

Move the Mountains: The Freedom Finders

By Emily Conolan



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Recommended for 9-13+-year-olds

Summary

Choose your own destiny and follow the exciting twists and turns of a girl leaving war-torn Italy to find a new home in Australia's Snowy Mountains in the 1950s.

It is 1943. During the war, you rescue and hide an Australian airman near your small Italian village. He tells you that you can be anything you dream of - but those dreams are fast slipping away. As you make the leap for a new life, you find yourself facing life-and-death choices at every turn.

Can you overthrow the curse of bad luck that has plagued your family and prove yourself in a new land? You'll be asked to stand up to bullies, stage a mutiny, and make your contribution to one of the greatest engineering projects the world has ever seen.



Move the Mountains looks at how the experience of WWII and its aftermath in Europe fuelled Australia's post-war immigration. Beginning during the war, the young heroine must make life and death choices or choices for economic and social independence during her migration odyssey. She finds herself in the great Australian adventure that was the building of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electricity Scheme.

Fact Files at the end of the book cover:

- Women in WWII
- European Migration after WWII
- The White Australia Policy
- The Snowy Scheme
- Women's Rights
- Mental Health and Treatment
- and a section covering the truth behind some of the fictional events

But the interactive excitement of reading the story, thinking about paths taken and not taken, makes this a fast-paced adventure read in itself.

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About the Freedom Finders series

In this exciting interactive series, readers step into the shoes of inspirational kids navigating their way to their new home, Australia.

When you read the Freedom Finders books, you are the main character, and you make the choices that direct the plot.

At the end of many scenes, you will face life-or-death choices. Turn to the page directed by your choice, and keep reading. Some of these decisions may not work out well for you, but there is a happy ending...somewhere.

If you reach a dead end, turn back to the last choice you made and find a way through. It is your quest to find freedom through the choices you make.

Series themes

- World history
- Australian settlement
- migration
- war / population displacement
- resilience
- courage
- asylum seekers / refugees
- the choices we make

Use in the curriculum

The series

This series takes the excitement and adventure of interactive fiction and adds it to the emotional depth and relevance of real migration journeys. This provides many educational opportunities:

- Students can all take different journeys and reflect and compare how their choices affected their outcomes.
- Exploring these journeys across many different choices and pathways adds nuance to polarized debates between 'right' and 'wrong'. Multiple dimensions are contained in the one book.
- The interactive plot structure breaks down barriers of passivity and indifference.
- Each book is a perfect springboard to discuss not only history and politics, but philosophical notions of choice, consequence, agency and free will.
- In this context, abstract concepts such as human rights and international laws are made relevant to the lives of ordinary people.
- Students will be inspired to inquire into their own family histories and look for examples of 'local heroes' in their communities.
- Positive representations of marginalised people and cultures build respect and value within students' communities.
- Fact files and interviews are included in the book, and there is a complementary website <https://www.emilyconolan.com.au/>.

Move the Mountains

The content directly addresses HASS Year 6 but this book can also contribute to English, Science, Ethics or Philosophy classes.

Year 6 HASS

'The Year 6 curriculum focuses on the social, economic and political development of Australia as a nation, particularly after 1900, and Australia's role within a diverse and interconnected world today. Students explore the events and developments that shaped Australia as a democratic nation and stable economy, and the experiences of the diverse groups who have contributed to and are/were affected by these events and developments, past and present.'

Knowledge and Understanding: 'Students learn about the way of life of people who migrated to Australia since Federation and their contributions to Australia's economic and social development (significance, empathy).'

Inquiry questions: 'Who were the people who came to Australia? Why did they come? What contribution have significant individuals and groups made to the development of Australian society?'

Year 6 SCIENCE

Transfer and transformations of electricity

Year 6 ENGLISH

In the English classroom, in addition to exploring the experiences and viewpoints of others, both in history and in the classroom, the book prompts learning about genre, stylistic choices and persuasive writing:

- The 'choose your own destiny' format comes alive through the use of the rare 2nd person narrative voice.
- The story is told in the present tense—excitement guaranteed!
- Fiction is mixed with such attributes of non-fiction as fact files and interviews.

Themes of *Move the Mountains*

- World history
- War
- Australian settlement
- Resilience
- Courage
- Migration
- Snowy Mountains Scheme

Inspiration for the series

'When I was a teacher, I had a student called Mohammed from Sierra Leone. He was doing a simple spoken English test where he had to use three different verbs in the past tense. He could have passed the test by simply saying, "Last Saturday, I went to the shops, played soccer, and watched a movie with a friend." Instead, as I turned the tape recorder on, Mohammed leaned forward and said, "I would like to tell you the saddest story of my life."

'The minutes melted away, and I forgot all about the test as Mohammed's story poured out of him. Mohammed had been in my class for months, and I knew him as a cheerful, dedicated student with a cheeky smile. I didn't usually ask my students about their personal histories, because they were there to learn English and move on with their lives, not rake over their past – and besides, I don't have counselling training. But sometimes, like with Mohammed, the stories just came out. I still have Mohammed's tape. His was an extraordinary tale of terror and persecution – but he looked just like an ordinary boy in my class.

'Over the years, as a teacher and refugee advocate, I heard many more inspirational, sometimes heartbreaking, stories. The people I met and stories I heard showed me that the journeys we humans take to find freedom may be common, but they are certainly not ordinary.'

—Emily Conolan

Discussion questions

1) Before reading *Move the Mountains: The Freedom Finders*, discuss the images on its cover.

- What visual clues suggest the novel will be set in the past?
- Can you guess when and where the story may be set?
- What specific images reinforce words found in the book's title, *Move the Mountains: The Freedom Finders*?
- Do you think the book will be an adventure story? Why?
- Does this seem like a book you will enjoy? Why or why not?

Answers should be shared with others in the class, and predictions can be revisited as students begin to read the novel.

2) The novel opens with the warning 'YOU MIGHT DIE WHILE READING THIS BOOK'. How did you feel when you read this – excited or wary? Why do you think the author might have wanted you to feel that way?

3) After reading the first two pages of the story, what do we know about 'you'? How has the author included all this information in just two pages of a story? Discuss the openings of other stories and how authors introduce the setting and characters of their stories.

4) *Move the Mountains: The Freedom Finders* features an unusual narrative style that is not often used in books – the second-person or 'you' narrative. Many of the books you have read might use the first-person or 'I' narrative ('I squeal with delight') or the third-person or 'he/she/they' narrative ('She squealed with delight').

- Why do you think the author chose to write the story like this? Might the fact that the story is told as a 'choose your own destiny' tale have something to do with this?

How did you feel as you progressed through the novel? Would you have preferred a more conventional narrative?

5) On page 11, you had to make your first decision about your destiny: whether to leave Mario with the wounded airman and fetch an adult to help, or to stay and help Mario.

- How did you make that decision? Was it what you thought was the right thing to do, or the safe thing to do, or the more adventurous thing to do?
- As you progress through the story, do you always get to make the choice, or do circumstances force you to do things you mightn't want to do?

6) After finishing the story, create an interactive fiction plot structure about your own life. Start with what has happened so far, and then think about key points where things might have been very different. Questions you might want to ask yourself include: What might have happened if I'd gone to a different school? Made friends with a different group? Decided to take up an unusual hobby?

or

7) Adapt a well-known fairytale into an interactive format with different choices and alternative endings. What might have happened if Goldilocks hadn't decided to eat the porridge or if Snow White hadn't eaten the poisoned apple?

8) Make up your own fictional post-war migrant to Australia and create a set of documents that shows their journey here and life in Australia. Use the National Archives of Australia online database to find real photos and documents that migrants to Australia needed in the 1950s, along with a brief history of the Snowy Mountains Scheme:

60 years of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme

<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/snapshots/power/index.aspx>

From Europe to Australia – Records of a postwar migrant family

<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/snapshots/postwar-migration/index.aspx>

The author

Emily Conolan is a writer and teacher, who is also known for her humanitarian work. For her role in establishing a volunteer support network for asylum seekers in Tasmania, she has been awarded Tasmanian of the Year, Hobart Citizen of the Year, and the Tasmanian Human Rights Award. The stories of courage and resilience she has heard in the course of her work with refugees, combined with tales from her own family history, inspired her to write the Freedom Finders series. Emily has never had smallpox or helped a horse give birth, but in the early 1800s, her family was bush-ranged and did help smuggle an Irish political prisoner out of Van Diemen's Land.

