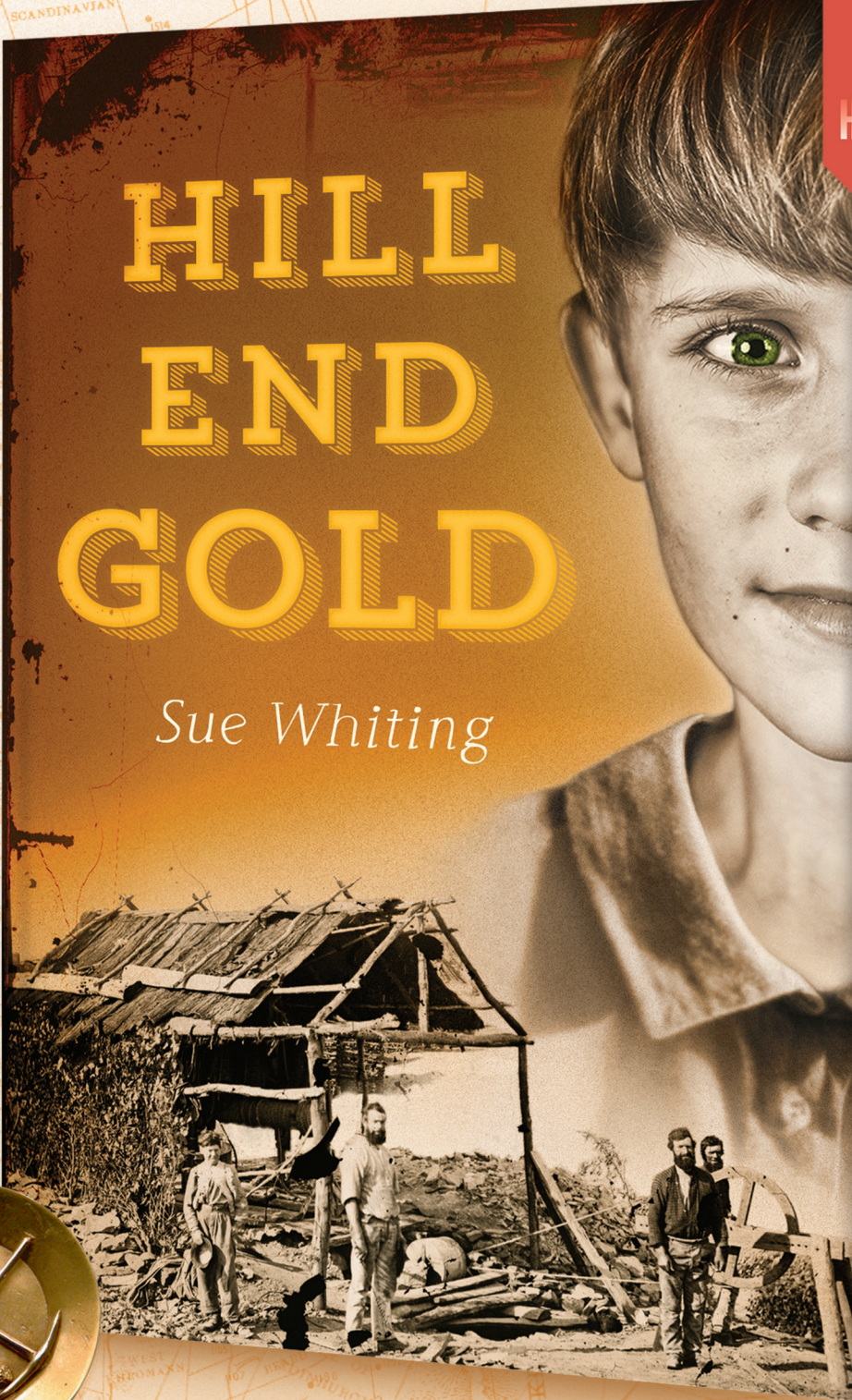


OUR
HISTORY

HILL END GOLD

Sue Whiting

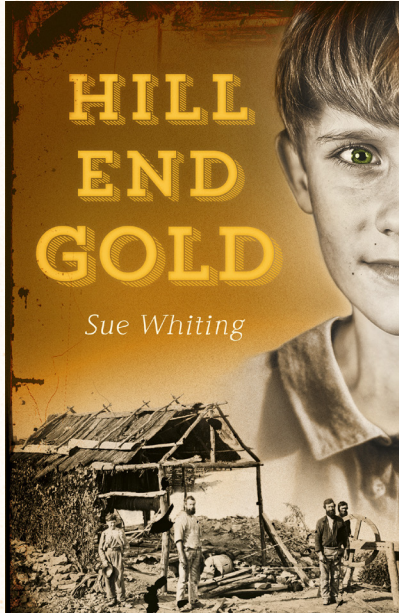


TEACHER NOTES

Teacher Notes by Belinda Bolliger

WALKER BOOKS

ABOUT THE BOOK



OUR HISTORY: HILL END GOLD
AUTHOR: SUE WHITING
ISBN 9781761601491 PAPERBACK
JUNE 2026

When Pa buys a stake in a gold mine at Hill End, Alfie knows his life is about to change. A golden future is just within reach, and fortune favours the bold

... but in Hill End, fortunes are lost as fast as they are made.

Set in 1872 during the height of the Australian gold rush, *Hill End Gold* follows Alfie Wilson, a boy swept up in his father's dream of striking it rich. When Pa invests the family's life savings in a mining claim and moves them from their farm near Bathurst to the booming gold town of Hill End, Alfie is filled with excitement and hope for a golden future.

At first, the promise of wealth seems within reach. But the reality of Hill End quickly challenges these expectations. The town is overcrowded, dirty and under-resourced, and the family's mine is far from the thriving claims of Hawkins Hill and not the prosperous mine that was promised to Pa.

As weeks pass, life becomes increasingly difficult. Constant rain, illness, financial strain and the physical demands of mining begin to take their toll. Alfie begins to question whether the risks and sacrifices are worth it. As he witnesses the strain on his family and the uncertainty of their future, Alfie comes to understand that true wealth may not lie in gold, but in family, security and resilience.

The third book in the *Our History* series, set in the famous gold rush town of Hill End. Written by acclaimed Australian author Sue Whiting.

For ages 8-12.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue Whiting is an award-winning children's and YA author, editor and former primary school teacher. Sue writes for many age groups, from picture books through to YA, including the bestselling *Missing*, the acclaimed *The Book of Chance* and several CBCA Notable Books. Sue's latest books are *Tilda*, a historical novel for readers 10+, and the second book in her middle-grade fiction series, *Pearly and Pig and the Lost City of Mu Savan*. As a storyteller and school performer, Sue has informed, inspired and entertained thousands of kids across the country. Sue is passionate about the power of story and is an advocate for reading and writing for pleasure.

WRITING STYLE

Sue Whiting uses a first-person narrative voice through Alfie, creating an immediate and engaging perspective that allows readers to experience the excitement, confusion and gradual disillusionment of life on the goldfields alongside him. Dialogue plays a key role in revealing character, particularly the contrast between Pa's optimism and Ma's practical concerns, while also grounding the story in family dynamics.

THEMES

**Family; Australian history; Historical change; Resilience;
Greed vs contentment; Community; Friendship; Hope and ambition**

CURRICULUM AREAS

- **English** (Literature and Literacy)
- **HASS** (History and Geography)
- **Civics and Citizenship**
- **Critical and Creative Thinking** (General Capability)
- **Ethical Understanding**

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

BEFORE READING

- Before you begin reading, explore what you already know about the Australian gold rush. As a class, discuss and record answers to the following:
 - When did it happen?
 - Where did it take place?
 - Who was involved?
 - Why did people go to the goldfields?
 - What do you imagine life was like?

Write your ideas on the board or in a shared document.

- Work in pairs or small groups to further investigate the gold rush era. Use the internet, books or your school library to find answers.
 - When did the Australian gold rush begin?
 - Where were the major goldfields located? (e.g. New South Wales and Victoria)
 - Can you find Hill End on a map of Australia?
 - What was 'gold fever'?
 - What kinds of jobs did people have on the goldfields?
 - What challenges or dangers did people face?

Each group or pair shares one or two interesting facts with the rest of the class. Then, as a class, build a list of key ideas about the gold rush.

- Create a short timeline showing important events in the gold rush era.
-

DURING AND AFTER READING

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- What do you think life in Australia was like in the 1870s?
- How might it be different from life today?
- What challenges might families like Alfie's have faced?

Explore the following topics:

Daily life

- What was everyday life like for families?
- What kinds of homes did people live in?
- What chores or responsibilities did children have?
- **Activity:** Write a journal entry as if you were a child in the 1870s, describing a typical day.

Work and money

- What kinds of jobs did people have?
- Why did so many people go to the goldfields?
- Did most people become wealthy?
- **Activity:** Imagine you are deciding whether to move to the goldfields. List the possible risks and rewards.

Transport and travel

- How did people travel between towns?
- How long might a journey take?
- What dangers or difficulties might they face?
- **Activity:** Map a journey to Hill End. How would you get there in 1872? What would you need to bring?

Towns and communities

- What were gold rush towns like?
- How quickly did they grow?
- What problems might people have faced (e.g. overcrowding, hygiene)?
- **Activity:** Create a labelled drawing or diagram of the goldfields town in Hill End, based on descriptions in the novel.

School and childhood

- Did all children go to school?
- What were schools like?
- How were boys' and girls' experiences different?
- **Activity:** Compare a school day in 1872 with your own school day.

Culture and society

- Who lived in Australia at this time?
- Where did people come from?
- What rules or beliefs shaped society?
- **Activity:** Research one group of people who lived on the goldfields and present a short profile.

Reflection

- Did anything surprise you about life in this time period?
- What would have been the hardest part of living then? What was the hardest part for Alfie and his family?
- Why do you think people were willing to take such big risks?
- Choose one topic (e.g. housing, schooling, transport) and compare life in 1872 to life today. What has improved? Has anything stayed the same?
- Examine a historical source (photograph, diary, advertisement) from the gold rush era. What does it reveal about life at the time?

CHARACTER STUDY

In the novel, the characters change and grow. As they face challenges, their thoughts, feelings and beliefs begin to change. This is called a character arc.

Alfie

- How does Alfie feel about moving to Hill End at the beginning of the story?
- What does he believe about gold and becoming wealthy?
- How is he influenced by his father's gold fever?
- What experiences begin to change his thinking?
- How does he feel about life in Hill End as time goes on?
- What does Alfie come to understand about what is truly important?
- Look for evidence in the text to support your ideas.
- Track Alfie's story arc: Create a timeline or graph showing how Alfie changes throughout the story. For each stage, note Alfie's beliefs, his feelings and key events that influence him.

Pa

- How would you describe Pa at the beginning of the story?
- What is 'gold fever'? How does it affect him?
- Was Pa's decision to leave the farm justified? Consider both his hopes and the consequences.
- How does Pa change as the story progresses?
- What pressures might he be under?
- How has your impression of Pa changed by the end of the novel?

Ma

- How does Ma respond to Pa's decision to move?
- What role does she play in the family?
- How does she show strength, generosity and resilience?

Louisa

- What are Louisa's hopes and frustrations?
- How does she respond differently to Alfie and Pa?

Character profile

- Choose one of the characters in the novel and create a profile. Include:
 - Personality traits.
 - Goals and motivations.
 - Challenges they face.
 - How they change over time.
- Support each point with a quote or example from the text.

Reflection

- What does the novel suggest about ambition and risk?
- How do the characters help us understand the idea that some things are 'more precious than gold'?
- **Activity:** Write a letter from Alfie to a friend explaining what he has learned.

PEOPLE OF THE GOLDFIELDS: DIVERSITY AND CULTURE

During the gold rush, people travelled to Australia from all over the world in search of wealth. The goldfields became some of the most diverse and culturally rich places in the colonies.

Discuss

- Why do you think people were willing to travel such long distances to find gold?
- What challenges might they have faced leaving their home countries?
- How might it feel to arrive in a completely new country where people speak a different language?

Research

- Work in pairs to find out more about the different groups of people who lived and worked on the goldfields. You might explore:
 - Chinese miners and workers.
 - European migrants (e.g. from Britain, Ireland or Germany).
 - American miners.
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their connection to Country.
- Consider
 - Where did they come from?
 - Why did they travel to the goldfields? What was life like in their home country?
 - What kind of work did they do?
 - What challenges or discrimination did they face?
 - How did they contribute to life on the goldfields?

Reflection

- How did having people from many different countries shape life on the goldfields?
- What kinds of foods, traditions or ideas might people have shared?
- How has this diversity influenced Australian culture today?
- Do you think the goldfields were a place of opportunity for everyone?

- What lessons can we learn about fairness and inclusion from this time in history?
- Australia today is a wonderfully rich multicultural country. How is this similar to the diversity seen on the goldfields? How is it different?

Activity

- Research a cultural tradition, such as food, festivals, or skills brought to Australia during the gold rush that is still part of Australian life today. Create a poster or another style of presentation titled 'How the gold rush shaped modern Australia.'

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES AND THE GOLD RUSH

'The Gold Rush had significant impacts on the lives of Aboriginal people. The Mobs on whose Country gold was mined faced huge upheaval as a huge influx of settlers came to their land. Much of their country was destroyed by mining and Mob were further dispossessed from their lands.'

deadlystory.com/page/culture/history/Gold_rush_brings_more_people_to_Victoria

- Research the meaning of Country to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. How might it feel to have large numbers of people suddenly arrive and change the land you live on?
- How do you think mining for gold affected the land and environment? How might these changes have impacted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
- Were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples involved in the goldfields? If so, how? Here are some websites that you may find useful:

deadlystory.com

oldtreasurybuilding.org.au

nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/gold-rushes

vaeai.org.au/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2019/06/Koorie-Perspectives-from-the-Goldfields.pdf

WOMEN ON THE GOLDFIELDS

Louisa's life in *Hill End Gold* is very different from Alfie's. Through her and Ma's characters, we see what life was like for many girls and women during this time.

- What are Louisa's hopes and frustrations?
- How does she respond differently to Alfie and Pa?
- How does her life differ from Alfie's?
- What opportunities does Alfie have that Louisa does not?
- How does Louisa feel about missing out on her career as a pupil teacher? Why is this important to her?
- Do you think it's fair that Louisa had to stay home to help Ma?
- How were expectations for women and girls different from those for boys and men? Do you think these expectations were fair? Why or why not?
- Research activity: Find out more about the role of women during this time. What roles did they play on the goldfields? Did they ever work as miners? Why or why not? What challenges did they face on the goldfields? How important were women to the success and survival of families and communities?
- How has life changed for women since then? Has anything stayed the same?
- Research a real woman from the gold rush era and present her story.

MINING FOR GOLD

Throughout the novel, we see different methods of mining and hear many specialised terms used by miners. Understanding this language helps us better imagine life on the goldfields.

Vocabulary

- Research the following terms and write a definition for each. (Use a dictionary, the internet and/or clues from the novel.)
 - Stamper batteries.
 - Working the tailings.
 - Fossicking.
 - Sluicing.
 - Reef mines.
 - Vein.
 - Workings.
 - Sinking a shaft.
 - Mine head.
 - Alluvial mine.
 - Claim.
 - Horse-whim.
 - Surface gold.
 - Windlass.
- Group these terms into categories:
 - Tools/machines.
 - Methods.
 - Types of mining.
 - Find an example in the novel where one of these terms is used.

Understanding the process

- What is the difference between alluvial mining and reef (underground) mining?
- Which type seems easier? Which is more dangerous? Why?
- Why do you think miners needed so many different methods to find gold?
- Which method would you choose if you were a miner? Why?
- Create a diagram or labelled illustration showing one method of gold mining (e.g. panning, sluicing or shaft mining). Include labels and a short explanation of how the method works.

Panning for gold

- You will need:
 - A shallow container or tray.
 - Sand or dirt.
 - Small 'gold' items (e.g. sequins, small beads, painted pebbles, costume jewellery).
 - Water.
 - A sieve, colander or shallow dish.
- Instructions
 - Mix the 'gold' into the sand or dirt.
 - Place a scoop of the sand or dirt into your container.
 - Add water and gently swirl the dirt or sand as if you are panning for gold.

Reflection

- Why does the 'gold' sink to the bottom?
- What skills would a miner need to successfully pan for gold?
- How long do you think it would take to find real gold this way?
- Would this method make someone rich? Why or why not?

Activities

- Write a short explanation of the science behind gold panning (think about weight and density).
- Imagine you are a miner and write a diary entry about your first day trying to find gold.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BOLD

The phrase 'Fortune favours the bold' appears many times throughout the novel (see pages 7, 9, 43, 94, 97, 114, 175, 182, 194, 213).

- What do you think it means?
- Do you think it suggests that taking risks is always a good idea? Why or why not?
- Can you think of real-life situations where being bold might lead to success? Can you think of times when it might not?
- Why is this phrase important to Pa?
- How does it influence Alfie's thinking at the beginning of the novel?
- At what points does Alfie begin to question this idea?
- By the end of the story, has the meaning of the phrase changed for Alfie? If so, how?
- Do you agree that 'fortune favours the bold'? Or do you think the novel suggests something different about risk, luck and what really matters?

Debate

- Topic: 'Taking big risks is the best way to succeed.' Argue for or against, using examples from the book.

What is true wealth?

- Create a treasure chest (a drawing or a list) of things you value most in your life.
- Compare it with Alfie's idea of wealth at the beginning and end of the story
- How does Alfie's understanding of wealth change?
- What does the story suggest is 'more precious than gold'?
- What does the story teach us about chasing dreams?

PLAY ACTING

- Pages 135–152 of the novel describe the discovery of 'the monster slab of gold' – a moment of fantastic excitement, tension and possibility. Working in small groups, write and perform a short script based on this event. Don't forget to add drama using sound effects (digging, tools striking rock, the crowd's responses, etc.), music or a soundtrack to build suspense and excitement.
- Your classmates can take on different roles – some may like to be script writers, others actors, some may choose to design costumes and props, create the soundtrack and so on.

CREATE A GOLDFIELDS NEWSPAPER

- Imagine you are living in a gold rush town like Hill End in 1872. Major events are happening all around you – including the discovery of gold, the struggles of miners and the challenges of daily life. Your task is to create your own goldfields newspaper based on events from *Hill End Gold*.
- Working in small groups, design and create a newspaper that includes a range of articles and features that reflect life in the town. Include:
 - Some of the dramatic events from the story (the mine collapse, the discovery of the huge slab of gold).
 - Lifestyle (conflicts or tensions between characters; fashion; daily goings-on).
 - Town life.
 - Weather report.
 - An interview with someone from the town.

- o An opinion piece (e.g. 'Is mining worth the risk?' or 'Are people being misled by 'gold fever'?).
- o Include 'photographs' (drawings or images from the internet) to accompany your stories.
- o Try to write in language and style from the time (use some of the mining vocabulary you discussed earlier).
- o Don't forget to create a name for your newspaper!

Extension activities

- Create a 'Breaking News Edition.'
- Compare then and now: How would your breaking news story be reported in today's media?
- **Reflect:** Does your newspaper present a positive or negative view of gold mining? Why?

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- Create a class mural that shows the town of Hill End based on information from the internet or your library and impressions from the novel. Include some of the different characters.
- Map the family's move from their farm to Hill End.
- In the Author's Note at the end of the book, Sue Whiting explains that some of the characters are based on real people from the time. Research one of these people and create a poster presentation about them.
- How is gold mining done today? How does it compare to methods used in 1872?

FINAL REFLECTIONS

- What did Alfie learn about the difference between hope and reality?
- What does the novel suggest about the idea of a 'better life'?
- What surprised you most about life on the goldfields?
- Would you have gone to the goldfields? Why or why not?
- What lessons from this story are still relevant today?
- What does *Hill End Gold* teach us about what really matters in life?