

## **A Synopsis: The Hunt for Ned Kelly** by Sophie Masson

Orphans, nineteen-year-old Ellen and her twelve-year-old brother, Jamie, leave Melbourne in 1879 for the northern Victorian town of Wangaratta, where Ellen is to take up a governess position. Eluding the bailiffs after hiding their buggy and horse at their uncle's house, Ellen also took the opportunity to hide their father's camera and tripod. But once in the north, Ellen heads for Beechworth, where she tells the astonished Jamie she intends to set up a photographic studio and continue their father's work.

The populations of Beechworth and Melbourne, along with the rest of Australia, are agog with news of the notorious Kelly gang, in hiding after the shoot out at Stringybark Creek, which left three policemen dead. Stories about the gang pass from one person to another, the newspapers have front page stories and people in the towns are keen for sightings of the gang. Ellen and Jamie meet Mr Turner, who, has also come to the area for a sighting, eager for information to write an article.

Ellen sets up her studio, the pair living at a boarding house run by Mrs Pickett, while Jamie has a dream job of working in a bookshop surrounded by his favourites, and opening new parcels of books from Melbourne. Here he comes across pamphlet written about the Kelly gang and often overhears conversations sharing information.

Sophie Masson cleverly tells the story of the Kelly gang and Ned Kelly in particular, using the two protagonists as they make their way in the town. People's opinions are talked about, information is shared, newspaper accounts read to give the reader a gripping account of 1879-1880 in Victoria through Jamie's diary entries. While Jamie works in the shop he overhears many differing accounts, and when Ellen finally talks to the Kelly sisters, she is able to go out to Greta to take photos of the family, her real purpose in coming to Beechworth.

The readers see many different aspects of the Kelly story, and in the end, like Jamie and Ellen, must make up their own minds about who is telling the truth. Masson does not waste words, she establishes the setting right away, placing her protagonists in a situation which informs the reader, engaging their attention as they read further of the life and times of the Kelly era, giving information readily through this account, enabling readers to make an assessment at the end.

The age-old questions about Ned Kelly are raised by many of the characters in the book, making the reader aware of the different opinions and pushing them to make some judgment themselves. Hero or villain, a criminal or a poor man just protecting his family, an icon or cur, the questions are there to ponder in this well-presented, informative and wholly mesmerising story for middle school readers.

### **Author: Sophie Masson**

Born in 1959 in Indonesia, Sophie Masson is a child of French parents, giving her a wide view of the world that she is able to bring to her work. Living now in Northern NSW, she writes a range of stories from fantasy to Australian history, all of which are well received. She has two further books coming out with Scholastic.

- For more information check out her website, which gives details about her life and interests and the books she has written:  
<http://users.nsw.chariot.net.au/~smasson/>
- And there is a little information on Wikipedia:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophie\\_Masson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophie_Masson)
- If students are interested in this author, they may like to read other novels by her. Check with your teacher librarian for other books in your library, or check with your public librarian and local bookshop. There may also be copies of her books available on line or in secondhand bookshops.

Students may like to

- set up a display of her books in the classroom or library, finding out when her birthday is to make a special display during that week
- set up a map of the world for students to mark on it where her books are set
- write to Sophie Masson asking questions about the book they have read
- write to the publishers of her books asking for bookmarks, pamphlets or posters to augment their display
- make posters and bookmarks of their own for the display

Before reading the novel

- Brainstorm on the electronic whiteboard what students know of Ned Kelly
- Display all the books from the library about Ned Kelly and his times around the classroom, or ask your teacher librarian to have a show and tell, or set up a display in the library
- Brainstorm the differences between life for your students today and life 130 years ago
- Give the class some sort of context for 1880's Victoria (what was going on in the rest of the world?)
- Make sure they have some knowledge of the convicts sent to Australia (many of whom were Irish) and the gold rushes

## B Month by Month: an overview of the novel

**For the teacher:** This charts the month-by-month story in the novel, gives a brief outline of the events and several guiding questions, and asks the students to map where the main characters are. A large wall map of Victoria will need to be displayed in the room, with sticky notes or thumb tacks and coloured paper.

### Student Worksheet

- Fill in the worksheet (\*) as you read the book (main event and setting)
- Answer the guiding question in class as each chapter is read  
Mark the places on the class map of where the protagonists go
- Use the information to map the whereabouts of the Kelly gang (use a different colour to represent them on the map of Victoria)

Month	Main events	Guiding question	Where they are (setting)
July 1879	Jamie and Ellen leave for Wangaratta	What are they aiming to do with their lives?	Melbourne
August 1879	Jamie finds out that the governess plan is a ruse	Why have they come to Beechworth?	Beechworth
September 1879	*	What does Jamie find out about the Kelly gang?	*
October 1879	*	What is Ellen's real reason for coming to Beechworth?	*
November 1879	*	Why do Ellen and Jamie go to Greta?	*
December 1879	Their aunt in Melbourne is ill and they are asked to return	What do Ellen and Jamie do when they return to Melbourne?	Melbourne
January 1880	*	Why are Ellen and Jamie wary of Elijah Turner?	*
February 1880	*	How are Ellen and Jamie able to keep their story quiet?	*
March 1880	*	What are they hearing from Beechworth?	*
April 1880	*	What does Jamie's work at <i>The Age</i> consist of?	*
May 1880	Ellen and Jamie confide in Mr Turner with dire results	What happens as a result of Jamie and Ellen telling Elijah Turner their secret?	Melbourne
June 1880	*	Trace the story of Ned Kelly's capture	*

July 1880	*	How are people cashing in on the Kelly story after his capture?	*
August 1880	Ned's arraignment at Beechworth	How do the inhabitants of Melbourne take the news?	*
September 1880	*	How do the two protagonists take the news of the trial?	*
October 1880	*	What does Jamie find out about the photograph?	*
November 1880	Ned is hanged	Justify Jamie's conflicting opinions	Melbourne

### Summary Activities

- 1 Make a timeline of the events in which Jamie and Ellen are involved in the novel
- 2 Make a timeline of the progress of Ned Kelly and his gang
- 3 Debate topics:
  - Ned Kelly should not have been hanged
  - Ned Kelly was a vicious criminal
  - The story of Ned Kelly will never truly be known
  - Ned Kelly is an Australian icon
- 4 Prepare a small presentation dramatising a part of the novel
- 5 Draw a range of the clothes worn by people in the 1880's
- 6 Find pictures of the transport of the times to pin up on the display boards about the classroom while the novel is being read
- 7 Find pictures of the type of weapons used at the time to display
- 8 Use the book *Outlaw Son* by Paula Hunt (*Black Dog Books*, 2009) to involve students in the whole saga of Ned Kelly. Several copies of this book would be well used in the classroom as background material.

## C Themes

### 1. 19<sup>th</sup> Century novels: Student worksheet

19<sup>th</sup> century novels appear regularly throughout the book.

Jamie reads novels, as does Ned Kelly, and Mr Turner.

- List those talked about
- Can you find evidence that Ned Kelly did read novels?
- Are these books readily available in your school library?
- Can they be displayed in the classroom for students to browse?

Many novels in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were published chapter by chapter in the newspaper, so making them accessible to all.

- Find out which novels were published this way. The teacher librarian may be able to help here
- Why would more people have read novels in this way?
- When Charles Dickens published his novels in this way, people were met at the docks in New York wanting to know what happened in the next chapter. Would this happen today? Why not?

Find some old copies of 19<sup>th</sup> century books (some grandparents may have some they might be willing to lend the class, some may be found in local secondhand shops, some may still be on library shelves in reprinted versions)

- Share them with the class
- List the advantages and disadvantages of reading books in this form
- How different are books produced today?
- Account for the differences
- What is happening with books now? Does anyone have a Kindle or iPad they can show to the class? What other forms of ebooks are available?
- Find a list of classics to share with the class (on the EDNA site at, <http://www.groups.edna.edu.au/course/view.php?id=616> is a list of classic books)
- What might happen to books in the future?

## 2 Life in 1880

**Introduction:** Sophie Masson is able through her writing to give the readers a real sense of life in town, farm and city to today's students. Chapters set in Melbourne give a feeling of the vibrancy of life there, especially in the days when the newspaper is published every hour to give people an idea of what is happening with Ned Kelly. The Kelly farmhouse at Greta is also very real in its depiction, giving the reader a feeling of what life must have been like for these struggling farmers.

### Student work

**Setting:** Choose either Melbourne, Greta farmhouse, Mrs Pickett's boarding House, Mr Ingram's shop or Beechworth, and track the descriptions of this place in the novel

- Skim read the novel to find references to the setting chosen
- Write a description of the place
- List the words used to describe it
- Note the differences between life in the 1880's and life now (What could Ellen and Jamie have done with a mobile phone or TV?)
- Draw a picture of the setting
- Find a picture/s in a history book which approximates the setting
- Which of the settings is most real to you and why?

**Women's lives:** How different were women's lives in the 1880's? Sophie Masson gives a clear account of what life was like for several women, Mrs Pickett, Ellen, Mrs Kelly and the Kelly sisters.

- Skim read the novel to find places where one of these women is portrayed
- Write a description of her from what the novel gives
- What restrictions are placed on her life compared with life today for women?
- What opportunities were there for women living in the 1880's in Melbourne and country towns?
- With which woman do you most sympathise and why?

**Men's lives:** How different were men's lives to those of today. Think about Ned Kelly and his family trying to survive on a small pocket of land, or Elijah Turner desperate for a break into journalism, or Jamie landing jobs firstly at the bookshop then at *The Age*.

- Skim read the novel for information about one of the men in the novel
- What does the novel tell us about his life?
- How different is it from yours?
- What sort of things does this man do to earn money?
- What is his life likely to hold for him?

- Look closely at the children mentioned in the novel. What were they expected to do that you are not?

### 3 Photography

**Introduction:** In the 19<sup>th</sup> century photography was in its infancy. There are many references to photography throughout the novel, as Ellen tries to succeed as a photographer.

**Student work:**

- Skim read the novel for references to photography
- Where is photography first mentioned?
- Why is Ellen so keen to become a photographer?
- What is her aim in going to Beechworth?
- What differences are there in the method of photography in the 1880's to now?
- Look at the reproductions of original photos in *Outlaw Son* (Paula Hunt) Could any of these have been taken by Ellen or someone similar? Who did take the photos?
- What things does Ellen need to set up her business?
- What would be her difficulties in doing this?
- Read again the description of the taking of the photograph of Steve Hart, Ned and Dan Kelly. (December 19) while looking closely at the photo itself (page 187) How do you think Ellen and Jamie felt at this moment?

### 2 Ned Kelly: Student work

**Introduction:** An Australian Government site about Australian History has a large amount devoted to Ned Kelly

**Student work:**

- <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/nedkelly/> (Australian Government Culture Portal)
- Log onto this website: read it and see what you can find out that adds to your information about the man
- The quotes Sophie Masson uses in her book are often used in information sites about Ned Kelly. Where would they have been written in the first place? Are they reliable?
- Draw up a timeline of Ned Kelly's life

- Make a poster showing a montage of the man (this may include a map of where he lived and worked, a wanted poster, pictures of his guns and horse, pictures of his farmhouse etc)
- Make a wanted poster of Ned Kelly and his gang
- <http://vrroom.naa.gov.au/print/?ID=19379> Is a website for the Australian Archives, which gives a drawing of Ned Kelly standing trial. Directions from the education team at the Australian Archives encourage responses to the drawing
- Write a newspaper article about the death of Ned Kelly, making sure that you include a range of different opinions about the man

### **Student work: *Outlaw Son***

- Use the book, *Outlaw Son* (Paula Hunt) to access maps, photos and other information about Ned Kelly and his group
- Another bushranger mentioned in *The Hunt for Ned Kelly* is Captain Moonlite (see November 19, page 101) What does Jamie tell us about him? Why is he not as well known as Ned Kelly and his gang?

## **5 Words**

### **Student work**

- 1 It always shocks me that Ned Kelly was 25 when he died. His notoriety speaks of someone who lived much longer. List the words used about the man (Find sites about him that idolise/dislike him and list the adjectives used)
  - Government websites are very careful to use words like infamous and notoriety rather than famous and reputable. For the list of words above, give a list of their opposites.
  - Have another look at the days in the book where Jamie is overhearing or talking to people about Ned Kelly. Again, list the words used by the people talking about Ned Kelly. What sort of words are they using? Does their choice of words delineate how they feel about the man?
- 2 Ned's last words were 'such is life'
  - <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/such-is-life.html> shows its meaning
  - This phrase (or idiom) is now seen as representing many things about Australian life and is used in many situations. Can you think of places where it is used?
  - Ben Cousins has the phrase tattooed across his stomach. Find a photo of him and his tattoo (there are many websites)



- Why do you think Ben Cousins had this phrase tattooed on his body?
- Why do you think these were Ned Kelly's last words?

## 6 Characterisation

**Introduction:** Sophie Masson has a range of characters who the reader gets to know. The fictional story revolves around Ellen and Jamie, the diarist. Along the way they meet a variety of people, including Mrs Pickett, the boarding house owner; Mr Ingram, the bookshop owner; Mr Turner, the man who steals the photograph; and so on. As well as these, Sophie Masson introduces people from history, including the Kelly gang, Ned Kelly's family and supporters, and the police. So well told is the story that the reader has a sense of all the characters.

### Student work

- 1 Follow the life of one of the main fictional characters
- 2 Draw up a timeline of their life
- 3 Find a picture in a magazine which you think best shows that person, and attach it to your work
- 4 Write a paragraph describing that person from information given in the book
- 5 Read your paragraph to another member of your class, to see if they can work out who it is
- 6 Do the same for any of the real characters (you may have to read a book about Ned Kelly, or go to a website to find more information)

**D Literature Circle:** A literature Circle is a way of having a class involved with a group of novels around a theme. It means that the class can read a group of different novels, giving them a choice and so stimulating interest, as well as being a parallel book to the one done in class (*The Hunt for Ned Kelly*) A list of novels to do with bushrangers and Ned Kelly in particular follows these instructions and proformas (these may need to be enlarged for class use)

- Divide the class into groups of 4-5
- Do a show-and-tell about the books, or ask your teacher librarian to do this
- Have each group select the novel they wish to read
- Allow a lesson a week over five weeks for reading and discussing
- Have one student in each group be the leader who monitors the group's reading for homework (about half of the book needs to be read in their own time)

- Allow several lessons at the end of the 5 weeks for student sharing of their novel and general discussion about the themes
- Proformas for use in the classroom:

Group names		
Novel being read	Author	Characters
When is the novel set?	Where is the novel set?	What is the theme of the story?

Week	Story	Background	Prediction
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Summary of story and its theme	The reasons my group enjoyed the story

**Bushrangers /Ned Kelly Novels** (have 4-6 copies of several of the novels ready for the class, through purchase or borrowing from another library or school)

Author	Title	Publication details	Blurb
Baillie, Allan	<i>Riding with Thunderbolt</i>	Scholastic 2004	My Story series, about the bushranger, Thunderbolt
Barwick, John	<i>It's true! Bushrangers lost their heads</i>	Allen and Unwin 2006	Non fiction facts told in a funny way about bushrangers
Bates, Dianne	<i>The hold up heroes</i>	National Museum of Australia Press, 2006	Two children overhear bushrangers planning to kidnap the governor: a great series for younger readers
Disher, Gary	<i>Moondyne Kate</i>	Hodder, 2001	Nat becomes caught up in an idealized version of his ancestor, a bushranger
French, Jackie	<i>Dancing with Ben Hall</i>	HarperCollins 1997	12 short stories, one of which relates some family stories from her past
Greenwood, Mark	<i>The legend of Moondyne Joe</i>	Uni of WA Press 2001	Picture book showing a welsh miner stealing, transported and then becoming a bushranger, with strong parallels to Ned Kelly's life
Harlen, Jonathan	<i>Drop dead! Mad Dog Fred</i>	Allen and Unwin 2003	Fantasy story about Sam the bushranger who uses boomerangs and rides a kangaroo. All in good fun
Hunt, Paula	<i>Outlaw son</i>	Black dog books 2006	Non fiction look Ned Kelly's life and times, told in newspaper articles, photos and maps
Pegler, Tim	<i>Game as Ned</i>	Angus and Robertson 2007	For the more mature reader, this tells of a boy who idolizes Ned Kelly, trying to take on some of his courage
Ridden, Brian	<i>Whistle man</i>	Lothian 2000	Orphan Garrett works first for Aaron Sherritt and then with Ned Kelly, despite his uncle's warning
Stafford, Paul	<i>Ned Kelly's helmet</i>	Crawford, 1998	A funny fantasy story of a group of kids researching Ned Kelly
Stowe, Randolph	<i>Midnite, the story of a wild colonial boy</i>	Puffin 1994	Story of a Western Australian bushranger, made into a play by Richard Tulloch 1997
Wilkinson, Carole	<i>Black snake: the daring of Ned Kelly</i>	Black dog books 2002	Biography of Ned Kelly showing how the man become a folk hero
Wilkinson, Carole	<i>Ned Kelly's Jerilderie letter</i>	Black dog books 2007	A letter composed by Ned Kelly explaining how he came to be involved in a life of crime

Summary discussion after the literature circle and the class has finished reading *The Hunt for Ned Kelly*. These are suggestions for a class discussion, group discussion and or a debate

- Ned Kelly is portrayed as an innocent in novels written about him
- No novel portrays Ned Kelly accurately
- Ned Kelly's iconic stature is misplaced
- There should be a statue of Ned Kelly in Canberra
- Ned Kelly's Jerilderie Letter tells people the truth

## E For the adventurous

1. For students who have completed the reading and the work set in class, some may like to try writing a **poem** about Ned Kelly
  - A terrific article regarding writing a poem about an Australian Hero is in *The Literature Base*, Volume 20 Issue 1, February 2009.
  - Ned Kelly may not be seen as an Australian hero, but the format can be used by students to write their own poem, or at least serve as a basis from which to start
2. Some students may like to ponder the question about the **iconic nature** of Ned Kelly
  - See *The Literature Base*, Issue 12, Number 1, February, 2001 for an article called: '*Ned Kelly and Bushranging, What should we tell the children?*'
  - Is he an icon? What makes an icon? How do the books read in class view the man? Write a response to the article in *The Literature Base*.
3. Some students may like to conduct a **survey** to see what people know about Ned Kelly and how they view him. Ask a variety of people, and tabulate your results for the class.

Question	Responses
What do you know about Ned Kelly?	
How do you view him in Australia's history?	
Do you think he is held in esteem by Australians?	
Why might this be?	
Where have you seen allusions to Ned Kelly recently?	
Would you like to know more about him?	
etc	
etc	

4. The State Library of Victoria has a wide-ranging web site which includes lots about Ned Kelly. Some of the students may like to research it further and share information they have found with the class.
- <http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/ergo/bushrangers>
  - This site links to many artifacts held by the State Library of Victoria. (Jerilderie Letter, the armour, the helmet etc)
  - Look at them all, gathering information about the site as you go
  - What primary documents are stored at the State Library of Victoria?
  - Write a blurb for the site to share with others in the class, informing them of what they can find on the site, its accessibility, readability and usefulness.
- 5 A private site which gives a large amount of information is called *Ironoutlaw*
- <http://www.ironoutlaw.com/>. The second sentence, 'he's had more written about him than any one else in Australian history' is amazing.
  - Brainstorm with the class, just who else would figure highly in the stakes of having a lot written about them
  - The left-hand side of the home page gives links to the Jerilderie letter, which may be read from the screen, as well as clips on Nedtube about Ned Kelly.
  - Browse the site. Why is the site so large?
  - Write a blurb for the site to share with others in the class, informing them of what they can find on the site, its accessibility, readability and usefulness.
- 6 Many people are hooked into the Ned Kelly phenomenon. Many websites are devoted to things about Ned Kelly, and people spend many hours keeping the websites up to date and corresponding with like-minded souls.
- <http://www.nedonthenet.com/> is one such site
  - Browse the site, checking out what is included
  - Compare it with the State Library of Victoria's site. What differences do you see? What have you learnt from this site that you did not know before?
  - Write a blurb for this site, telling other students how useful it is, its ease of use, readability, and accessibility.
- 7 Some students may like to follow up ballads and poems written about Ned Kelly
- Find some poetry books in the library which contain older Australian verse
  - Examples of ballads to do with Ned Kelly and the Kelly era are:
    - *The Bushrangers* by Edward Harrington
    - *The Kellys* by Anonymous
    - *Kelly was their Captain* by Anonymous

- *Farewell to my Home in Greta* also Anonymous
- Read and transcribe one or two of the poems
- Some may like to copy them out and pin them up for others to enjoy
- Would someone like to set one of the poems to music and rehearse it to present to the class?
- Some may like to develop their own ballad
- Some may like to practise saying them out loud to present to a group or the class

- 8 Ned Kelly was not the only bushranger at work in Victoria at this time. Another bushranger is mentioned in the story in the diary entry for November 19, 1879.

**Student work:**

- Who was this man?
- Where did he work?
- What can you find out about him?
- Why is he not as well known as Ned Kelly and his gang?

- 9 ***Outlaw Son*** (Paula Hunt)

The first few pages of this book about Ned Kelly give a succinct picture of what life was like for small farmers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century

- Read the first 3 double page spreads, *Ned's Australia*, *Growing up Kelly* and *Fighting and Stealing*.
- Imagine what it would have been like for the Kelly family
- Write a letter/email back to relatives in Ireland expressing your feelings about the situation in Victoria, and your hopes for the future of your family

**10 The cover**

The cover for this latest story in the *My Australian Story* series from Scholastic is very different from those that have been published before.

Collect some from your school library to share with the class

- Ask the students to note the differences
- Ask them to give an opinion about the first group in the series and this one
- Which do they prefer and why?
- Some may like to design a new cover for *The Hunt for Ned Kelly* using the old style of cover
- Some may like to design a whole new cover