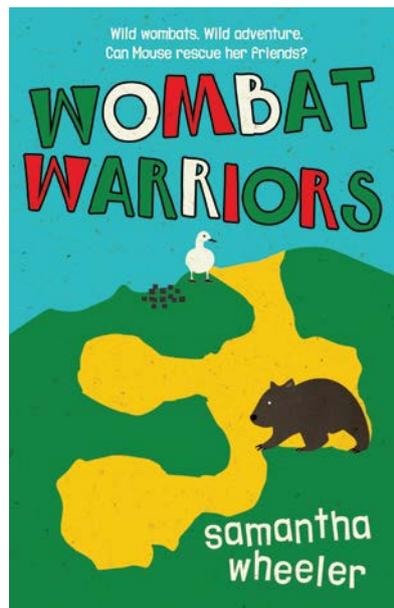


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WOMBAT WARRIORS

Samantha Wheeler



Teachers' Notes

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

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SYNOPSIS

When Minnie's parents attend her grandmother's funeral overseas, the shy Brisbane girl goes to live with her Aunt Evie in rural South Australia and attends the local school. Feeling alone and overwhelmed, she makes friends with an unusual housemate – a wombat named Miss Pearl who lives in her aunt's rundown cottage. The only problem is, the farmers of the district see wombats as a pest and would rather see them dead.

Minnie – who prefers to be called Mouse – feels powerless, but eventually gains the courage to find her voice and put her ideas into action.

Wombat Warriors is an inspiring story about courage, resilience and making a difference.

THEMES

Friendship:

- Mouse makes unexpected friends in Miss Pearl and Harry.

Wombats:

- The diet, behaviour, habitat and appearance of wombats feature in the text, as does the threat posed to wombats by farming.

Courage:

- One person, no matter how young, can make a difference.
- It is important to find one's voice.

Resilience:

- Mouse must withstand obstacles and confront feelings of loneliness and fear in order to grow and learn.

Action:

- Mouse and Harry decide to put ideas into action to help the plight of wombats in the district.

WRITING STYLE

Wombat Warriors is written in first person, past tense. Mouse's voice is relatable and realistic. Younger readers will easily identify with Mouse and her efforts to help farmers and wombats co-exist in the bush. This is an excellent text for encouraging children to put their ideas into action in order to benefit the wider community.

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STUDY NOTES

- The opening pages of *Wombat Warriors* foreshadow Mouse's weaknesses. What are these? How has the author woven these into the first chapter? Why are they introduced so early in the text?
- Why is Mouse unaccustomed to being told to 'speak up' (p6)? Why is this problematic?
- Using the description on p7, make your own sketch of either the cottage or Mouse's bedroom.
- Discuss Samantha Wheeler's language choices when describing a scene. Use some of these ideas to describe your own house, bedroom or a place that is special to you such as a favourite holiday spot.
- How have Mouse's parents unintentionally contributed to her lack of confidence?
- Track the plot of *Wombat Warriors* using a story graph. Note that the story starts with the 'moment of change'; Mouse is a 'fish out of water'. Why is this an effective way to structure a story? How does the story climax? How are the complications resolved?
- In what ways does Mouse show courage and perseverance in *Wombat Warriors*? Give examples from the text to help illustrate your ideas.
- What role does Miss Pearl play in *Wombat Warriors*? Why is she such an important character?
- Mouse goes into great detail when describing Miss Pearl's appearance. Observe photos of southern hairy-nosed wombats and compare these images with Mouse's description on p26. Choose another native Australian animal and write your own using images to help with this description. Swap with a friend and sketch one another's animals using the written description as your guide. Display these descriptions and sketches around the classroom.
- Mouse has to start at a new school. Can you identify with any of her doubts or emotions? Write a reflection about your first day at a new school.
- Mouse likes to Skype her parents while they're away in Ireland. In small groups, assume the roles of Mouse and her parents and hold your own Skype sessions – either real or make-believe – while Mouse is staying at Aunt Evie's.
- What prompts Mouse to start feeling proud of herself?
- How does the baby wombat, Willow, add depth and interest to the story? Why has the author included Willow in the text?
- Discuss Samantha Wheeler's use of figurative language throughout *Wombat Warriors*. Some examples include:
 - Her knitted jumper ... smelt like wool wash mixed with sunshine p2
 - A windmill beside the cottage creaked a rusty welcome p4

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- It smelt musty, like old mulching straw from the garden p5
- My words froze on my tongue p6
- My legs had turned to wood p8
- My toes were like ten mini icy poles in my shoes p20
- A large windmill spun lazily p28
- This wombat's coat was bunched up and ragged, like a woollen jumper that has shrunk after being washed in water that's too hot p58
- The plants were pale, like they'd been painted in water colours instead of oils p79
- So was the setting sun: a bright orange ball, dipping slowly towards the horizon p79
- How has Mouse developed and grown 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 Mouse? What can you learn about yourself from reading *Wombat Warriors*?
- Using evidence from the text, create a visual representation comparing Mouse's life in Queensland with her experiences in South Australia.
- Choose your own topic on which to create an 'ology' scrapbook.
- Research the life cycle, habitat, behaviours and diet of wombats. Present your information in a report format of your choice.
- How does Mouse problem-solve to help rescue the wombats?
- Faced with the likely extermination of wombats, Mouse says, 'I had to find my voice' (p139). Share a time when you found your voice. Alternatively, discuss the importance of Mouse finding her voice, and why this is such an important lesson to learn.
- Discuss the sentiment 'If life deals you lemons, make lemonade' (p175). Why does Aunt Evie remind Mouse of this saying? Share experiences from your own life in which you have followed this mantra.
- The concept of 'action' is an important theme in *Wombat Warriors*. Discuss the ways in which people of all ages and abilities have the capacity to act and contribute effectively to the community. How does Mouse go about creating change through her action? What have you learnt about action through her persistence and research?
- Read Samantha Wheeler's notes at the back of the text. Visit the websites listed on p182–183 of *Wombat Warriors* to discover more about the organisations that aim to help wombat conservation and to learn more about wombats.
- Using Mouse's Wombat-ology notes, create a multi-modal presentation to share these facts.
- Choose an animal of your own to research. Take notes- and present your findings using the following headings:
 - Introduction

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- Habitat
- Appearance
- Behaviour
- Threats
- Conservation
- As a class, devise your own ways of raising awareness and funds for a charity or community-minded project. Keep a photo journal or blog that tracks this action. Reflect upon this process by writing or recording your involvement.
- Use Jackie French's picture books such as *Diary of a Wombat* and *Diary of a Baby Wombat* during the tuning in phase of your novel study.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

In September 2014, Samantha saw a newspaper article showing a roll of wire pushed down a wombat burrow. The article explained that Southern Hairy-Nosed wombats, the state emblem of South Australia, were being buried alive. But there were two sides to this terrible story: one of wildlife lovers and one of farmers trying to make a living from the land. And that's how *Wombat Warriors* evolved!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samantha Wheeler lives in Brisbane with her husband, two daughters, two dogs and a horse. After a varied career involving dairy farmers and teaching, Samantha took up writing in 2009. Her first children's book, *Smooch & Rose*, was shortlisted for the 2014 Queensland Literary Awards and the Readings Children's Book Prize. Her second book, *Spud & Charli*, was imagined while riding her horse through the bush. Her third book *Mister Cassowary* was shortlisted for the 2016 Wilderness Society Environment Award for Children's Literature, the Readings Children's Book Prize, Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year Award and was commended in the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales Whitley Award. *Wombat Warriors* is Samantha's fourth book.

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