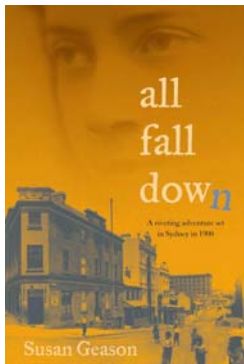


# All Fall Down

By Susan Geason



Set in Sydney in 1900, *All Fall Down* follows protagonist Christabel McManus, a strong-willed fourteen-year-old from Sydney's upper classes. Since the death of her mother two years earlier, her father—the Government Inspector of Health for New South Wales—has thrown himself increasingly into his work, leaving Christabel feeling lonely and resentful. When Paddy Rafferty, a servant's eight-year-old son, is kidnapped by his villainous father to be trained as a pickpocket, Christabel decides to rescue him—by dressing as a boy herself and heading into the squalid and crime-ridden streets of The Rocks.

*All Fall Down* encompasses both fast-paced adventure and well-researched historical settings. Information about such issues as women's suffrage, public health and working conditions at the turn of the century is deftly woven into the plot, making this book a good starting point for provoking classroom discussions.

This is also a story about coming of age, as a spoiled teenager learns about life beyond her own pampered existence. Christabel learns—literally—what it is like to walk in another person's shoes.

## Susan Geason says:

“Years ago I saw a haunting image of some dirty, barefooted street urchins photographed against the cliffs in The Rocks and never forgot it. Later I had the idea of setting a story in The Rocks but could not decide whether to write it for children or adults. The location attracted me because it was a seaport, a violent slum, and the home of many descendants of convicts; it was also a living reminder of our convict past for those who preferred to forget. When I was asked to write a mystery for young readers, the idea gelled into a plot, and *All Fall Down* was born. I set the novel in 1900 because it was a turning point, the year an outbreak of bubonic plague in Sydney forced the government to improve living conditions in our slums. Fortunately the ensuing slum clearance did not erase all traces of the old Rocks. Although The Rocks is now a tourist precinct, we can still walk through the Argyle Cut and imagine the convicts chipping the roadway out of the sandstone; or stand in Cumberland Place and hear the shrill voices of the urchins and touts; or visit The Hero of Waterloo and transport ourselves, just for a moment, into Sydney's raffish convict past.”

## About the author/illustrator:

Susan Geason was born in Australia, grew up in Queensland, and now lives in Sydney. Most of her professional life has centred on politics and writing, including positions as a researcher in Parliament House, Canberra and Cabinet Adviser in the NSW Premier's Department. Since 1988 she has worked as a freelance writer and editor, including a five-year stint from 1992-1997 as literary editor of Sydney's *Sun-Herald*. Her crime fiction for adults—she is best known for her novels starring PI Syd Fish, including *Dogfish* and *Shark Bait*—has been published around the world in several languages. Her first book for teenagers, *Great Australian Girls*, has reprinted several times since publication in 1999, and was followed by *Australian Heroines*.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- Examine the daily living and working conditions of people living in Sydney in the early twentieth century. What hardships did they endure? How obvious were the differences between the wealthy and the poor? By the late 1800s, most wealthy people had abandoned The Rocks. In the novel *All Fall Down*, Geason depicts the working-class residents of The Rocks living in often overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. The streets were patrolled by larrikins or ‘pushes’, groups of young men bent on bullying and mischief. Discuss this portrayal of the Rocks. What are the similarities and differences to society today?
- Discuss the relationship between Christabel and her father throughout the novel. How does this relationship change at the end?
- Katie Cadwallader joins the Salvation Army and Christabel’s interest in the movement is ignited. Research the Salvation Army’s founder, William Booth, and the beginning of the Salvos’ work in Australia. What were the reasons for their strong presence in The Rocks at this time in history?
- Rose Scott was a resolute defender of women’s rights. She was an activist for the NSW Womanhood Suffrage League. Investigate the women’s suffrage movement. For what reasons did women feel the need to pursue their right for independence? What arguments did men give at the time to refuse female suffrage? What role did Rose Scott play in the historical development of women’s rights in Australia?
- Some important women in Australian history have fought for the vote and other rights for women. How difficult would it have been in the early twentieth century to change legislation in a male-dominated society?
- Discuss human rights. What are they? Examine the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Are all people entitled to human rights? How did people’s rights suffer in the early settlement years of Australia?
- In 1888, Louisa Lawson began publishing *The Dawn* magazine which, for the next seventeen years, focused on issues of justice for women. List some issues that women fought for which Geason brings to light in Chapter 7. Write a letter to the editor of *The Dawn* that reflects the hardships experienced by some women of the time.
- “Ring-a-ring o’ roses” is a very old playground rhyme sometimes said to describe the Black Death of the fourteenth century or the great Plague of London in the seventeenth century. Research the meaning of the words. Discuss Susan Geason’s possible reasons for including the rhyme in the story and choosing it as the novel’s title.