

ALEX AND THE ALPACAS SAVE THE WORLD

Author: Kathryn Lefroy

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Year level: Y4–7

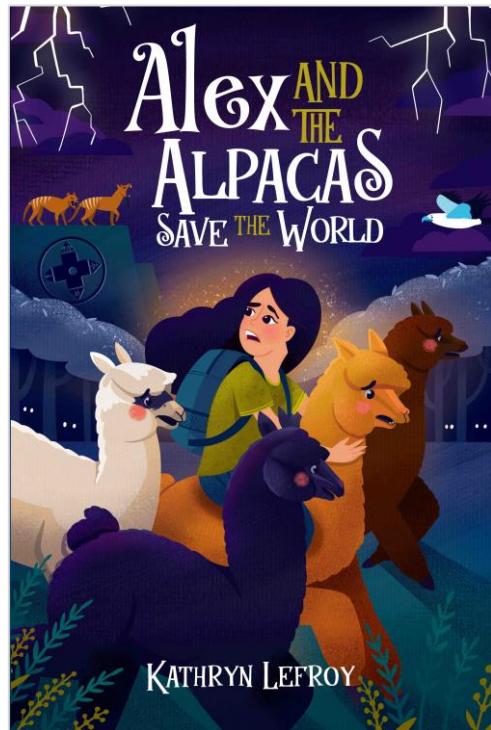
Cross-curriculum priorities: Sustainability

ABOUT THE BOOK

Alex is expecting a pretty boring summer. But when Mum takes her to visit her mysterious grandfather on his farm in Tasmania, weird things start to happen ... Weirdest of all? Her grandfather's pet alpacas ... who can talk! When things go from strange to scary, Alex must use all her brains, brawn and bravery in order to survive the sinister forces threatening life as she knows it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathryn writes novels, screenplays, articles – and the occasional shopping list. She has a PhD in marketing, several screenwriting credits, and her stories have appeared in magazines, journals and online. She spends way too much time in conversation with imaginary characters, and not-so-secretly wishes she lived in a dance movie.



THEMES

- Mythology and magic
- Bravery
- Family
- Friendship
- Nature
- Forgiveness
- Teamwork

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y4–7 English

Y4–7 Biological Sciences

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: www.kathrynlefroy.com
- Author's Facebook: www.facebook.com/KathrynLefroyAuthor/
- Author's Twitter: twitter.com/kathrynlefroy

TEACHING NOTES

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Discussion questions

1. Alex believes her dad has replaced her with his new baby – do you think this is really the case? Can you recall a time when a friend or family member let you down? How did it make you feel?
2. Why do you think Alex's mum and grandpa haven't spoken for ten years? What does it mean to describe someone as 'difficult'? Do you think Grandpa Jacob deserves this label?
3. What do you think caused the strange wind after Alex touched the symbol by the gate?
4. What obstacles do Alex, Leeui and the alpacas have to overcome in order to complete the binding ritual? Use a dictionary to define the following terms – *ritual, prophecy, elixir, oasis*.
5. Symbolism: The Amarlysa is an important recurring symbol throughout the plot – what is the difference between an ordinary image and a symbol? What symbols are common in your community? Alex reflects: '*What if they were not looking for a literal key, but a symbolic key?*' (p. 112) What does she mean?
6. Figurative language: Can you find examples of personification, simile and metaphor in this excerpt?
The near-darkness played tricks with Alex's mind. The vines crawling and twisting over each other became writhing pythons, and the pale silver eucalyptus trunks were shadowy ghost-zombies. (p. 136) How do such literary devices enhance the imagery conjured for the reader? Can you incorporate simile, metaphor and personification into your own creative writing?
7. Setting: How are descriptions of weather and landscape used to foreshadow events, evoke tension and create an atmosphere of suspense?
8. Homophones: The words S-O-N and S-U-N create confusion about the prophecy. What is a homophone pair? How many others can you think of? e.g. *tale – tail; ate – eight*
9. Synaesthesia: *The air smelled of sunshine and flowers and something just a little bit ... magical. The sun, now in the middle of the sky, bathed the garden in buttery warmth.* (p. 150) How does the author play with sensory language here? Can something literally smell like sunshine? What is 'synaesthesia'? How does it make descriptions more immersive for the reader?
10. Genre study: Would you describe this novel as an adventure? Epic quest? Mystery? Fantasy? Folktale? Myth? In pairs, brainstorm the traditional characteristics of each genre present in the story (e.g. 'the chosen one' trope; the epic battle of good versus evil; navigating clues and 'red herrings' to solve a riddle; talking animals etc.) Does the novel fit neatly into a single genre? In what ways are genre labels useful? In what ways are they limiting?
11. Debate: Divide the class into affirmative and negative teams to debate the following:
 - a. *'Is the blood of one worth more than the blood of an empire?*' (p. 244) Do you think Resila made the right choice to bind her sister in the tree?
 - b. Is Alex's cousin Wilfred an example of the way kids these days spend too much time looking at screens and not enough time playing outdoors and exercising?
12. Characterisation: Compare and contrast Alex's attitude towards the following characters at the beginning and the end of the book: Grandpa Jacob, Leeui, Isaac (her dad), Luciana (her baby sister), Kiala. How does Alex grow and change through her experiences over the course of the novel? What do you think she learns through surviving this ordeal?
13. Themes: How are the themes of bravery, friendship, forgiveness, resilience, female strength and respecting the magic of the land portrayed in this book? What messages do you personally take away from the story? What did you enjoy most about the book and why?

Creative writing

1. Recount: Alex is excited to spend the summer at her grandpa's farm. Write a recount of the most exciting experience of your school holidays – why did you enjoy it so much?
2. Advertising: What is your dream holiday location and why? Create a poster, pamphlet or PowerPoint presentation that aims to persuade other people to visit!
3. Narrative writing: Use an A3 narrative planning framework to map the different events in *Alex and the Alpacas Save the World* under the following headings: exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution. Using the same framework, plan and draft your own unique narrative about an imaginary summer holiday adventure in which the lead protagonist has a mystery to solve! Will you leave 'red herrings' (misleading clues) alongside the helpful ones in order to trick your reader and make your ending a surprise? How will you use figurative language and descriptions of setting to evoke an atmosphere of tension and suspense?

TEACHING NOTES

4. Biography and personal essay: Moraika is described as a ‘true hero’. However, Ollin argues, ‘*Hero is such a subjective measure ...*’ (p. 196) Do you agree – is there a single individual that is universally accepted as a hero? Write a short biography of your personal hero and an explanation of why they are worthy of this label, in your opinion.
5. Nature walk and poetry: Alex develops a profound respect and love for the forest. Do you have a special place where you feel connected to nature? Visit this location and make notes on the following: *I see ... I feel ... I smell ... I hear ... I notice ... I wonder ...* Compose a free verse poem using simile, metaphor, synesthesia and personification to transport your reader to your special place.
6. Continue the story: The epilogue hints that Kiala has finally found her twin sister, Resila – what do you imagine will happen next? Write the first three chapters of the sequel!

Biological sciences

1. Alex and her friends have plenty of encounters with Tasmanian tigers – what other name does this species go by? Was it only native to Tasmania? Create a fact sheet about the animal with the following information: name, physical characteristics, habitat, diet, life cycle, interesting facts, labelled diagram, when and why it became extinct.
2. When and how did alpacas arrive in Australia? Create a fact sheet detailing the following information: characteristics, habitat, diet, life cycle, interesting facts, labelled diagram, conservation status.
3. Leeuie provides ‘*commentary on all the vegetation they passed, outlining order, family, genus and species*’ (p. 138) What is ‘proper binomial nomenclature’? How does it work? Leeuie has also memorised every native and introduced species in the area – what is the difference between the two?
4. The secret garden is located inside an extinct volcano – what causes a volcano to erupt? How long must a volcano remain dormant before it is labelled extinct?
5. Why do you think Grandpa Jacob believes olive trees represent ‘*resilience, peace and harmony*’ (p. 200)? Where is the oldest olive tree on record and what age is it?

Visual art

1. Create a watercolour painting of the secret Amarylsa garden as you imagine it.
2. Create a map depicting Alex’s journey from the farm (olive orchard, alpaca hut, front gate) through the different parts of the forest to the Amarylsa garden, and finally to the tree where Kiala is imprisoned.
3. Illustrate your favourite scene from the story using any medium of your choice. Display around the classroom.

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