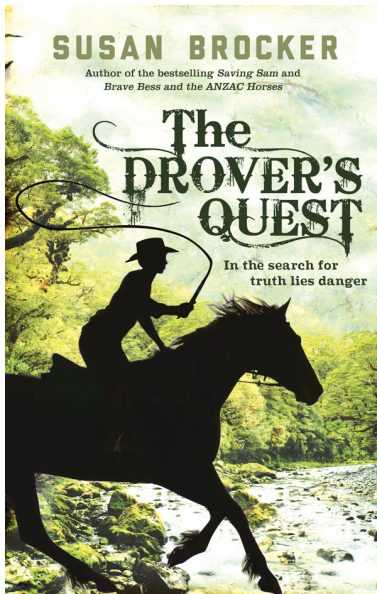


The Drover's Quest by SUSAN BROCKER



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English unit from



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The Drover's Quest is Susan Brocker's fifth novel for Kiwi kids and teenagers and once again demonstrates her ability to write fresh and vibrant novels that will absolutely captivate this particular audience. Susan has a degree in history, a deep interest in social history and a great love of, affinity with and respect for animals. In this novel she combines all of these passions with great skill and again demonstrates her exceptional abilities as a gifted author. As well as exploring relationships between people and animals, *The Drover's Quest* gives us an insightful look at the motivations that drive people to go to extraordinary lengths to accomplish something that really matters to them, and how actions speak louder than words in establishing, growing and cementing relationships between people who share the same personal values. The novel is set in Christchurch and on the West Coast of New Zealand at the time of the 1860s gold rush. Our two main characters, Charlotte, a young 14-year-old girl, and Joseph, a young teenage boy, both have demons to lay to rest. Charlotte is finding it hard to forgive her father for seemingly abandoning her at a Christchurch boarding school while he hunts for gold. Joseph is of Cherokee descent and has sailed from America to look for stock work in an effort to bury his guilt for his wrongly supposed responsibility for the death of his father when they worked together as trackers for the Union Army during the American Civil War. Both Charlotte and Joseph are skilled riders and develop a growing respect for each other during a difficult and dangerous cattle drive over Arthur's Pass to deliver the stock to Hokitika. A cast of strongly-drawn characters, many with dubious motives and agendas, make this an absolutely compelling read.

Story synopsis

After Charlotte's mother died, her stockman father Tom was ordered by the government to send her to a Christchurch convent rather than continue to accompany him on stock drives. In an effort to buy a farm so he can get her back, he prospects for gold and discovers and hides a large nugget. His campsite is invaded by three hooded men demanding his gold. His partner Tama returns to find the campsite wrecked, the dog Skye wounded and tied up, and no Tom. Tama and the patched-up Skye travel to Christchurch to tell Charlotte. She escapes from the convent and insists on joining Tama on a cattle drive to Hokitika, disguised as a boy, to find her father. Joseph has arrived from America and, needing money and experience in droving, he too joins the large cattle drive to the West Coast. Scar, the drive boss, is a hard taskmaster and is under orders from Mr Goodman to get the cattle to the coast in double quick time. Goodman follows the drive in a coach to check on progress. In spite of the difficult terrain and inclement weather, Charlotte (Charlie) and Joseph gain a grudging respect from Scar as their abilities in riding and stock management are better than most of the other drovers. During a difficult river crossing, Joseph saves Charlie from drowning and she confesses to him that she is not a boy. Charlotte injures her leg and is taken ahead by coach to Otira to recover and await the stock drive. Going down a steep pass, the cattle panic and Scar's dog falls over a cliff. Joseph rescues the dog and Scar 'owes him one'. The drive reaches the Hokitika cattle yards but that night they are spooked by a thunderstorm. In trying to calm them, Charlotte suffers serious concussion and needs medical treatment. When partially recovered, Charlotte and Tama ride to her father's campsite. They are ambushed by Goodman, Scar and Red, a cruel Irishman. Their horses and Skye are tied up. They are taken to a cave where Charlotte's father is chained to a wall. To protect Tama and Charlotte, Tom is forced to reveal the whereabouts of the nugget but they too are chained to the wall and left for dead. When Charlotte and Tama don't return to Hokitika, Joseph rides to the campsite and releases Skye and the horses. With his tracking skills and the help of Skye, Joseph locates the captives, but he too is chained up when Goodman and Red return. Angry at having failed to locate the gold nugget, they set a dynamite charge and leave. Skye pulls the fuse free and Scar returns to release the chains to pay back his debt to Joseph. Tom locates the nugget, buys a farm for he and Charlotte and pays out Tama with the proceeds. Goodman and Red are arrested but there is no sign of Scar. Joseph finally decides he did not cause his father's death and returns to America to reunite with his Cherokee mother and hopes his close friend Charlotte will visit him there.

Setting the scene and motivational activities

- Tell students that *The Drover's Quest* is set in the 1860s in New Zealand when the only way of moving cattle and sheep was by driving them 'on the hoof'. Did they know that the people who did this difficult work were called drovers? Play the cattle droving video at: www.teara.govt.nz/en/transport-of-animals/2/2 How does the video depict droving as a difficult and dangerous job?
- Did the students know that gold was discovered on the West Coast in the 1860s? Have students speculate on what life would be like on a goldfield at that time. Use the following link for shared reading: www.teara.govt.nz/en/gold-and-gold-mining/4 Build up a picture of the harshness of life on the goldfields over 150 years ago.

During and post-reading activities

- Read/shared read the prologue to the class. Identify Tom's motives for working on the goldfields. Do they think the government was correct in insisting that a droving life was not suited for a young girl? Speculate on Tom's fate. Can they back this up with reasons?
- Can students identify the main motive for anyone attempting to drive 1000 cattle over mountain ranges to the West Coast? Can they find reasons why Scar would hire such young people as Charlie and Joseph to become part of the drive? Have them explain what Mr Goodman meant by telling Joseph he was his 'eyes and ears'.
- Can students find any evidence to suggest that Mr Goodman didn't completely trust Scar to be in full control of the drive?
- Identify the ways that Charlie tried to keep her identity as a girl secret from Joseph, Scar and the other drovers. Was this successful? Do they think she was justified in keeping her secret from Joseph even though he showed her kindness and consideration?
- Have students identify and the greatest risks and dangers that Tama, Joseph and Charlotte face on the drive. Identify any incidents in particular that showed how courageous and fearless they were.
- Identify incidents and actions that illustrate the respect and love for animals that Charlotte and Joseph display.
- List adjectives that would best describe Scar and his actions on the drive. Do they think he redeemed himself in the end?
- Do students think that Joseph should have felt responsible for the death of his father in the American Civil War?
- Can they describe the final relationship between Joseph and Charlotte?