

---

# Teachers' Notes

---



## THE CAPTIVE'S SONG

Amanda Deed

ISBN: 9781761111464

Reading level: 13+ years

---

### BOOK SUMMARY

Freedom is a pipe dream. At least, that's what Olivia Cruikshank believes. Six years as a convict transported to Van Diemen's Land has taught her none can be trusted.

Until Michael Reeve shows up — a prison guard unlike any other. He acts like Olivia matters. Like her future matters.

Can Olivia learn to trust before it's too late? Will Mick's kindness lead to love, or will it be his undoing?

*The Captive's Song* is an Australian retelling of Rapunzel, complete with a tower, a braid and a beautiful song.

---

## THEMES

- Australian convict history
- True Freedom
- Social Justice
- Family Relationships
- Difficult interactions

## CONTENTS

Book Summary .....	1
Themes .....	1
About the Author .....	3
Discussion Questions & Classroom Activities .....	4
Creative Activities .....	6
Key Curriculum Areas .....	7

**DISCLAIMER:** These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools and other educational institutions, but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Light the Dark Pty Ltd, Trading as Wombat Books      ABN: 30 137 345 941  
Rhiza Press, PO Box 302, Chinchilla, Queensland 4413      admin@wombathriza.com.au



**Amanda Deed is available for author talks and workshops.  
Contact Rhiza Press for more information.**

*The Captive's Song Teachers' Notes can be used in schools (independent learning, small groups, and whole classes); at home with caregivers; and as part of mental health support programs facilitated by counsellors, psychologists, children's charities, etc.*

### Connect with Rhiza Press

[www.wombathriza.com.au](http://www.wombathriza.com.au)  
[www.facebook.com/rhizaedge](https://www.facebook.com/rhizaedge)

**Stories you'll want to Share**

**WOMBAT BOOKS    RHIZA PRESS    RHIZA EDGE**

*These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use within schools, but not offered for commercial sale.*

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

---



Amanda Deed is an award-winning author residing in Melbourne with her husband, her grown-up children, and several birds. Outside of her family, her life revolves around words, numbers (writing and accounting) and a healthy splash of music.

Her first novel, *The Game*, won the 2010 CALEB Prize for Fiction, and she has since had several novels final in the same prize. Amanda loves to write novels that explore her faith, Australian history, and romance.

For more information, go to [www.amandadeed.com](http://www.amandadeed.com).

### AUTHOR NOTES

*The Captive's Song* is a retelling of Rapunzel, one of my favourite fairy tales. I worked from [the original story](#). Instead of having a sorceress lock up my heroine, I thought I could use the penal system of the early 1800s instead, and thus Olivia Cruikshank and her story was born. This lent itself easily to an exploration of real freedom and social justice.

As part of my research, I travelled to Tasmania and went to what is left of the Cascades Female Factory. It is truly a haunting place, with some terrible tales.

You can find out more about the factory here: <https://femalefactory.org.au/>

### NOTES FROM THE END OF *THE CAPTIVE'S SONG*

Transportation of prisoners to Australia commenced in 1788 and continued, to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) at least, until 1853. Approximately 25,000 of the 164,000 convicts transported were women, convicted mostly of petty crimes, and 12,500 of those ended up in Van Diemen's Land.

Although my character, Olivia, and her fellow inmates are fictional characters, I drew from real women's stories who suffered at the hands of the penal system.

In 1841, an Inquiry into Female Convict Discipline was established which looked into areas such as rioting, trafficking, ill-discipline of convicts and also looked into the high mortality rate of infants in the nursery.

The results of this inquisition, along with the introduction of the Probation system, meant that after that time, women were kept in separate apartments, or light cells, two women per room. They lived in those small cells 24/7 with only a short break to walk each day, where they were made to stay at least four feet away from each other. They slept, ate and worked in the separate apartments under strict watch and were not permitted to speak to each other, under threat of punishment if they did. If well behaved for six months, they were then given permission to be assigned to work outside the prison.

The Anti-Transportation League was indeed a movement that raised a voice to cease the transportation of convicts, although it did not begin until the late 1840s. However, there was growing opposition to transportation from 1837 and even more so after transportation ceased to New South Wales in 1840, so I thought it relevant to include those sentiments in this novel. While the Iron Pot Lighthouse was run and maintained by convicts in 1841, I found no evidence that a female convict was ever sent there. But what is Rapunzel without a tower, right?

*These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use within schools, but not offered for commercial sale.*

---

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

---

### AUSTRALIAN CONVICT HISTORY

1. What sort of crimes were women sentenced to Australia as a convict for? (Ref: page 24, 60 & 108) Discuss the severity of these sentences compared to the crimes committed.
2. What kind of work were the prisoners required to do at Cascades Female Factory? (Ref: page 18, 63 & 101.)
3. What kind of punishment would they receive for misbehaviour within the prison? (Ref: page 9-10, 23, 75.)
4. What did it mean to be assigned? [Information here.](#)
5. Try and imagine how you would feel today, if you stole something small, like a packet of lollies, and were caught and sent overseas as punishment. Discuss.

### TRUE FREEDOM

1. "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." Nelson Mandela. Discuss this quote.
2. Is freedom just about whether you are in prison or not?
3. In thinking about the laws and societal expectations, do you feel that we are free people? Discuss.
4. Talk about things that hold you back – as if they are in invisible prison – eg fear.
5. Olivia finally finds her true freedom in God's forgiveness and acceptance (see page 206-207). What plays a role in your sense of freedom? Does religion, spirituality, security?

### SOCIAL JUSTICE

1. Michael Reeve has a strong sense of social justice. Oxford Reference outlines social justice as "the objective of creating a fair and equal society in which each individual matters, their rights are recognized and protected, and decisions are made in ways that are fair and honest." How does he demonstrate this in the novel?
2. Mick is very concerned about how prisoners were treated (see pages 137-138). Do you think these thoughts are still applicable to prisoners today?
3. Mick attends Anti-Transportation Meetings and is involved in the fight to stop transportation (see pages 51-52, 74-75). Would you take action about something you care deeply about? What would you do?
4. What other areas of social justice exist today? And what can we do about them?
5. Are there any obstacles to achieving social justice?
6. As a man that follows the Bible, Mick believes in treating others equally. (Matthew 25:31-46).
  - a) How does Mick's religious beliefs intersect with his actions in the novel and his values as a person?
  - b) What indicates that other characters may not exhibit the same beliefs?

*These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use within schools, but not offered for commercial sale.*

- 
- c) Many religions have a similar concept of the equality of people. How would you phrase your belief in equal treatment and how do you demonstrate this in your everyday life?

### FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

- Compare Olivia's relationship with her parents to Mick's relationship with his parents. What are the differences? Are there any similarities?
- How important is it to receive support and encouragement from your family?
- Olivia is abandoned by her family every time she is caught with stolen goods. Think about a time you have felt abandoned by your family. What did you do about it? If you feel safe to talk about it, share your thoughts.
- Mick loves spending time with his family, particularly Sunday dinners together. What are your favourite family events to attend? Why?
- Is it possible to heal and mend broken relationships like Olivia and her mother's? How important is it to forgive? Discuss

### DIFFICULT INTERACTIONS

- Working in a prison setting exposes Mick to many suffering, broken, hurt and angry people. How do these prisoners treat Mick and each other?
- When you come across someone who always seems angry or depressed, how do you treat them?
- Is it important to try and put yourself in someone else's shoes? How does this help the way you see them and respond to them?
- Mick is determined to be gracious and kind to the prisoners. But, is there a limit? Should there be a point where he walks away or gives up on a person? Discuss what circumstances make it too hard to be of help to someone.
- If you were the one who was suffering and hurt, how would you want others to behave toward you?



## CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Imagine you are a convict sent to a prison on the other side of the world. What crime did you commit? How do you survive? Would you follow prison rules or rebel? Do you dream about returning home? Write a creative piece on what your experience as a convict might look like.
2. Think about the characters of Mary Cruikshank (Olivia's mother) or Ellen Smith (Olivia's antagonist) and imagine what their futures might be. Choose one of them and write their continued story after the events of *The Captive's Song*.
3. Consider the context of *The Captive's Song*. What was life like and what was happening in history? With this in mind a story with a point of view - a free settler, a convict who has earned freedom, a convict who returned to England, a member of the aristocracy.
4. The table below lists of various media sources you can watch and explore.

Documentaries	Films	TV & miniseries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A Short History of Convict Australia</li> <li>▪ The Colony</li> <li>▪ Convict Kids</li> <li>▪ Rogue Nation</li> <li>▪ Who Do You Think You Are? Australia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Incredible Journey of Mary Bryant</li> <li>▪ The Outlaw Michael Howe</li> <li>▪ The Proposition</li> <li>▪ The Last Confession of Alexander Pearce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Banished</li> <li>▪ For the Term of His Natural Life</li> <li>▪ Against the Wind</li> <li>▪ The Secret River</li> <li>▪ All the Rivers Run</li> <li>▪ Ben Hall</li> <li>▪ Five Mile Creek</li> <li>▪ Great Expectations: The Untold Story</li> <li>▪ Sara Dane</li> </ul>

- a) How does this explore the same period of history from a different perspective to *The Captive's Song*? Did it teach you something new you hadn't known about colonial Australia?
- b) Why did England decide to send prisoners to Australia? What is the context of the Australian penal colony and who did they send out here?
- c) How did the time period that the film, TV series or documentary was produced in affect the way it was made? Do you think it was simply a change aesthetically or are there elements of cultural change or a change in attitude towards the history it's portraying? Reflect on the contemporary novel *The Captive's Song* and an older piece of media.
- d) How does the perspective affect the story? Consider where a story is coming from, the source can influence the way a story is told and who is a villain and a hero. [You can even read a primary source about Mary Bryant.](#) Would that have altered how *The Captive's Song* was told?
- e) Pick one element of colonial history you would like to further research. Why does this interest you? What do you think you might find? How does it relate to Olivia and Mick's lives?
- f) Compare the media you watched with *The Captive's Song*. In what ways do they tell their story differently and how did that affect the story being told?

*These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use within schools, but not offered for commercial sale.*

---

## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

---

### YEAR 7

English, Civics and Citizenship, History

AC9E7LE01	AC9E7LE02	AC9E7LE03	AC9E7LE05
AC9E7LE06	AC9E7LY06	AC9E7LA03	
AC9HC7K04	AC9HC7K05	AC9HC7S01	
AC9HH7S01	AC9HH7S07		

### YEAR 8

English, Civics and Citizenship, History

AC9E8LA02	AC9E8LE01	AC9E8LE02	AC9E8LE03
AC9E8LE05	AC9E8LY05		
AC9HC8K04			
AC9HH8K08	AC9HH8K09	AC9HH8K16	AC9HH8K13

### YEAR 9

English, Civics and Citizenship, History

AC9E9LA02	AC9E9LA03	AC9E9LA05	AC9E9LA07
AC9E9LA08	AC9E9LE01	AC9E9LE04	AC9E9LY01
AC9E9LY03	AC9E9LY05		
AC9HC9S03			
AC9HH9K01	AC9HH9K06		

### YEAR 10

English, Civics and Citizenship

AC9E10LA01	AC9E10LE01	AC9E10LA03	AC9E10LA09
AC9E10LE06	AC9E10LE05	AC9E10LE04	AC9E10LE03
AC9E10LY03			
AC9HC10S03	AC9HC10S04		

### YEAR 11 & 12

English, Modern History

ACEEN002	ACEEN004	ACEEN005	ACEEN006
ACEEN007	ACEEN008	ACEEN009	ACEEN010
ACEEN020	ACEEN038	ACEEN041	ACEEN042
ACEEN043	ACEEN060	ACEEN061	ACEEN062
ACEEN063	ACEEN064	ACEEN065	ACEEN076
ACEEN077			
ACHMH001	ACHMH002	ACHMH010	ACHMH011
ACHMH012			

*These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use within schools, but not offered for commercial sale.*