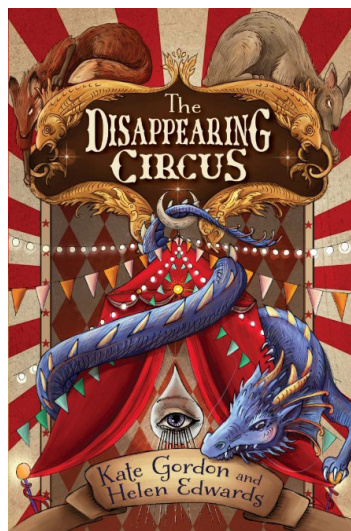


The Disappearing Circus

by Kate Gordon & Helen Edwards

TEACHERS' RESOURCES



ISBN: 9781763526037

RECOMMENDED FOR
Upper Primary & Lower Secondary

RESOURCE PREPARED BY:
Dr Helen Edwards © 2025

SYNOPSIS

Step right up and prepare for the most magical show of all!

When Emme and Ivy—two runaway girls weighed down by grief—stumble upon a strange circus on the moors, they are flung together, as they discover a world unlike any other. Ghostly performers, mythical creatures, and a Ringmistress with dark secrets await them beneath the blood-red Big Top. To save the fading circus from vanishing forever, Emme and Ivy must uncover their hidden talents and put on a show to end all shows. But do they even have talents? And can they discover them in time?

As the girls navigate dizzying trials of magic and mystery, they realise that the circus isn't just disappearing—it's somehow connected to the very threads of their pasts. As secrets are unravelled, Emme and Ivy must step into the spotlight and take a chance on themselves and each other, proving that you must always hold onto wonder and that even the smallest sparks of magic can change everything.

A breathtaking blend of magic, mythology, and heart, *The Disappearing Circus* reminds us that friendship and courage can be found in the most unexpected of places, that the future is ours to hold—and that some stories are too powerful to ever truly disappear.

Take your seats. The show is about to begin!



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - KATE GORDON

Kate Gordon grew up in a very bookish house, with two librarian parents, in a small town by the sea in Tasmania. In 2009, she won a Varuna fellowship and hasn't stopped writing since. Her first book, *Three Things About Daisy Blue*, was published by Allen and Unwin in 2010. She has since been published multiple times by everyone from Yellow Brick Books to Random House Australia. Kate won the 2016 IBBY Ena Noel Award for *Writing Clementine*, and in 2018 was shortlisted in the Dorothy Hewett Award for an Unpublished Manuscript. Her YA novel *Girl Running, Boy Falling* (2018) is a CBCA Notable. In 2021, *Aster's Good, Right Things* (published by Riveted Press) won the CBCA Book of the Year for Younger Readers, and in 2023, *Xavier in the Meantime* was shortlisted in the same category. *My Brother, Finch* was longlisted in the CBCA Book of the Year for Older Readers in 2025.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR - HELEN EDWARDS

Dr Helen Edwards is an award-winning author and speaker. She holds a PhD in Psychology and has a long-standing background in mental health. Helen is a mid-career SA State Library Fellow in 2025, supported by Writers' SA. *The Disappearing Circus* is her fourth middle-grade novel. Helen 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. Helen writes stories that challenge stereotypes, promote understanding of diversity, and showcase Australian history and nature. She includes characters who are neurodivergent and/or who live with physical and mental health conditions, out in the world, having adventures. Helen has been shortlisted and won several awards, including being a South Australian State Finalist for Australian of the Year for her work in diabetes. She 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 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, discovering new story ideas, laughing a lot, and listening to music.

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

ENGLISH

LITERACY

- Responding to literature
- Examining literature
- Interpreting, analysing, evaluating
- How different contexts determine language use
- Building knowledge and understanding, and communicating emotions, opinions and ideas with others

CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING

- Listening to, reading, viewing, creating and presenting texts
- Developing critical and creative thinking through interacting with others, creating and experimenting with literary texts, and discussing the aesthetic or social value of texts
- Critically analysing the opinions, perspectives and unstated assumptions embedded in texts
- Expressing personal responses and preferences, stating and justifying points of view, and responding to the opinions of others in discussing texts
- Considering the authors' innovations, planning, exploring and creating ideas for imaginative texts, in particular, the combination of facts and fiction
- Using and adapting language to represent novel ideas

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CAPABILITY

- Development of understanding that language is central to personal and social identity
- Exploring diverse perspectives and how these shape different interpretations and responses to both text and ideas
- Interacting with others in formal and informal settings to become effective communicators
- Articulating opinions and collaborating with others to analyse text and create your own
- Through close reading and discussion of the text, students experience and evaluate different personal and social behaviours and perspectives. They develop connections and empathy with the main characters in other contexts and through diverse experiences.

ETHICAL UNDERSTANDING

- Developing ethical understanding as they explore ethical issues within real-world and fictional settings—in particular, Ivy and Emme’s decisions about protecting the circus, despite their uncertainty and grief, their decision to trust each other and to put themselves at risk for others
- Identifying moral messages, ethical concepts, bias and stereotypes, and their representation in texts
- Comparing, evaluating and discussing how these messages are created through language
- Analysing ethical perspectives on contemporary issues and the strengths and weaknesses of how arguments are represented

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

The English curriculum and Humanities and Social Sciences share a focus on analysing, interpreting and evaluating information and texts. These learning areas examine how perspectives and points of view influence texts and shape the ideas they convey. They help students to develop written, visual, digital and multimodal texts by selecting text structures and language features for a range of purposes and audiences.

In *The Disappearing Circus*, these areas include:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Neurodiversity
- Society and culture
- Conservation
- Family relationships
- Self-belief, courage and hope



THEMES & DISCUSSION

USE IN THE CLASSROOM

- As an example of middle-grade magical fiction
- As a basis for writing exercises on characterisation and diversity
- As a basis for writing exercises related to the use of magical elements in stories, and how to build fantasy worlds based on reality
- To explore the use and power of metaphor in describing emotions
- To explore Nature in fiction
- To understand allegory in writing
- To discuss mental health issues affecting young people and develop resilience
- To discuss the impact of grief and loss and the importance of seeking support
- To consider the ethics of right and wrong
- How to ask for help and understand who can support you when you have problems
- Family relationships and extended family.

THEMES

- How do we champion and stand up for those who cannot do this for themselves?
- Complexities of family relationships
- Grief and loss - the importance of experiencing loss in your own way
- Developing courage and self-belief
- Mental Health
- Neurodiversity
- Growth, change and identity
- Our relationship with Nature
- Magical realism and fantasy in the real world

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

BEFORE READING

Before reading the novel, have a look at the cover and identify the following:

- The title of the book
- The authors
- The publisher
- The blurb.

Based on the cover and the blurb, what do you think this story is about? Compare your ideas with those of your classmates. What do you think the main themes are?

- Do you know what is going to happen? After reading the book, review it to see if your predictions were correct and if any aspects surprised you or that you didn't anticipate.

DURING OR AFTER READING

- Read the first five 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 authors managed to do that?
- Creating a complication for a character in their pursuit of a goal or in solving a problem is an essential aspect of building tension in a story. How do you think the authors do this in Emme and Ivy's situation? How do you think their problems are similar? How are they different?
- Where do you think the highest point of tension is in the story? This is often referred to as the climax and typically occurs somewhere in the middle of the book. What are the things that make this the climax in *The Disappearing Circus*? Can you identify other parts of the story where there is tension?
- Emme and Ivy are the main characters. Note down all of the words you can think of to describe one of them or both. You can draw them if you would like. Consider how they appear, their voices and personalities, how they think, act, and feel. Then, discuss this as a class and see if there are any common words or ideas. Compare differences or similarities.
- There are also several important secondary characters in the book, including Cindertail, Ohme, Seraphina, and the ghosts. Complete the same exercise as above, for one or two of the secondary characters.
- The authors have woven magical and mythical creatures into this story, as well as ghosts – discuss how they have managed to do this while still making the story believable.
- A central theme in this book is about holding onto hope and the fact that when someone is lost or gone from your life, they can still be a part of it. Holding onto hope and memories is essential. Write a poem about something that makes you feel hopeful in life.



- The authors have used alternating chapters between their characters and, at times, have written sections in each other's chapters, to make their voices work — do you like stories with more than one character voice? What do you like about it? Is there anything you don't like? Write a one-page story with two different points of view.
- At the end of every story, there is a resolution. In Emme and Ivy's case, there are some crucial scenes in the closing chapters, including understanding why their family members had left them. Write down and then discuss how Emme and Ivy resolved these issues and what things supported them to do so?
- Design a different cover for the book that incorporates something from the story that you 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.
- 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. Ensure you incorporate some of the language or expressions they use, so that you remain true to their character.
- Why do you think senses are essential 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.
- In this story, the authors used the third-person past tense narrative. Why do you think the authors did that? How do you think the story might have changed if they had used first-person perspectives?
- Break into small groups and choose a theme from the book. Choose some examples from the text that show how this theme is explored.
- Retell the scene where Emme and Ivy are being tested on their talents from one of the other characters' perspectives—eg Cindertail or Seraphina. How does this alteration impact the story and its narrative flow? Does it add to or detract from the story?
- Describe a time when 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, consider sharing these stories with a small group of classmates.
- In small groups, select a chapter from the book and adapt it into a play. Act this out in front of the class. Analyse what you did and how you created action from a written story.