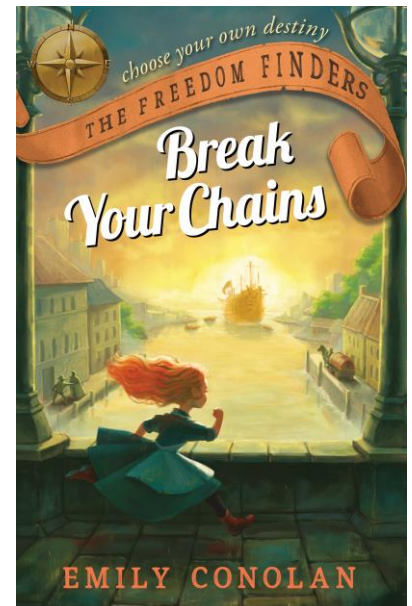


# Break Your Chains: the Freedom Finders

By Emily Conolan

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Recommended for 9–13+ year olds



## Summary

It is 1825 and you are thirteen years old. Having fled Ireland, you and Ma have survived on the streets of London ever since the soldiers took Da away. Now, with Ma gone too, you find yourself facing life-and-death choices at every turn.

Can you carry a secret treasure across the oceans and finally be reunited with Da? You'll be asked to betray your friends, survive storms at sea and attacks by bushrangers, and trust thieves.

At every turn, the choice is yours. How far will you go for freedom?

## 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

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## 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/>.

### ***Break Your Chains***

The plot of *Break Your Chains* involves the early convicts of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Aboriginal people these settlers would come to displace. Fact files found at the end of the book, and linked to throughout the story, provide useful information on topics as varied as smallpox, London pickpockets, 19th-century prison conditions and Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

The content directly addresses HASS Year 5 but this book can also contribute to English, Ethics or Philosophy classes and HASS or History classes at other year levels.

In the English 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 *Break Your Chains*

- loyalty
- endurance
- courage
- self-belief
- defiance of injustice
- trust



## Discussion questions and activities

**1)** Before reading *Break Your Chains: 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, *Break Your Chains: 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)** The Prologue tells us quite a bit about Da. Some of this information is stated explicitly, but much is also implicit. Examples of explicit information (information that is directly told to the reader) include the fact that Da's surname is Ryan, and that he works as a servant to a 'master'. Examples of implicit information (information that isn't directly told to the reader, but that the reader can guess based on what is said or happening) include that Da is badly treated by his master, and that he is a loving and kind father who would risk a beating so that his three-year-old daughter can have some fun on a horse.

- Can you find other examples of either explicit or implicit information about Da in the Prologue?

**4)** *Break Your Chains: 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 17, you had to make your first decision about your destiny: whether to stay with your sick, infectious mother or move to Mrs Raeburn's house down the street.

- How did you make that decision?
- Was it what you thought was the right thing to do, or was it because you thought it was the safe 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)** The Refugee Council of Australia's website features many real-life stories about Freedom Finders who have come to Australia. [Matur's story](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/international/journeys/stories/matur-story/) is one of these.

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- Read this story, and discuss the sorts of difficult decisions Matur needed to make to find his way to freedom.

**9)** What do people mean when they talk about 'own voice' in literature?

- Emily Conolan includes an interview with Tasmanian Aboriginal Elder, Theresa Sainy, in *Break Your Chains*, and in the second book in the series, *Touch the Sun*, she includes an interview with a real Somalian refugee, Hani, as well as quoting a number of Hani's real poems throughout the story. Why do you think that she chose to do this?

**10) Class discussion:** In the Author's Note, Emily Conolan says: 'But in the end, I decided it would be more hurtful to leave out the racism and pretend it never happened.'

- Do you think she was right to include racist scenes in the book, for example where Tasmanian Aboriginal people are derogatively called 'natives', settlers suggest Tasmanian Aboriginal people need to be violently attacked, and other characters show religious intolerance towards a Muslim man?

## 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 traumas – 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

## 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.

