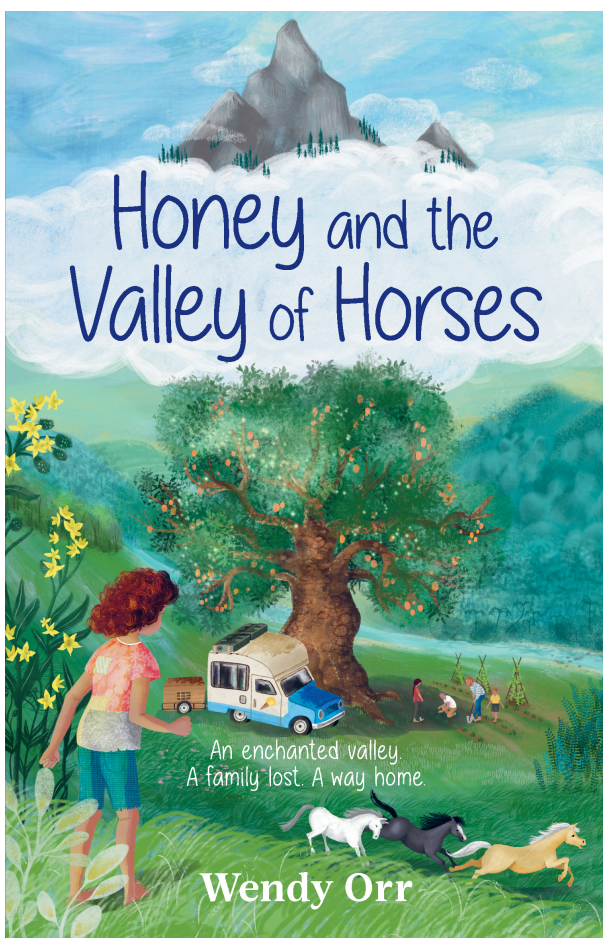


Honey and the Valley of Horses

By Wendy Orr



A warm and wonderful adventure with a touch of fantasy. Honey and her family seek the quiet comfort of a magical valley so they can escape the troubles of the wide world. A beautifully restorative novel from the award-winning author of the bestselling *Nim's Island* stories.

RECOMMENDED FOR

9 – 13 (Upper Primary and Lower Secondary)

THEMES

Adventure, family, grief, healing, horses, fantasy, self-sufficiency, resilience, courage

ISBN (AUS)

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SYNOPSIS

When Honey was four and her brother Rumi was a tiny baby, her family loaded up their converted ice-cream-van-camper and drove away from all they knew, as an illness swept the sad wide world. High in the mountains, they crossed a bridge to follow a mysterious herd of enchanted horses into a sheltered valley. The bridge and the track disappeared behind them – and now they are trapped in paradise.

In the valley of horses, Honey's family becomes self-sufficient, fishing, growing vegetables and using solar power. But no messages from the outside world are ever received. When her father falls desperately ill, Honey is sure there must still be people in the big wide world who can help. She is determined to draw on her resourcefulness, self-belief and courage, but will this be enough to find a way out of the valley?

AUTHOR MOTIVATION



Credit Roger Gould

‘During Melbourne’s lockdown, our son’s family lived with us for ten months. The children arrived aged nine months and two and a half, so had little memory of pre-lockdown life. As the world opened up, we watched their hesitancy at meeting other people – an anxiety that was echoed in stories from friends and neighbours. I became concerned about the lack of trust and fear of others that was being generated, and started to wonder about how that could play out in extreme cases.

‘The first line of this book had come into my head several years earlier, and although I’d played with it in various forms, I hadn’t yet found its story. I have no idea how it came to merge with the lockdown thoughts, but once it did, it became clear that the story would be magic realism, in a similar tone to *Nim’s Island*. In fact, I first described it to my publisher as, ‘*Nim’s Island* with horses.’

'Remembering a walk in the extraordinary rainforest near Maleny, I set the book in the hinterland region of Queensland's Sunshine Coast. I'd always thought of that hike as magical – now it became a bit more so. I also drew on memories of the hinterland of the Gold Coast, where we'd stayed during the filming of *Nim's Island*, and Tamborine Mountain, where *Return to Nim's Island* was filmed.

'Although I haven't been able to ride since breaking my neck in 1991, I still love horses and enjoyed pulling on the emotions of being with a horse as well as the physical sensation of riding.

'The other element in the book is self-sufficiency, something else I am passionate about. I have made my own yoghurt, cheese and occasionally butter, preserved fruit and vegetables. I also love the principles of patchwork and reusing clothing or any scraps of material. Possibly the only reason I've never turned fabric baby books into pockets or squares for a quilt is that my children only had paper books.'

Wendy Orr

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wendy Orr was born in Canada, and grew up in France, Canada and the USA. After high school, she studied occupational therapy in England, married an Australian farmer and moved to Australia. They had a son and daughter, and now live on five acres of bush, near the sea. Her books have won awards in Australia and around the world and have been translated into twenty-six languages.

Although Wendy first learned to read and write in French, her family spoke English at home. She clearly remembers the excitement of reading a story in her own language for the first time. She immediately started writing stories and hasn't stopped since.

Wendy has had many highlights in her writing career, including winning the CBCA Book of the Year and walking a red carpet with Jodie Foster, but believes that nothing compares to the thrill of the first vision of a new book.

IN-CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Cover Discussion Questions

- What elements in the cover image suggest that this valley might be magical?
- Consider the perspective of the image. Does looking down from a distance add to a feeling of magic? How do the soaring mountain peaks make you feel?
- How do the title and subtitle support this sense of magic? What word or words, in particular, suggest the story might be magical?
- Consider the colours used on the cover. Do they suggest magic to you? If so, what sort of magic, good or evil and menacing?
- Open the story and read the very first sentence. Does the sentence remind you of stories you may have heard before? What sort of stories were they and did they often involve magic of some sort?

Foreshadowing

- Foreshadowing is when an author provides hints about what will happen later in a story. Can you find any examples of foreshadowing in the first chapter of the story?

Text Messages

- The end of each chapter is marked by a short message from someone in Honey and Rumi's extended family in the outside world. Why do you think Wendy Orr included these messages? Did these messages add to an element of mystery for you?
- How does the language in them differ from the language used in the main part of the story? Does the change in language style change the way you read the story?

Point-of-View

- From what point of view (POV) is the story told? Can you think of other stories involving magic that had the same POV?

Characterisation

- Choose three adjectives to describe Honey. Now find a scene in the book to illustrate each word you chose. For instance, if you chose the word *brave* describe a scene or scenes in the novel where she demonstrates her bravery.

Living Sustainably

'Absolutely everything they'd brought with them had been used and reused and mended and used again for something new.' (Page 12)

- Name five things that Honey and Rumi's family use and reuse and mend and use again.
- What would you pack if you were setting out in a camper van like Honey and Rumi's parents and NanNan?
- How might you use and reuse and mend and use again one of the things you packed?
- How might you use and reuse something in your classroom?
- Further Reading: Discover how, in mid-2023, four Colombian children survived a plane crash and 40 days in the Amazonian jungle alone.

Bush Foods

'Rumi hit his thumb three times and Honey hit hers twice, but in the end there was a big pile of nuts to be roasted over the fire...wearing her jacket against the prickly leaves.' (Page 33)

- The valley provides Honey and Rumi's family with everything they need but they work hard for everything they eat. How does their life differ from yours? Do you

think growing, finding, fishing and preparing all your food would change how you feel about food? Would it make it more valuable or less? Might you enjoy it more or less?

- Find out about Bush Tucker by watching the ABC TV's *Behind the News* program entitled, 'Bush Tucker Garden' [aired on 26 Nov, 2019].
- Grow your own Bush Tucker Garden at school or home.

Poetry

'Honey's poem flowed into her mind while she was still getting her feather and ink-dye from their shelf in the van. Even though it was sad it made her feel better.' (Page 82)

- Why do you think writing a poem helped Honey feel better about her torn sleeping bag?
- What poetic techniques has Honey used in her poem?
- Try writing a short poem about something that you lost and made you feel sad.
 1. Choose the thing that you want to write about.
 2. Think of words, rhymes and rhythms that relate to the thing you have chosen.
 3. Write down words to describe how you feel about your loss.
 4. Write the poem.
 5. Edit the poem by taking out any words you think don't need to be there.

John Gordon Wilding's Letter

- How does Honey's Great-Great Grandad's experience reflect things that happen to Honey's family?
- After finishing the story, can you find things that happen to him that also happen to Honey after she finds the letter?

'Going to war while I was still a boy. I saw things no one should ever see: I came home wounded in body and soul, only to lose my parents and other people I loved to a disease that seemed to have no end.' (Page 87)

- Spend a lesson in the library to find out more about Australia straight after the First World War. What might it have been like for a young man like John Gordon Wilding to return to Australia? What was the 'disease' he mentions in his letter?

Genre

- Research the term 'magical realism' and write a paragraph arguing that *Honey and the Valley of the Horses* is/is not a magical realism novel.
- Write another paragraph about your response to magical realism. Did you like it when magical things happened in the novel? In your paragraph explain why you felt this way.

Symbolism

- Ice cream is mentioned many times in the story. Honey and her family live in an ice-cream van, the clouds above the mountain are like ice cream, the adults talk about eating ice cream in the world outside and the story ends with Honey trying ice cream for the first time. If ice cream is a symbol here – something that represents an idea, place or relationship – then what do you think it might symbolise here?

Language Study

'It started as a breeze, and the leaves rustled. It grew to a wind, and the trees danced. It bellowed into a storm, a howling, shrieking gale, and the trees bent and creaked. Big branches cracked and crashed and small ones flew through the air like bumbling birds.'

(Page 158)

- Find examples of repetition, personification, alliteration, simile and rhythm in the above extract. Why do you think Wendy Orr chose to use these literary techniques at this precise moment in the story?

'His thoughts spun like kaleidoscope windows: *Will we find Honey?...How can I feel so happy when I'm so scared for Papa and Honey?*' (Page 176)

- Research the term Stream of Consciousness and write a short paragraph about whether you think the extract is an example of it.
- Did this passage make you feel closer to Rumi because you could understand the whirl of his thoughts?
- Did this passage make the story even more dramatic for you?

Book Review

- Write a book review for *Honey and the Valley of Horses*. Start with a summary of the main characters, outline the plot, then provide an overview of the key themes. Next, include a personal response to the book, identifying and explaining what you enjoyed, what challenged you and what you did not like. Would you recommend the book to other readers of your age group? Why, or why not? Finish by rating the book out of 10.

Create your Own Ink

- Honey writes her poem with ink-dye that her family made from the fruits and plants in the valley. You can make ink-dye, too, if you follow some simple steps. There are loads of sites on the internet that will show you how. All you require are the following ingredients:
 - Leaves, flowers, and berries
 - Water
 - Salt
 - White vinegar
 - Gum arabic (available at art-supply stores)
 - Colourful plant
 - Whole clove or wintergreen oil
 - Old pot (stainless steel works best)
 - Rubber gloves
 - Rags
 - Coffee filter
 - Funnel
 - Wide-mouth glass jar
 - Glass bottles with lids