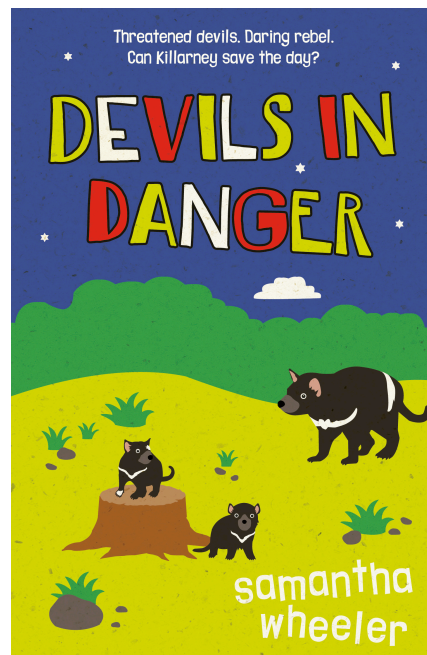


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DEVILS IN DANGER

Samantha Wheeler



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

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SYNOPSIS

Killarney finds school boring and plans to be a hairdresser, just like her mum. She is tired of being hassled about her homework and does not see the point of the endless tasks set by her teacher. But when strange screeching sounds keep her awake at night and objects start disappearing, her curiosity is aroused. With the encouragement of wildlife zoologist April, Killarney begins researching. She soon discovers a Tasmanian devil denning under the house with her two little imps. While Killarney is excited, many in the small community of Dodges Ferry are horrified. How can Killarney convince them they have nothing to fear?

Killarney risks losing her friends and upsetting her mother's clients, but she simply cannot sit by and do nothing. She pushes herself to educate the town, finding the courage to campaign her hardest to protect these unique marsupials. *Devils in Danger* is an endearing story about hope, resilience and making a difference.

THEMES

- Friendship
- Tasmanian devils
- Action
- Courage
- Resilience
- Hope

WRITING STYLE

Devils in Danger is written in first person, past tense. Figurative language adds a literary quality to the text, while authentic characterisation makes it tangible and relatable to younger readers. Killarney's efforts to help the local community successfully co-exist with Fern and her joeys showcase how action is achievable for people of all ages. This is an excellent text for encouraging children to put their ideas in motion to benefit the environment and wider community. It should be noted that Fern, the mother Tasmanian devil, dies from devil facial tumour disease.

STUDY NOTES

- The opening pages of *Devils in Danger* create a mood of tension and mystery. How has the author achieved this?
- What do you predict is making 'those dreadful noises' (p. 3)? Take note of the clues given to readers in the opening chapters.

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- Use selected excerpts from *Devils in Danger* to discuss sentence or passage level language features. On p. 3, for example, a **complex sentence** uses specific structures and **vocabulary** choices to evoke a mysterious **mood**: ‘Finally, Mum, silhouetted in the foggy darkness, turned and marched briskly back, the shovel still poised over her shoulder.’ Have students identify similar examples to discuss in small groups and as a whole class.
- As you read *Devils in Danger*, track the plot on a story graph. Note that the story starts with the ‘moment of change’: ‘Mum and I were clearing the dinner table when a furious scream exploded through the air’ (p. 1). Why is this an effective way in which to begin a story? How does the story climax? How are the complications resolved? Use the illustrations at the beginning of each chapter to help shape this map.
- Create a sketch of the setting of Dodges Ferry using the descriptions given throughout the text.
- Why is Missy so dismissive of Killarney after she tells her about the ‘long dropping, full of wiry white hair and tiny fragments of bone’ (p. 11)? How does this magnify these characters’ different traits?
- How is Bones used to help propel the storyline? How would the story be different without her?
- Discuss how Samantha Wheeler uses a hook at the end of each chapter to lure readers to the subsequent chapter. Why is this an effective tool to use?
- Why do you think Noah’s arms are ‘wrapped protectively around his belly’ (p. 11)? What can you infer about Noah from this?
- Why has the author included Killarney’s plush toy collection in the story? How is Shelley used to show the depth of Killarney’s character?
- Discuss the role Killarney’s nanna plays in *Devils in Danger* even though she is dead. In what ways does she continue to help Killarney?
- Why is a character like Mario included in the story? How do his actions affect Killarney? Why are antagonists necessary to narratives?
- In the role of Killarney, create and perform a monologue about Missy avoiding you.
- Re-read the description of the reserve at the top of p. 36. Why has this scene been included in the text? How does this make you feel about your own waste management?
- Why does Killarney’s mum go to so much effort when meeting April for the first time? How are readers able to see her values in this scene? Why does she push Killarney to value education more?
- Why does Killarney dislike schoolwork so much? What helps to change this mindset?
- In the role of Killarney, write a journal entry about the first time you see Fern.

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- Project an image of a Tasmanian devil onto the board. Brainstorm ways to describe it. Compare your ideas with the description of Fern on pp. 71–72. Discuss the language choices made by Samantha Wheeler in this passage.
- Compare the characters of Killarney and Noah using a Venn diagram.
- As you are reading, take note of the quality verbs used by Samantha Wheeler. Add these to a class *Word Wall*. Examples include ricocheted (p. 3), silhouetted (p. 3), careened (p. 36), squelched (p. 41), scoured (p. 100), flanked (p. 159) and deter (p. 160). Similarly, add other vocabulary, such as fundamentally (p. 22), gymkhana (p. 25), biodiversity (p. 41), ghoulish (p. 42), catastrophe (p. 46), and skittish (p. 119).
- *Devils in Danger* uses many idioms. Discuss the meaning of these, especially with students for whom English is an additional language (EALD). Examples include:
 - Why're you all dolled up? (p. 54)
 - Righto, I'd better hit the frog and toad (p. 63)
 - Got time for a quick cuppa? (p. 69)
 - Now that's a set of laughing gear (p. 72)
 - Dad looked pretty stoked too (p. 78)
- In what ways does Killarney show courage and perseverance in *Devils in Danger*? Give examples from the text to help illustrate your ideas.
- What role does Grannie Annie play in *Devils in Danger*? Why is she an important character?
- Discuss Samantha Wheeler's use of figurative language throughout *Devils in Danger*. Some examples include:
 - Another shriek pierced my eardrums (p. 2)
 - His roly-poly body was as white as freshly caught fish (p. 5)
 - With my skinny Daddy-long-legs legs and a fierce spray of freckles across my nose (p. 5)
 - Sniffing like she was vacuuming the ground (p. 9)
 - The naughty dog ... fired off another round of excited barks (p. 9)
 - Josh Dwyer ... was torpedoing around our kitchen with Mum's best saucepan on his head (p. 13)
 - His long legs stuck out like sticks below the too-short hem of his suit pants (p. 29)
 - I froze as a startled cry rang out behind me (p. 30)
 - The sounds from the footy club soon faded, replaced by the warbling calls of a distant butcherbird, and gum leaves whistling in the wind (p. 35)
 - An old rusty scooter ... stole my attention (p. 36)
 - She leapt over fallen branches and swerved like a dodgem car around the trees (p. 37)

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- When the small bell tinkled on the post office door, he'd jump back as if a hand grenade was about to go off (p. 46)
- Mr Tratt would wring his hands and screw up his face like a crinkly prune (p. 46)
- It was like the countdown to Christmas, waiting for the trapdoor to snap shut (p. 65)
- My stomach flipped like a fish on a line (p. 71)
- A big fiery ball of frustration suddenly exploded inside me (p. 87)
- The possibilities fizzed in my head like sherbert (p. 92)
- An angry hot flush crept up my neck (p. 105)
- His warm cuddle was like a calming blanket (p. 108)
- I poured out all my frustrations, spilling them like polystyrene beads bursting from a ripped beanbag (p. 108)
- My jittery nerves ... jumped around like popcorn (p. 116)
- Grannie Annie began squeezing my arm so hard it was like being crushed by a boa constrictor (p. 125)
- The first joey ... was as fragile as a newborn kitten (p. 126)
- His normally smart moustache was long and lank, hanging like a mop past his mouth (p. 143)
- Their legs splayed out like they were parachuting (p. 151)
- Her coat shone like black diamonds (p. 152)
- Her breath rattled in and out (p. 168)
- My chest felt fit to burst (p. 189)
- How does Killarney develop and change from the beginning to the end of the text? What has allowed this growth to occur? In what ways are you similar to and different from Killarney? What does Killarney learn about herself throughout *Devils in Danger*? What can you learn about yourself from reading *Devils in Danger*?
- What strategies does Killarney use to 'get the locals onside' (p. 77)?
- Discuss Samantha Wheeler's language choices when describing scenes. Use some of these techniques to describe your own house, bedroom or suburb/home town.
- Why has a character like Noah been included in *Devils in Danger*? Why is he necessary to the plot?
- Research the life cycle, habitat, behaviour and diet of Tasmanian devils. Present your information in a format of your choice.
- How does Killarney problem-solve to help rescue the devils?
- The concept of 'action' is an important theme of *Devils in Danger*. Discuss the ways in which people of all ages and abilities have the capacity to act and contribute effectively to the community. How does Killarney go about creating such change through her action? What have you learnt about action through her persistence and research?

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- The locals have preconceived ideas about Tasmanian devils. How are such preconceptions dangerous?
- Why does Noah think that posters are too old-fashioned to use to raise awareness? What does he suggest instead? Do you agree with him? Discuss.
- Why has the author included details in the text such as Mr Snibbler's disdain for Indian mynas? What comment is she making about native species as opposed to those introduced?
- Why does Killarney say that 'people were surprisingly difficult to educate' (p. 90)?
- Discuss the language features of the 'dreadful notes' left in Killarney's letterbox (see p. 91). How is personification used to make these notes even more vicious?
- Re-create Killarney's poster on p. 94, adding visuals to help attract and persuade the audience.
- What does Killarney mean when she says, 'Nanna had given me Shelley to make me *feel*' (p. 107)? Why does Nanna write in the card, *It's only when you see these beautiful creatures that you'll really understand* (p. 107)? How is this true with regards to the Tasmanian devils in *Devils in Danger*?
- Why does Killarney criticise herself for being not 'good enough to help poor Fern' (p. 107)? Is this really true? Discuss.
- Why is 'championing an animal with such a bad reputation' difficult (p. 108)?
- What does Dad mean when he says, 'It's not about being smart. It's about being *clever*' (p. 109)?
- Why do Mrs Dwyer and Grannie Annie decide to support Killarney's cause? What does this tell us about having preconceived ideas about people?
- Recreate Killarney's video about Tasmanian devils using the information on p. 136, as well as the notes at the end of the text. Alternatively, research and present information about another protected Australian species.
- Create your own 'unique tourism campaign', just like Miss Bredlow's class (see p. 110).
- Discuss the following statement from p. 146: 'It's not about being cute. All native animals deserve to be safe, whether they're cute or not'.
- In the role of Killarney, write a reflection to share how you feel about Fern's devil facial tumour disease.
- Why does Killarney give her pelican to Benjamin and Shelley to Bella? What does this tell us about Killarney's character?
- In what way is *Devils in Danger* a book about hope?

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- Read 'Killarney's Scientific Journal' starting on p. 197. Visit the websites listed on pp. 203–204 of *Devils in Danger* to discover more about this species and the organisations that help Tasmanian devil conservation.
- Using 'Killarney's Scientific Journal', create a multi-modal presentation to share these facts.
- Choose an animal on which to research, note-take and present your findings using the following headings:
 - Introduction
 - Habitat
 - Appearance
 - Behaviour
 - Threats
 - Conservation

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

A few years ago, when I was researching my novel *Wombat Warriors*, I had the pleasure of participating in a fundraising walk with the Wilderness Society in Tasmania. Early one morning, we crossed the fast-flowing Pieman River to walk along a stunning stretch of untamed coastline, thick with heathland shrubs. I saw loads of signs of wombats: droppings, burrows and wombats themselves. Then I saw something I'll never forget: a weird wiry dropping near a set of small unusual footprints. A Tasmanian devil had passed just ahead of us! I spent the rest of the walk consumed with thoughts of that wild devil and how I could write its story.

Once I began my research for *Devils in Danger*, I was at first delighted to discover that Tassie devils sometimes den under suburban houses, causing much ruckus and concern, a great premise for my story. But I was then saddened to learn about the devil facial tumour disease (DFTD) and how many devils had died from it.

On my second visit to Tasmania, I connected with the manager of the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program, David Pemberton, who gave me so much hope about the survival of this incredible species. He explained about the insurance populations and current research developments, describing the discovery of DFTD-resistant 'super' devils with much excitement. When I asked what I could do to help, David said the most useful things people could do were the everyday things, like being careful on the roads, keeping dogs on leads, not clearing trees unnecessarily, or using poisons like Ratsak in the home. He also showed me a great app to report roadkill and told me about virtual fences. I really hope I've inspired you all to go out and make a difference!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samantha Wheeler fell in love with animals when, at the age of six, she received a tortoise. She went on to study agriculture, work with dairy farmers and teach science, until writing her first children's book, inspired by koalas, in 2011. Her books, which include *Smooch & Rose*, *Spud & Charli*, *Mister Cassowary*, *Wombat Warriors*, *Turtle Trackers* and *Everything I've Never Said*, have been shortlisted for the Queensland Literary Awards, the Readings Children's Book Prize, the Wilderness Society's Environment Award for Children's Literature and the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales Whitley Awards. Samantha hopes her books will encourage everyone to make a difference. www.samanthawheeler.com.au