

THE BUSHFIRE BOOK

HOW TO BE AWARE AND PREPARE

Written by
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Illustrated by
Chris Nixon

Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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INTRODUCTION

'Bushfires can make a real mess of things.
The air fills with smoke.
The sky turns red.
Ash falls.
Precious things burn.' (p 8)

This is a very approachable book for children about bushfires and how one might be aware, prepare, and share our knowledge about bushfires to help ourselves and others.

It contains useful advice about how bushfires happen and how to prevent them. It also contains a handy list of key Australian organisations. Written by Polly Marsden in a colloquial and engaging style, it is illustrated by Chris Nixon in a vibrant, 'retro' medium which is very appealing and eye-catching. Students will find this book offers an invitation to research bushfires further and to share their knowledge with their peers.

THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes are covered in this book which might be related to the Australian Curriculum, including:

STUDY OF HISTORY, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

BUSHFIRES

DISCUSSION POINT: Research bushfires in Australia. What are the major causes of bushfires? [See also **Worksheet 4.**]

DISCUSSION POINT: What has been the impact of bushfires in different states in Australia? How have they affected people, animals and the landscape?

DISCUSSION POINT: How can bushfires be prevented?

DISCUSSION POINT: Many questions are posed by the threat of bushfires. On p 11 some of those questions are listed. Can you think of any other questions presented by a bushfire?

DISCUSSION POINT: 'Bushfires need three ingredients to start: 1.fuel 2. heat 3. oxygen.' (p 14) How do we avoid those three ingredients coming together?

DISCUSSION POINT: How do First Nations peoples prevent bushfires?

DISCUSSION POINT: Which experts keep an eye on weather changes and conditions and protect us from bushfires? [See p 20 for some of them.]

DISCUSSION POINT: What are the three things this book tells you to do to protect yourself from bushfires? [Answer: 1. Be aware 2. Prepare 3. Share (pp 24–5)]

DISCUSSION POINT: Fire Danger Rating Charts are an important part of the information described in this book. What is likely to happen if the needle on the chart points to red or orange?

DISCUSSION POINT: What do firefighters do? How are they trained? What equipment do they need? Does Australia have adequate numbers of firefighters? [See also **Worksheets 1 and 2.**]

NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS

DISCUSSION POINT: Bushfires are just one of the natural disaster events which Australia suffers quite regularly: ‘Cyclones, floods, heatwaves (when it is very, absolutely, *extremely* hot for days on end) and droughts* are all types of extreme weather.’ (p 6) Research the effects of any of these events.

DISCUSSION POINT: Have any such natural disasters effected the area where you live?

DISCUSSION POINT: We use the word ‘natural’ to describe such disasters but how much might such disasters be avoided if we paid more attention to how we use and manage the land we live on and to issues such as climate change?

FEELINGS SUCH AS BRAVERY AND COURAGE

DISCUSSION POINT: The author wrote this book to encourage kids not to be fearful but to understand the threat of bushfires and to develop strategies to confront such threats. Ask your students if this book makes them feel braver?

DISCUSSION POINT: What makes a person fearful? What makes a person brave?

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

The text of this book might be studied in relation to the following aspects:

ACTIVITY: The tone of voice in which a work is written very much influences how it is read. This book begins: ‘Well now, here we are. In Australia.

How about that?’ (p 2) This is a casual invitation to the reader to dip into this book, rather than a didactic instruction to read it. The rest of the text uses similar strategies to engage the reader. Invite students to discuss the style in which this book is written and the narrative strategies employed such as asking questions (p 11); list making (p 20); second person narration eg (‘Which is what you’re doing – so well done!’) (p 23). Invite them to write a short piece about bushfires in a similar tone of voice.

ACTIVITY: Write a short story about someone being caught in a bushfire including some of the information contained in this book. [See also **Worksheet 3.**]

ACTIVITY: Test your students' **comprehension** by asking them questions about the written and visual text. [See also **Author's Notes** below.]

VISUAL LITERACY

The visual text of a book combines with the written text to tell the story using the various parts of the book's design and illustrations, as explored below:

ACTIVITY: The **cover** of a book is an important part of its message. This one depicts a range of people and other aspects of the Australian landscape on a vibrant orange background. Invite students to design a new cover for this book.

ACTIVITY: The **endpapers** are silhouette images of people, animals, forms of transport, plants, and other aspects of Australian life. Invite students to design new endpapers for this book.

DISCUSSION POINT: The **title page** depicts a small child with a firefighter beneath the title of the book printed in striking typography. What message does this send to the reader?

DISCUSSION POINT: The **format** of the book is square in shape. Why did the designer choose this rather than a landscape or portrait format?

DISCUSSION POINT: How does the **layout of the storyboard** and the **format and design** of the book influence your reading of it?

ACTIVITY: The **medium or style** employed is digital art, and pays particular attention to colours, texture and pattern. Encourage students to draw an image in a similar style.

DISCUSSION POINT: The **colours** used in this book are vibrant primary colours and the colour orange is used to suggest the colour of fire. Does the colour palette suggest anything else to your students?

ACTIVITY: Invite students to draw, paint, or collage another scene to accompany the story you wrote above. Create a classroom mural using all the images. [See also **Worksheet 1.** below.]

ACTIVITY: Create a graphic novel/comic version of a scene in this book. [See **Bibliography.**] [See also **Worksheet 4.**]

CREATIVE ARTS

There are many creative activities suggested by this text:

- 1. Create a sign (similar to the one included in these notes on pp 8 and 11) which graphically warns people about bushfires.**
- 2. Create a slogan about bushfire awareness.**

3. **Create a poster using this slogan.**
4. **Create a short script for an advertising campaign** about bushfire awareness.
5. **Create a Book Trailer** to promote this book. [See **Bibliography.**]

LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

ACTIVITY: Research the topics above online.

ACTIVITY: Research the author and illustrator online. [See **Bibliography.**]

MATHEMATICS

ACTIVITY: Have fun counting things in this text, on the endpapers and in other double page spreads.

FURTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

This is Polly Marsden's first children's book. Try to discover information about her other work online.

Research the work of Chris Nixon. Compare this to his other books. Students might research this book in comparison to reading other books about bushfires such as those listed in the **Bibliography.**

Investigate any other topic not covered in these notes which you consider is suggested by this text.

CONCLUSION

This is a beautifully crafted and designed non-fiction work for children which teaches about bushfires, as it entertains. It conveys the basic facts in a tone which children will find very inviting, and with illustrations which are lively and appealing.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

'It's a privilege to collaborate with Chris Nixon on such a timely book. This bushfire season has meant many young Australians have been affected by an immense and tragic natural catastrophe. Children are fearful - my own included - and it's actually pretty hard to tell them everything will be ok. But understanding is a great antidote to anxiety. That's what this book aims to do - to replace confusion with context, worry with knowledge, and hopelessness with a sense of empowerment. It's probably something all of us - no matter our age or experience - could do with right now.' **Polly Marsden**

ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTES

'I was drawn to the project to use my work to contribute and make an impact in any way I can. While our country is experiencing immense grief and dread I've been thinking of the impact on the future and our younger generations and I believe that being informed and prepared will help to reduce the collective anxiety and focus on the incredible humanity for an optimistic future. I'm proud to collaborate on a book that speaks directly to young readers to help, even in the smallest form of starting an important conversation.' **Chris Nixon**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

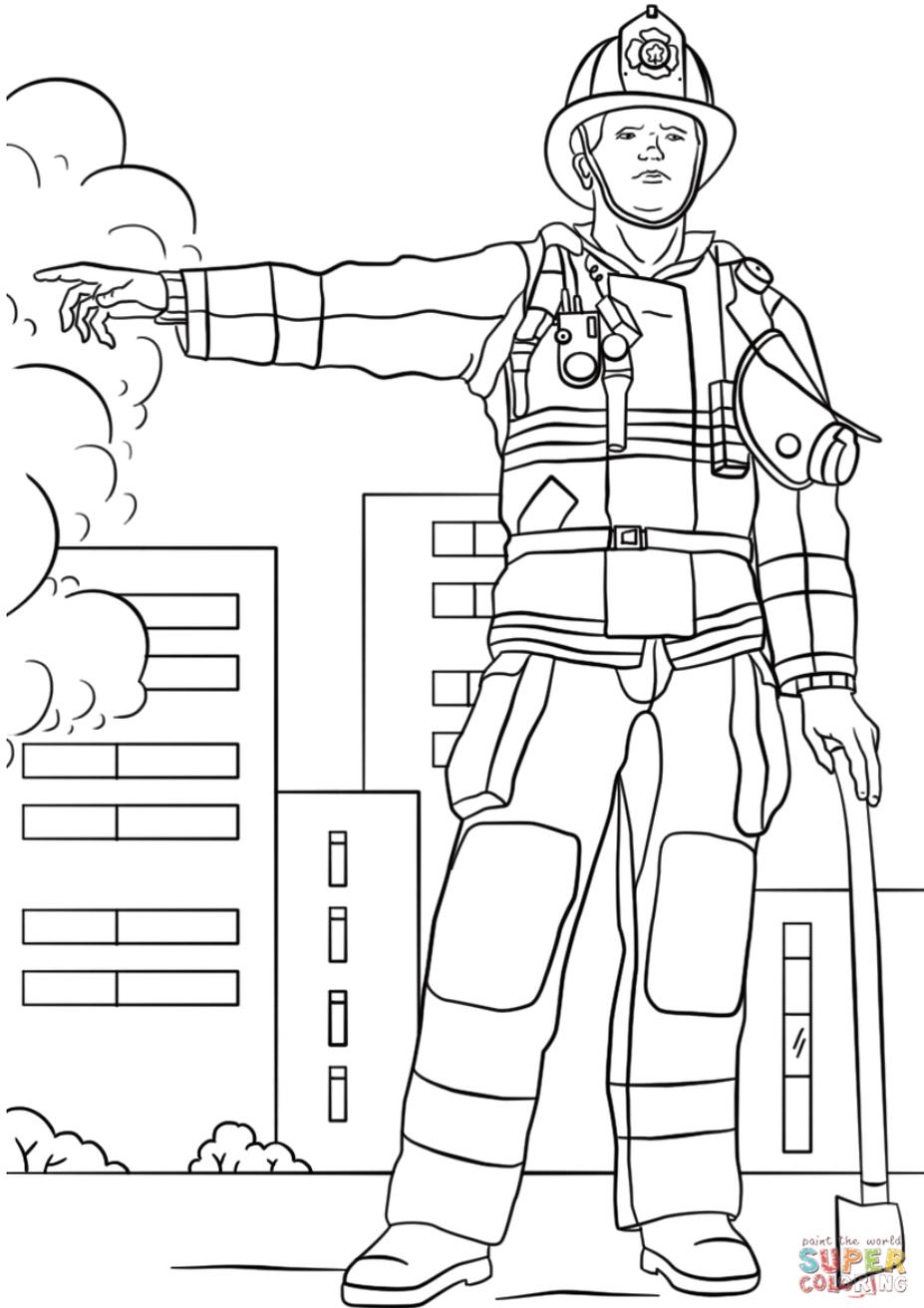
Polly Marsden is the creator behind the concept for *Big Weather (and How To Survive It)*, a new documentary TV series hosted by Craig Reucassel to be broadcast on ABC TV in 2020. Polly is a speechwriter and script writer who is passionate about the power of words to inspire positive social change.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Chris Nixon is a multidisciplinary artist creating across illustration, graphic design, creative direction and public art. Based in Perth, Chris's work is inspired by the West Coast and classic surf culture with an emphasis on the handmade and crafted, using colour, texture and pattern across a wide range of media from children's books to animation, commercial illustration and large artwork installations. For further information see: <https://www.chrisnixon.net/>

WORKSHEETS

WORKSHEET 1. COLOUR THIS IMAGE OF A FIREFIGHTER



From: <http://www.supercoloring.com/coloring-pages/firefighter>

WORKSHEET 2. FIREFIGHTER POEM

Respond to the image below by writing a simple acrostic poem.



**F
I
R
E
F
I
G
H
T
E
R**

WORKSHEET 3. PROSE RESPONSE

Imagine yourself as a member of a family which returns to the scene below.
Describe your feelings.



WORKSHEET 4. NAME THAT FIRESTARTER



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



8.

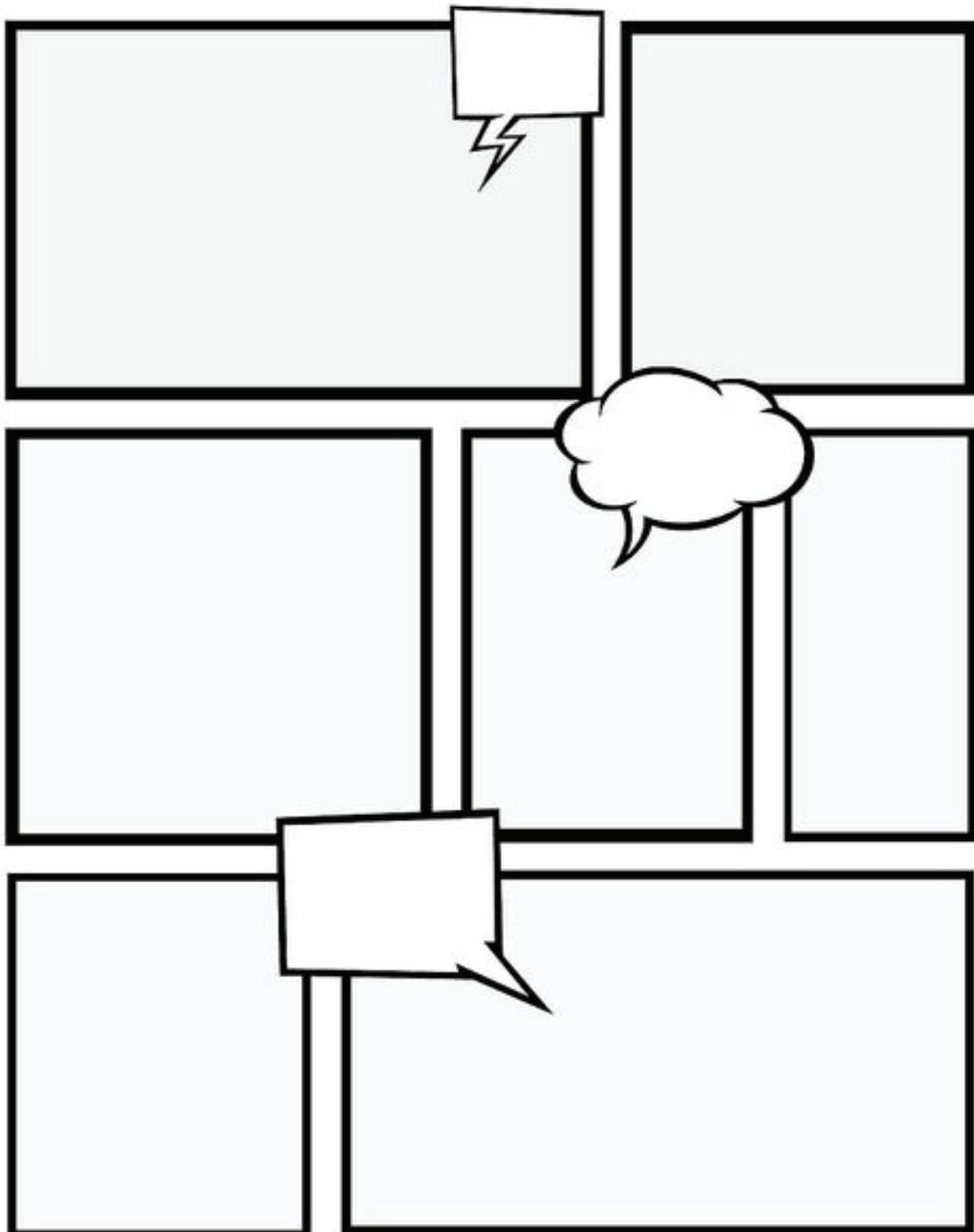


9.

ANSWERS: 1. Petrol. 2. Campfire. 3. Wind. 4. Barbecue. 5. Matches. 6. Cigarettes. 7. Lightning. 8. Drought. 9. Explosion.

WORKSHEET 5. GRAPHIC STORYTELLING

Create a graphic novel/comic interpretation of one of the scenes in this book. Use the layout below as the storyboard for your comic. Enlarge on a photocopier to give you more space.



Comic Book Template viewed at: <http://www.pinterest.com/pin/365706432212821426/>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award.