees magic in the everyday. She lives in Adelaide with her lovely family, two cats and a very active rescue kelpie! When not reading, writing or watching good stories, you’ll find her walking in nature, going on road trips to discover new story ideas, laughing a lot, and listening to music.

The Rebels of Mount Buffalo is her first middle-grade novel.

[www.helenedwardswrites.com](http://www.helenedwardswrites.com) @drhelenedwardswrites

### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Responding to literature
- Examining literature
- Literacy - Interpreting, analysing, evaluating
- Australian history
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Society and culture

### THEMES

- Parental Separation and family relationships
- Courage and self-belief
- Mental Health, including anxiety, grief and loss
- Neurodiversity
- Growth, change and identity
- Early feminism in Australia
- History in Alpine Victoria and Melbourne
- Environment and Conservation
- Friendship
- Bullying
- Using the past as a vehicle to explore themes in the present and future
- First Nations Peoples history in relation to Mount Buffalo

### USE IN THE CLASSROOM

- As an example of middle-grade Australian historical fiction.
- As a basis for writing exercises on characterisation and diversity.
- As a basis for writing exercises related to the use of time in stories, speculative fiction and how to blend fact and fiction.
- To explore the use and power of metaphor in describing emotions.
- To explore Nature in fiction and stories that feature the environment.
- As a portal to learning about the history of Mount Buffalo, Guide Alice Manfield, The Mount Buffalo Chalet and the surrounding regions.
- To introduce the 1890s Depression and in particular the impact on Melbourne.
- As a lead in to studying early feminism in Australia and looking for lesser known or hidden stories about women in the past.
- As an example of the importance of preservation of important ecosystems such as Mount Buffalo and the change in attitudes over time from one of consumption to conservation.
- As a stepping off point to exploring the First Nations history in the regions.
- To discuss mental health issues affecting young people and developing resilience.
- To discuss the impact of grief and loss and the importance of seeking support.
- To generate discussion about the connections between mental health and Nature.
- To discuss bullying and never being a bystander.

## DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Before reading the novel, have a look at the cover and identify the following:
  - The title of the book
  - The author
  - The publisher
  - The blurb.
2. Based on the cover and the blurb, what do you think this story is about? Compare your ideas with other people in the class. What do you think the main themes are? Do you know what is going to happen? When you have read the book, go back and see if you were right and if there was anything you didn't predict, or anything that surprised you.
3. Read the first three chapters of the book and write down some of the things you think might happen. Later, check back to see if you predicted anything and discuss what the key aspects of the story were that led you to these predictions. If you were surprised, how do you think the author managed to do that?
4. Creating a complication for a character in reaching their goal, or solving their problem, is an important aspect of creating tension in a story. How do you think the author does this in Clara's situation? What are some of the complications that she has to face? Would you add any other complications?
5. Where do you think the highest point of tension is in the story? This is often called the climax and commonly falls somewhere in the middle of the book. What are the things that make this the climax in *The Rebels of Mount Buffalo*? Can you identify other parts of the story where there is tension?
6. There are two main characters in *The Rebels of Mount Buffalo*— Clara and Alice. Note down all of the words you can think of to describe one or both of these characters. You can draw them if you would like. Consider how they look, their voice, their personalities, how they think, act and feel. Then discuss this as a class and see if there were some common words or ideas. Compare differences or similarities in their personalities and ideas about the world— do you think any of these differences are due to the different times they lived in?
7. There are also a number of important secondary characters in the book. Complete the same exercise as above, for one of the secondary characters, such as Mr and Mrs Manfield, Alice's brothers and sisters, Clara's parents, or the people at the Manfield's hotel.
8. Darius never appears in the book, and yet, he is woven through the story. Write down the scenes and ways in which Darius is brought into the story. How does the author present his character, and can you describe him as a person? Do you think he would have been proud of Clara and how she handled the time-slip adventure?
9. World-building is very important in any book. This story is set in a real place, with some real events, some real people and some fictional characters. It is also a magical story because Clara slips back in time. Why do you think the author decided to use time-slip as the tool for Clara to find her way towards understanding her grief and discovering her bravery?
10. Do you like stories that combine real and imagined elements? If so, why? And if not, why not? Did you think the time-slip worked in this story and if so, what made it work well?
11. At the end of every story there is a resolution. In Clara's case, there were some important scenes in the closing chapters. Write down and then discuss, what themes and issues she was able to resolve and what were the things that supported her to do so.

12. In the 1890s there was a Depression in Australia and Melbourne was at the epicentre. Do some further research to find out more about how the Depression began and the impact on the different states. See if you can write a short story about a character who might have lived through these times and how they might have coped.
13. The story mentions Vida Goldstein and the petition to the Victorian Parliament for women to gain the right to vote. Do some research to find out more about this petition and discuss in class, what the outcomes were and how this might have impacted women's rights in current times.
14. Guide Alice was considered a 'rebel of her time'. What do you think this means? What made her a rebel?
15. Being a rebel can be seen as a negative aspect of a person's character, but also, a positive one. Write down some of the ways rebellion can be positive and some of the ways it can be negative.
16. Find one person from history who you consider to be a rebel and who did something positive for the world. What was it that they did and how did being a rebel support them to act?
17. John Monash attends a dinner at the Manfield's hotel and was really a regular guest there. This was before he became a highly regarded figure in Australia. Research John Monash and write down three things he did in his life that were important. How would you have spoken with him if you had been Clara and knew his future? Write a paragraph pretending you were serving him dinner.
18. Design a different cover for the book that incorporates something from the story that you really enjoyed. If you would like to, also create a new title and see if you can write a tagline for the book that will encourage people to want to read it.
19. Choose your favourite character from the book and draw a picture of how you think they look. Write a letter from this character to another character in the book. Make sure you use some of the language or expressions that they use, so that you are staying true to their character.
20. What do you think it might have been like to climb Mount Buffalo in 1893? What things might you have needed to stay safe? Would you enjoy sleeping in a canvas tent?
21. The environment is important in this story —the sounds, smells, colours, plants and animals that live at Mount Buffalo. The senses are important in writing a book, it helps to place the reader in the story. Pick out three parts of the book where the author uses senses to put you in the moment. Describe what the author wrote and how and why it connected you to the story.
22. Why do you think senses are important in writing and how do they connect you to memories of your own life? Do you have a favourite smell, song, or object that connects you to a memory? Write a poem that uses these senses.
23. Guide Alice took many photographs of Mount Buffalo across her life, using mostly glass slide cameras. Some of these are available via the State Library of Victoria. Have a look at these photos online and choose one. Write a story based on the photo. Research how these cameras worked and compare this to how photos are part of our lives now. Do you think photos might have been more or less important back then?
24. In this story the author used 1<sup>st</sup> person past tense narrative. Why do you think the author used first person narrative from Clara's perspective? How do you think the story might have changed if she had also used Alice's perspective and written alternating chapters?

25. Break into small groups and choose a theme from the book. Choose some examples from the text that show how this theme is explored and present as a Powerpoint or Prezi.
26. Retell the scene where Clara and Alice first meet at the hotel from Alice's perspective. How does this change the story and the narrative flow? Does it add or take anything away from the story?
27. Write a scene where Alice slips forward to Clara's time in 1998 and they meet at the Chalet on the night of the centenary, instead of Clara going back in time. What might that offer the narrative? Would it have changed Clara's journey if she was to stay in her time and Alice came to her? How did Clara slipping back to the 1890s enable her to find her courage and self-belief?
28. What do you think it might be like to slip back or forward in time? Write a story where you go backwards or forwards in time, to an era you might like to explore. What would it be like to find yourself suddenly in a completely different time? How would you handle it? What might you learn about yourself?
29. Clara talks about her anger and guilt burning holes inside of her that filled with lava. She also talks about growing wings of courage, that at first are as soft as duckling down, but eventually grow as strong and as soft as a falcon feather, attached to skin and bone. Why do you think the author uses these metaphors to describe anger, grief, guilt and courage? Brainstorm metaphors for one or more of these emotions. As a class, discuss why we use metaphorical language to talk about our feelings.
30. Clara finds great solace in nature. It has been shown that time in nature, especially around trees and forests, is good for our mental health. Discuss some of the places you enjoy spending time in nature and why they make you feel good.
31. Clara and Alice talk about the First Nations Peoples who lived at Mount Buffalo and gathered there to feast on the Bogong Moths. Some of the Traditional Custodians of the surrounding regions are the Dhudhuroa, Taungurung, Waywurru, Gunaikurnai and Jaithmathang Peoples. These are the Traditional Custodians of the Alpine Shire, which encompasses the land, water and sky of Bright and Surrounds. Many other groups would travel to Mount Buffalo and meet to trade and share stories. Research the history and culture of one of these groups of people. Choose one aspect, such as food, language, cultural activities, or place, to present to the class. If your group finds it difficult to find information, discuss why this might be.
32. Like Clara in the story, people often find it difficult to discuss grief and guilt is a common emotion when someone dies. Describe a time where you have felt grief about someone or something you have lost. Write a short story about how you felt and use metaphors to illustrate these feelings. If you are comfortable, share these stories with a small group of other people in the class.

## KEY QUOTES AND PASSAGES

**These are some of the key quotes and passages in the book. You can use these as stepping off points for discussions about the book, and also, for broader discussion about themes, such as anxiety, mental health, grief, loss and being brave.**

“Tomorrow, I’m going to quiet my too-loud brain and my too-fast beating heart.  
I’m going to stand tall and look people in the eye.  
I’m going to talk in front of class, without stumbling.  
Tomorrow, I’ll be more like Darius.  
Tomorrow, I’ll be better.  
Tomorrow I’ll be brave.”

“Being brave doesn’t come easily. Not to me anyway. Darius roared into the world like a courageous lion. I followed him, hours later, as if I was too scared to leave Mum. Like a soft little mouse.”

“We were so close that when we were small, I didn’t even realise he was a boy, and I was a girl. We were just, ‘Clara and Darius.’ But as we grew up it was like we became the north and south poles, the entire world spinning in-between us on its axis.”

“After, I didn’t even feel I could call myself a twin anymore, because I was only one half of a pair. Less than one half really. From the moment he left, I had no reference point, no guide. It was like being lost in the bush without a compass. Or rappelling down a mountain face without an anchor. I was a slithery half-moon, trying impossibly to shine the way, in a thick-clouded, pitch-black sky.”

“She stands up for people and what she believes in. Darius did too when he was here. He used to tell them to shut up, that girls and boys were equally strong and tough—and equally soft too—that there was nothing wrong with softness, that everyone felt things, and everyone cried. He learned that from Dad, who had no problem crying ‘at the drop of a hat’ or so Mum said. It made me love Dad even more.”

“When Darius first died, I hated it when people kept on being their usual selves. I would see them laughing and enjoying their days and I wanted to scream at them, ‘Don’t you realise what’s happened here? What is wrong with you?!! Just STOP!!!!’”

“The anger that had filled me like a mountain of lava the night Darius died, had spread into my hollow bones and begun to settle there. I was angry at the guy who was responsible for the accident—more than I’d ever been angry at anyone. And as it simmered inside of me, it escaped like steam, at all sorts of moments where being angry really wasn’t okay. The holes became craters. Craters of loneliness. Craters of guilt.”

“I should have been relaxed in the dining room: it was such a familiar and happy place and one of Darius’s favourites. But beneath the bright lights, with all of the chatter and laughter, I felt caught in a tumbling whirlpool of memories that only reminded me of his absence. It was almost as if I was fading into Darius, disappearing inside my memories of him. I gripped the edge of the table, trying to hold onto myself.”

“I wanted to climb into her lap and ask her to hug me, like when I’d kissed her goodnight the other night. I wanted her to tell me she remembered too. That she felt the huge space at the table, the space Darius should have filled. That she wished he was here.”

“Ever since Darius had died, I had wished that time could go backwards. And here I was, in the past. But all I wanted was for it to rush forwards, as fast as a peregrine falcon.”

“Somehow, despite all of the years between us, it seemed we were becoming a pair; two halves of a whole. I knew Alice had my back. Knew she would help me. If only I could convince her to believe me.”

“In the end, I couldn’t speak at the funeral, not out loud. I wanted to do that last brave thing for Darius. I was all words on the inside. But trying to explain how it felt; as if half of my own body had been torn away, was impossible.”

“Drawing all of my energy into my legs, I disappeared into the darkness. I ran across muddy, sodden, boggy earth, smooth slippery stones and moss-flecked granite.  
Rain filled my eyes, making them sting.  
But I kept on running.  
Sobs filled my throat, making it ache.  
But I kept on running.  
Darius and Mum and Dad filled my head and I longed to be with them. To be anywhere but here, in this time...  
But I kept on running.”

“Guilt beat against my chest, and I almost welcomed the familiar sensation. It had made itself at home inside me after the accident, joining forces with my anger, settling in the holes and carving out the craters.”

“I stared at the sea-blue sky. It was the same sky that soared above my parents. The granite tors that held me in their stillness, were the same ones I knew so well.  
This mountain was my constant.  
I held onto the sky and the trees and the granite stone.  
I held onto the mountain.”

“But I did know.  
I understood.  
I knew they loved each other like hurricanes; wide and wild.”

“We sat there laughing together. Alice held onto my hand. I felt safe and warm. It reminded me of having a sleepover with Jess. A mix of happiness and sadness bubbled up inside me, as if one couldn’t exist without the other.”

“Perhaps my deep thinking was a good thing. Not something to feel ashamed about. Not something to be embarrassed about. Perhaps I was just a little bit brave. After all, Clara Worrying Wilde had just saved two people’s lives.”



“The worrying grew as tall as the peaks of Mount Buffalo. All weekend, I tried to fight it by keeping busy or by relying on my newfound courage. But it was delicate and soft, like duckling down.”

“I curled over, putting my head between my knees. I had to stay still and quiet like a stone. I wanted to rush out there and fall into Darius and Mum and Dad and hold them and never let them go. But I couldn’t.

Because I wasn’t supposed to be there. Not this version of me.

If I did that, I had no idea what might happen.”

“Alice and I held the camera up, our other hands clutched together. We stared at each other; our eyes locked, our friendship tied up tight, no matter where we ended up.

‘Here we go,’ I said. ‘Fingers crossed.’

‘Brave and bold and burning bright,’ Alice said.

‘Brave and bold and burning bright,’ I whispered.”

“I looked very much like Darius, there was no doubt.

But the truth is, I wasn’t a reflection of him.

I wasn’t a mimic or an imitation or a replica.

I was Clara.

Not just Clara, not only Clara.

Clara.”

“The strongest person isn’t always the one winning the trophies you know. And being brave isn’t about not being scared. We’re all scared sometimes. It’s what you do in the moments that matter that count the most.”

“Through it all, my courage had grown wings. Wings as strong and soft as falcon feathers, curled against me, ready whenever I needed.”