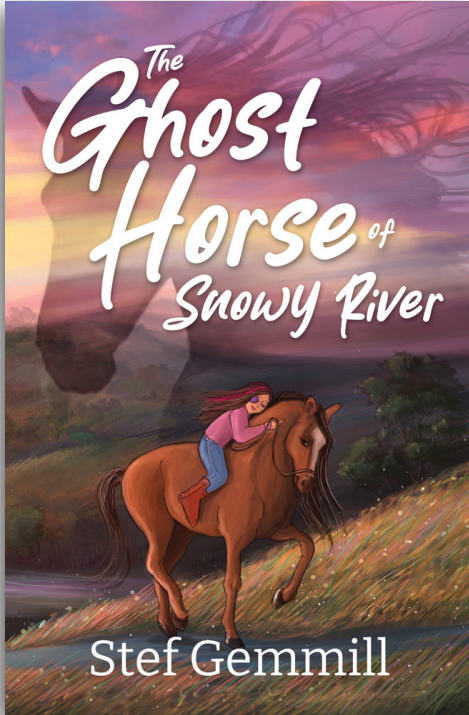

Teachers' Notes



THE GHOST HORSE OF SNOWY RIVER

Stef Gemmill

ISBN: 9781761113543

Reading level: Middle Fiction 8+

BOOK SUMMARY

A year has passed since 12-year-old Georgie Stone had a serious horse-riding accident. Now that she's back at the cattle station, she tries to overcome her fear of riding. But she's worried about the herd of wild brumbies led by the Ghost Horse that are being hunted by a local horsewhipper, Goldburn.

Could the Ghost Horse be Georgie's old horse, Magic?

How can she prove it before Goldburn captures him?

THEMES

Identity & Connections • Resilience • Responsibility •

Disability & Agency • Life on the Land • Environment & Nature •

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Previously a technical writer and music journalist, Stef Gemmill swapped the mosh-pit for toys and tantrums to write books for curious children. Her work often reflects her quest to understand the true meaning of 'home' after spending a short period in a foster home in her teenage years. Themes of homelessness and change are reflected in her debut picture book, *A Home for Luna*, winner of the Rubery Book Award (children's category) 2020. Stef's other publications include picture books *In My Dreams*, *Toy Mountain* and *This Drop of Water*. *The Ghost Horse of Snowy River* is the author's first middle-grade fiction book.

Stef lives in the Victorian High Country in winter where *The Ghost Horse of Snowy River* is set, and on the Surf Coast in summer with her family and sleepy cat, Luna, the star of her award-winning book, *A Home for Luna*.

For more information about the author, visit www.stefgemmill.com

AUTHOR NOTES

I've always loved horses. My Dad grew up on a farm where his Uncle trained horses to muster stock in steep terrain. These are the type of tough ponies I learned to ride on. My favourite horse was Midnight – he turned from black to grey quite quickly, like Magic did in the story.

Through writing *The Ghost Horse of Snowy River*, I've also lived out my dream of riding with wild brumbies. I've ridden horses as well as mustered cattle in the High Country near where *The Man from Snowy River* movie was filmed and the story reflects its ruggedness and beauty. The main character, Georgie Stone, is so capable and brave, after losing an eye in a riding accident, as my brother did as a young adult. Living with disability is a challenge - more so because of people's judgement of many aspects of your disability. I also live with an invisible disability that has impacted my life. But at the heart of the story, is a girl's love for a wild horse that reflects her own isolation.

There is something captivating about the power and companionship of horses, even if you've never ridden a horse in your life. I hope that readers find the thrill of riding a horse within this book while finding compassion and understanding for someone trying to live with a disability.

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REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

The Ghost Horse of Snowy River provides an engaging and accessible entry point for students to explore themes of identity, belonging, and personal growth. Through Georgie's journey, readers are invited to reflect on how people respond to change, challenge, and loss, and how a sense of self can evolve. Her experience with vision impairment also builds empathy and understanding, encouraging students to consider different perspectives and the ways individuals adapt to new circumstances.

The story offers rich opportunities to examine all kinds of relationships and the role of trust. As Georgie reconnects with her brother, parents, and peers, students can explore how relationships shift and strengthen through shared experiences. At the same time *The Ghost Horse of Snowy River* raises important ethical questions, particularly in relation to the treatment of brumbies, prompting discussion around responsibility, conservation, and human impact on the environment.

Set in the Australian High Country, the novel connects strongly to local contexts and introduces aspects of rural life such as cattle stations, mustering, and the significance of the land. This setting supports cross-curricular learning, particularly in English and Science, with links to comprehension, persuasive communication, and ecological understanding. Overall, the text encourages critical and creative thinking, inviting students to analyse character decisions, engage in discussion, and respond thoughtfully through a range of activities.

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

CURRICULUM V9

YEAR 4

English

AC9E4LA02 - identify the subjective language of opinion and feeling, and the objective language of factual reporting.

AC9E4LA07 - investigate how quoted (direct) and reported (indirect) speech are used.

AC9E4LY03 - identify the characteristic features used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the text.

AC9E4LY04 - read different types of texts, integrating phonic, semantic and grammatical knowledge to read accurately and fluently, re-reading and self-correcting when needed.

AC9E4LY05 - use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring and questioning to build literal and inferred meaning, to expand topic knowledge and ideas, and evaluate texts.

AC9E4LE01 - recognise similar storylines, ideas and relationships in different contexts in literary texts by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors.

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AC9E4LE02 - describe the effects of text structures and language features in literary texts when responding to and sharing opinions.

AC9E4LE03 - discuss how authors and illustrators make stories engaging by the way they develop character, setting and plot tensions.

Science

AC9S4U01 - explain the roles and interactions of consumers, producers and decomposers within a habitat and how food chains represent feeding relationships.

YEAR 5

English

AC9E5LY02 - use appropriate interaction skills including paraphrasing and questioning to clarify meaning, make connections to own experience, and present and justify an opinion or idea.

AC9E5LY03 - explain characteristic features used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the text.

AC9E5LY04 - navigate and read texts for specific purposes, monitoring meaning using strategies such as skimming, scanning and confirming.

AC9E5LY05 - use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring and questioning to build literal and inferred meaning to evaluate information and ideas.

AC9E5LY07 - plan, create, rehearse and deliver spoken and multimodal presentations that include relevant, elaborated ideas, sequencing ideas and using complex sentences, specialist and technical vocabulary, pitch, tone, pace, volume, and visual and digital features.

AC9E5LE01 - identify aspects of literary texts that represent details or information about historical, social and cultural contexts in literature by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors.

AC9E5LE02 - present an opinion on a literary text using specific terms about literary devices, text structures and language features, and reflect on the viewpoints of others.

AC9E5LE03 - recognise that the point of view in a literary text influences how readers interpret and respond to events and characters.

Science

AC9S5U01 - examine how particular structural features and behaviours of living things enable their survival in specific habitats.

YEAR 6

English

AC9E6LY02 - use interaction skills and awareness of formality when paraphrasing, questioning, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing and supporting arguments, and sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions.

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AC9E6LY03 - analyse how text structures and language features work together to meet the purpose of a text, and engage and influence audiences.

AC9E6LY04 - select, navigate and read texts for a range of purposes, monitoring meaning and evaluating the use of structural features; for example, table of contents, glossary, chapters, headings and subheadings.

AC9E6LY05 - use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring and questioning to build literal and inferred meaning, and to connect and compare content from a variety of sources.

AC9E6LY06 - plan, create, edit and publish written and multimodal texts whose purposes may be imaginative, informative and persuasive, using paragraphs, a variety of complex sentences, expanded verb groups, tense, topic-specific and vivid vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and visual features.

AC9E6LE01 - identify responses to characters and events in literary texts, drawn from historical, social or cultural contexts, by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors.

AC9E6LE02 - identify similarities and differences in literary texts on similar topics, themes or plots.

AC9E6LE03 - identify and explain characteristics that define an author's individual style.

Science

AC9S6U01 - investigate the physical conditions of a habitat and analyse how the growth and survival of living things is affected by changing physical conditions.

YEAR 7

English

AC9E7LY02 - use interaction skills when discussing and presenting ideas and information including evaluations of the features of spoken texts.

AC9E7LY03 - analyse the ways in which language features shape meaning and vary according to audience and purpose.

AC9E7LY04 - explain the structure of ideas such as the use of taxonomies, cause and effect, extended metaphors and chronology.

AC9E7LY05 - use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring, questioning and inferring to analyse and summarise information and ideas.

AC9E7LE01 - identify and explore ideas, points of view, characters, events and/or issues in literary texts, drawn from historical, social and/or cultural contexts, by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors.

AC9E7LE02 - form an opinion about characters, settings and events in texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others' opinions and justifying a response.

AC9E7LE03 - explain the ways that literary devices and language features such as dialogue, and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts.

TEACHING POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

This book may be used in whole class, small group or independent learning activities in schools.

Please note, the following suggestions and activities are suited to a variety of year levels spanning Foundation to Year 6 primary aged children. Some activities may be applicable to early secondary school students, as well.

KNOWLEDGE AND LITERAL UNDERSTANDING

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. As a class, look at the book's cover.
2. What do you think this story might be about? What clues can you see?
3. Read the back cover blurb. How does this add to or change your predictions?
4. Where do you think the story is set? What details from the cover help you identify the setting?

AFTER-READING QUESTIONS

1. Who are the main characters in the story? How would you describe Georgie at the beginning?
2. Do any of the characters remind you of someone you know (a friend, sibling, or yourself)? What makes them relatable?
3. How do Georgie, her family, or her friends change over the course of the story? Use descriptive words (e.g. confident, cautious, determined).
4. What were the key events in the story? Can you retell them in the correct order?
5. What challenges do the characters face? Which challenge would be the most difficult for you? Why?
6. What part of the story did you enjoy the most? Explain your answer.
7. How did your feelings about Georgie change from the beginning to the end of the book?
8. How does the setting (the High Country and the farm) influence what happens in the story?
9. Is there anything in Georgie's story that you connected with or related to? Why?
10. What do you think might happen next if the story continued?

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

GENERAL

- What was your favourite moment in the story? What made it stand out?
- Was there a moment that surprised you? Why?
- Which part of the story did you find most emotional or powerful?
- How does the story show the importance of trust—between people or animals?
- What role do animals play in the story? Why are they important?
- If you could give Georgie advice at one point in the story, what would you say and when?
- Do you agree with all of Georgie's decisions? Why or why not?
- How might the story be different if it were told from another character's perspective (e.g. Finn, Rosie, or Goldburn)?

IDENTITY & CONNECTIONS

- How does Georgie's sense of belonging change from the beginning to the end of the story?
- What is the sibling dynamic between Georgie and Finn? And how does this change throughout the novel?
- There is a lot of tension between Georgie and her older brother Finn throughout the story. What are some of the reasons behind this? How could they have resolved this earlier in the story?
- Why do you think her grandma and her dad want Georgie to get back on a horse again? Why does her mum not want her to ride again? How does this affect her relationship with each one of them?
- Why does it take time for Rosie to warm up to Georgie? What does this show about building new friendships?
- In which chapter did you begin to suspect that Ghost might be Magic? How did this moment affect Georgie emotionally?

RESILIENCE

- How does Georgie overcome her fear of riding after her accident?
- What challenges does Georgie face throughout the story? Which is the hardest for her to overcome?
- Describe a moment where Georgie shows courage. What makes this moment significant?
- How does Georgie change emotionally from the beginning to the end of the novel?
- Think of a time you faced a challenge. What helped you overcome it?

RESPONSIBILITY

- What does it mean to be a responsible person?

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- Identify key moments in the story where Georgie needs to be responsible, but fails. What could she have done differently?
 - What is one good decision Georgie makes? What are the consequences of that choice?
 - How does rescuing the joey (Cookie) show responsibility?
 - Have you ever been responsible for caring for an animal or someone else? What did you learn from the experience?
 - How can irresponsible actions affect others? Can you give an example from the story?

DISABILITY & AGENCY

A person may have a disability if they experience a limitation, restriction, or impairment that affects their everyday activities and likely to last for at least six months. Some disabilities are visible, while others are not, but all can present challenges in daily life.

- How does Georgie's vision impairment affect her daily life and choices?
- How do your perceptions of Georgie change from the beginning to the end of the story?
- In what ways does Georgie show independence and determination despite her disability?
- How does her disability influence her friendships and interactions with others?
- What actions does Georgie take to solve problems on her own (e.g. investigating Ghost)?
- Why is it important for Georgie to make her own decisions, even when others disagree?

LIFE ON THE LAND (RURAL VERSUS URBAN LIVING)

- Georgie lived in an apartment in Melbourne before moving back onto the High Country cattle station. How do these two locations differ? Which one would you prefer to live in?
- What are the challenges and rewards of living in a remote area like the High Country?
- What role does mustering and farm work play in the story?
- Which setting would you prefer to live in—city or country? Why?
- How does returning to the farm help Georgie grow and change?

ENVIRONMENT & NATURE

- Find three examples in the story where brumbies impact the environment.
- How do Georgie and Goldburn differ in their attitudes towards brumbies? List at least three differences.
- Why is Georgie's compassionate response more ethical and effective at wildlife conservation than Goldburn's?
- Do you think brumbies should remain in Australia's national parks? Why or why not?
- How do human actions affect ecosystems in the story?
- How are animals (like Magic, the brumbies, and the joey) important to the story's message?

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

SURVIVAL IN THE BUSH

Imagine you are lost while camping in the High Country. Your phone has no signal, and the weather is unpredictable—it could be 40°C heat one day, storms the next, and even drop to 0°C overnight.

You can only choose one bundle of items to survive.

- Tent, a dog, a sleeping bag, canned food
- Matches, fishing line, rifle, ammunition, a pocket knife
- Mountain bike, gas cooker, rabbit trap, compass

1. Select one of the bundles.
2. Explain why you chose it.
3. Describe how each item in your bundle would help you survive. Consider: shelter, warmth, food, safety, and navigation.

Extension (Optional): Rank the other bundles from most to least useful and justify your thinking.

GEORGIE'S JOURNEY

Write a diary entry from Georgie's perspective at an important moment in the story (e.g. after seeing Ghost, after the river incident, or at the end).

- Include her thoughts, emotions, and fears
- Show how she is changing

THE HIGH COUNTRY THROUGH EMOTION

The High Country is more than just a setting, it is used as a way to showcase and explore Georgie's journey. In this activity, you will create an artwork that shows how a landscape can express feelings and change over time.

Design a landscape of the High Country that represents one key moment from the story (e.g. the storm, the muster, the river scene, finding Ghost, or the ending).

You can:

- Draw, paint, collage, or use mixed media
- Include elements like mountains, rivers, animals, weather, and sky

Think about:

- What is happening at this moment?
- How is Georgie feeling?
- How can you show emotion through colour, light, and texture?

Write a short paragraph (4–6 sentences) that includes what moment you chose and why, how your artwork shows the emotion, and how the setting connects with Georgie's journey.

BRUMBIES: DEBATE AND PERSUASIVE WRITING

Background Information

Horses first arrived in Australia with the First Fleet in 1788. As the colony grew, some escaped or were released into the wild. These horses roamed freely across the large, unfenced areas of Australian bush, forming populations now known as brumbies. The name is widely believed to have originated with James Brumby, a soldier who left his horses behind when he moved to Tasmania in the early 1800s. Those horses adapted to the harsh Australian climate, and their descendants developed into what we now associate with the hardy Brumby breed.

The importance of horses in everyday life within Australia shrank as vehicles took over transport and farming duties. Brumbies, however, have become a significant part of national stories and identity, appearing in texts like *The Man from Snowy River*, or depicted as part of monuments to World War I. However, today there is debate about their place in Australia. Today, brumbies are considered by some to be a symbol of freedom and a part of Australian heritage, while others consider them an invasive species that damages the environment.

Topic: Should brumbies be protected or removed from national parks?

i. Class Debate

Instructions:

a) Divide into two groups:

- Save the Brumbies
- Protect the Environment

b) Research:

- Cultural and historical significance of brumbies
- Environmental impacts (e.g. land damage, native species)
- Management strategies (e.g. relocation, culling, fertility control)

c) Prepare arguments and supporting evidence.

d) Participate in a structured class debate

ii. Write a persuasive text

a) Research the same areas as in part i.

b) Prepare arguments and supporting evidence.

c) Write a persuasive text to communicate one of two stances on the topic: Save the Brumbies or Protect the Environment.

WORKSHEET: FOOD CHAINS IN THE HIGH COUNTRY

Name:

Date:

UNDERSTANDING FOOD CHAINS

A **food chain** shows how energy moves through an ecosystem. Each living thing depends on others for survival.

- **Producer:** Makes its own food (e.g. plants)
- **Primary Consumer:** Eats producers (herbivores)
- **Secondary Consumer:** Eats primary consumers
- **Tertiary Consumer:** Eats secondary consumers
- **Apex Predator:** Top of the food chain (no natural predators)
- **Decomposer:** Breaks down dead plants and animals

PART A: BUILD A FOOD CHAIN

Create a food chain based on the **High Country environment**.

Instructions:

1. Choose plants and animals that might live in the High Country.
2. Draw arrows to show who eats who.
3. Label each part of the chain.

Example starter ideas (you may use your own):

Grass → Insects → Frog → Snake → Eagle

Your Food Chain:

PART B: LABEL THE TROPHIC LEVELS

Using your food chain above, label each organism:

Producer:

Primary Consumer:

Secondary Consumer:

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Tertiary Consumer:

Apex Predator:

Decomposer:

PART C: INTERCONNECTIONS IN THE ECOSYSTEM

In real ecosystems, food chains are connected into **food webs**.

Task: Choose one animal (e.g. brumbies) and explain how it affects other parts of the ecosystem.

Example: Brumbies trample grass → fewer plants grow → insects lose habitat → frogs have less food → snake population decreases.

Your Explanation:

PART D: INTRODUCED SPECIES - THE BRUMBY

Brumbies are **introduced animals** in Australia.

Questions:

1. How might brumbies affect plants and smaller animals?

2. What impact could this have on the whole food chain?

3. Do you think brumbies should be managed? Why or why not?