

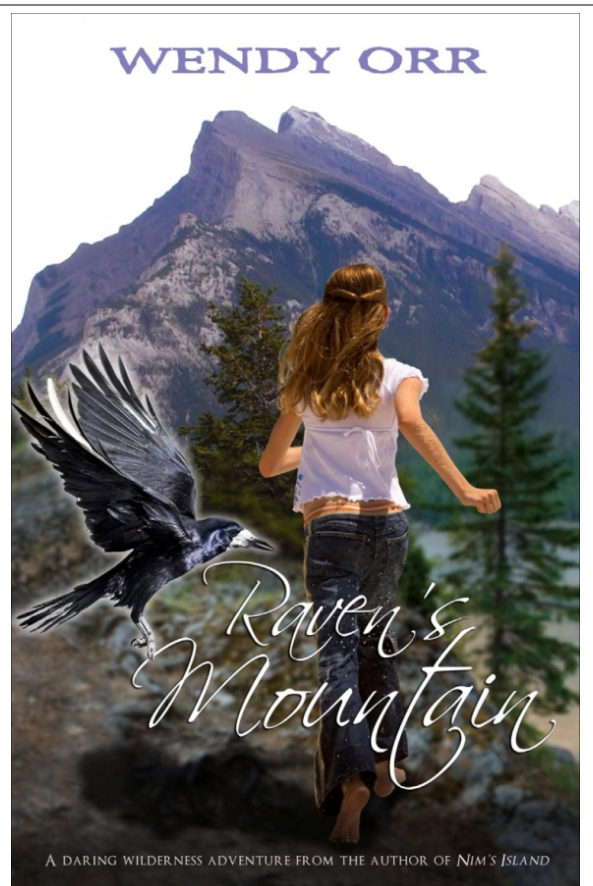
Teachers Notes

Raven's Mountain Wendy Orr

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Recommended for ages 8-12 yrs.

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INTRODUCTION

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Eleven year-old Raven is not happy about her mother remarrying and destroying Raven's dream that one day, the father who disappeared to Australia when she was born, would return to the family. She is even more unhappy about moving from a city on the Canadian prairies to a tiny town on the other side of the Rocky Mountains.

However her mother and stepdad Scott are determined that Raven and her big sister Lily will learn to love the mountains. Even though at the last minute Mum is unable to go with them, Scott and the girls head into the wilderness for two days of camping and mountain climbing before starting at their new schools.

Raven is first to reach the summit. Lily and Scott are still climbing the trail below. She is alone on top of the world. So she dances – a crazy, jumping, spinning dance –because if you can climb a mountain you can do anything! But then there is a rumble and the earth shakes. Rocks are falling, and so is Raven, in a terrible tumble down the side of the mountain. When she comes to, no one answers her calls. The rockfall is covering the trail where she last saw Lily and Scott... Wendy Orr tells the dramatic story of an eleven year-old a girl who goes beyond her limits to save her family - and on the way, discovers a mysterious bond with a family of bears and a raven.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Wendy Orr was born in Edmonton, Canada. Between preschool and Year 12, she went to eleven schools in different parts of France, Canada and the USA. She married an Australian, while she was studying occupational therapy in London, UK, and moved to Australia. She now has a grown up son James and daughter Susan. She and her husband Tom live on a small bush block south of Melbourne.

Wendy always wanted to be a writer, and wrote stories and poetry constantly while she was in school. She has now written many award-winning books including *Ark in the Park*, *Nim's Island*, *Nim at Sea*, *The Princess and her Panther*, and for teenagers, *Peeling the Onion*. Her books have been translated into twenty-four languages and are published around the world.



BACKGROUND TO THE BOOK – WENDY ORR SAYS:

The idea for this story came from climbing Pike's Peak in Colorado (4000 metres) with my dad and younger sister when I was twelve. We felt very proud of ourselves when we stood on the icy summit! The mountain is not technically difficult, and in fact there's a road to the top. However, it's still a very long, steep hike, so that we went from summer in the foothills to snow at the peak. At around 3000 metres I started having trouble breathing. My dad, who was a pilot, explained that at that height pilots used oxygen and talked me through it so that I went on to the top without any trouble. At one point we also ran into a hail storm and sheltered under a rock. I started to play with "what if we had to stay there longer?; what if the rock was a cave?..."



At this age I was also always dreaming of being a hero. When we moved from Colorado, it looked as if our horse might have to be sold because she refused to get into the float. I decided I would run away and ride her to Toronto, over 2000km. (Luckily the horse agreed to get into the float before I had finished packing my backpack.) I think I really wanted to know how far I could go to save someone or something I loved.

Raven, however, hasn't ever wanted to test herself in extremes. She's the middle one in a triangular friendship; the one the other two always want to be with – the one I wanted to be but never was, because I was too busy and bossy, writing plays and inventing games that I bullied the others into playing.

Why did I name her Raven? Her mum's name was Jenny, a very common name for her age. She wanted something different for her daughters. I probably chose Raven because years ago, when I was recovering from terrible injuries, I went to Canada and had treatment that helped me walk normally again. The therapist

had an orphaned raven that stared intently through the window at each treatment session. I've felt a secret bond with ravens ever since.

I set the story in the Canadian Rockies, where there is still a lot of wilderness to be lost in, and where bears are still spotted regularly.

BEFORE READING THE TEXT

- Examine the cover. What does it suggest? Why do you think the designer has used mauve for the spine and back cover? What does this colour represent to you?
- Looking at the cover, where do you think the book is set? What suggests that it is not in Australia?

PROLOGUE

- What does the prologue tell us about Raven and her family? What are Raven's fears in this section?
- Find words or phrases in the prologue that suggest what might be going to happen later in the story. Will she have different fears then?

How many students in your class have moved home or school? Have others joined a new club or activity where they didn't know anyone?

- Discuss or get students to write a short piece on how it feels to be a 'new kid'. Are there students from different cultures who are prepared to discuss some of the differences between their old home and new? Why do you think people are nervous of being 'new'?

STUDIES OF SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

SETTING – GEOGRAPHY

The text suggests that the story is set in North America but does not say exactly where.

- Why do you think this might be?
- Does it give your imagination more freedom if you can decide for yourself where a story is set?

Prairies

The North American prairies are flat or gently rolling treeless grasslands.

- Are there parts of Australia that could be called prairies?

Mountains

Find the Rockies on a map of North America. Decide where you think the story is set.

- What is the highest mountain in the world? How high is it?
- What is the highest mountain in Australia? How high is it?
- Why are mountains lower in Australia?

Tree line

The tree line is the limit on a mountain of where trees are able to grow. Above that line, it may be too cold, too dry, or not have enough air pressure. For more information: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tree_line)

Raven says:

I always thought the tree line was like a border: one minute you're in the woods, and the next step you're on a bare mountain where it's too high and cold for trees to live. For some reason I thought it would be exciting. I think Lily did too; at least she didn't argue when I said we should have our lunch right on the tree line. I thought we could sit on the rocks with our feet in the forest.

It's not like that at all. It's not even a line: the trees have just been getting smaller, scrawnier and further apart, and now there are hardly any at all.

- Why does something like the tree line look so different up close from how it appears from far away?

ENVIRONMENT

- What are some of the differences in the natural environment between the wilderness where Raven is lost, and the Australian bush?

A predator is "An animal that naturally preys on others; an animal that habitually catches and eats prey." (New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.)

The text mentions several different predators that Raven is afraid of.

- What are they?
- Are there animal predators in Australia?
- What animals do you need to be careful of in Australia? How should you act around them?

Compare coyotes and dingoes.

- How are they similar?
- One of them is a top predator – there are no other animals that can attack it. Which one?
- How would you keep yourself safe in the Australian bush?
- What could you do to prepare for an outback adventure?

INDIGENOUS THEMES AND MYTHOLOGY

There are many North American First Nation myths about Raven. Sometimes he is a creator god, and sometimes a trickster hero.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raven_in_mythology

- Do you know any Dreamtime stories from Australia?
- What animals are most often represented in Australian Aboriginal mythology?

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

RESILIENCE

There are several definitions of resilience in the dictionary.

- Look them up and decide what this reviewer means:
Raven is a great strong character, who is certainly a lot more resilient at the end of her few days in the wild. (Australian Bookseller and Publisher)
- How do you think that Raven has changed by the end of the book?
- What is the difference between resilience and courage?

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Raven and Lily

When I was little, Lily was my hero. On my very first day of school she knocked down the big boy who kept rapping me on the head and calling me a redheaded woodpecker. Some nights she'd climb into bed with me and tell me stories. But ever since she turned thirteen, my sister has been Queen of the Putdown. She doesn't have to say anything: just rolls her eyes, sniffs, and looks away... and I realize I'm the stupidest, most immature being on earth.

- Why have things changed between Lily and Raven?
- How do you think their relationship will have changed after the end of the book?

Raven and Scott

- Do you think Raven likes Scott? Why doesn't she want her mother to marry him? Do you think her father would have been likely to come back if she hadn't?

HOW RAVEN SEES HERSELF

I'm not as smart as Jess or as good at sport as Amelia: I'm the middle bit that joins two long sides of a triangle, practicing handstands with Amelia and writing plays with Jess.

- What does *raven* mean?

When Raven's alone on the mountain, she imagines conversations with her friends.

- How does this help her?
- Is Raven actually stronger and smarter than she thinks?

She also imagines hearing her real father's voice.

- Why do you think she does this? How does it help her?
- Whose voice is it really?

If you have read Nim's Island, compare Nim to Raven.

- How are they different? What do they have in common?

ENGLISH

There are poems by Jess and Raven in the book. Write your own poem for Raven.

Write a play like Jess's *Coyote Girl* play.

POINTS OF VIEW

The story is told in the first person, so we see it all from Raven's point of view.

- Write part of the story from Lily's point of view.

OR

- Write a letter that Lily might have written in the cave, to Raven, her mum, or a friend.

OR

- Tell the story through text messages from Lily.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF LOOKING AT NARRATIVE

- Design a cover for Raven's Mountain, or choose a scene to illustrate.
- Draw a narrative map. Work out the compass points for the mountain.
- Do a story board.

MULTI MEDIA

Wendy Orr has used polyvore.com to depict some of her influences when writing this book. <http://www.polyvore.com/cgi/profile?id=2264473>

- Use this site or something similar to choose suitable clothes for Raven for her journey.
- Find two other useful things to give her.

OTHER BOOKS AND MOVIES ON A SIMILAR THEME

Hatchet, by Gary Paulsen

My Side of the Mountain, by Jean George