



**DO YOU DARE ? SERIES – 1841
THE BUSHRANGER BOYS BY A. LLOYD**

TEACHING NOTES

The Bushranger Boys

It's 1841. Join Jem and his mates as they take on the landed gentry and battle to protect a bushranger in the wild country of southern New South Wales.

This is an exciting boys' adventure, based on the real story of the Bushranger William Westwood at the time he was robbing travellers on the roads around Bungendore, near modern day Canberra.

CONTEXT

1. It's 1841. Australia is still a wild land, of convicts and ex convicts, settlers and Aboriginals, of few roads and sparse settlements. Life is tough, most people are grindingly poor and few bush children get educational opportunities.

Have the children read "What life was like in Jem's time" at the back of the book.

2. The children could be asked to try to discover what they can about other Australian Bushrangers. Small groups of children could be asked to report back to the class about their bushranger, his name and nicknames, some stories about how he came to be a bushranger, what is known about his misdeeds and crimes and how and where he came to his (usually sticky) end. (ACHHS070) Each report should name its information sources. The class could have a concluding discussion about why people became bushrangers, what kinds of people they were, how in general they behaved and were treated and why there were bushrangers then but not now; i.e. how has the environment that enabled bushrangers to operate changed (ACELY1709)(ACELY1816). The class could draw up a bushranger chart before the research begins so that they all look broadly for answers to common questions (i.e. what years were they operating,

how old were they, were they convicts or free settlers, where did they rob people, how many people did they rob or kill, how were they caught, did they ever escape, how did they die and so on), with the resulting chart indicating what Australian bushrangers had in common and how they were different (ACELY1713).

3. On a map of New South Wales, ask the children to find the Monaro plains and Bungendore. Find out who has been to the area in winter. How would Aboriginal people have survived there (ACELY1712)? Talk to them about the cold high plains climate there and encourage a discussion about the difficulties of living in an area of little water, high winds and cold winters. Ask someone to research the annual bogong moth invasion and how Aboriginal people responded (ACELY1712).

4. Ask the children if they have or ever had a secret place, just for them, that grown ups didn't know about (ACELT 1596)(ACELY1713). Perhaps they could split into pairs and try to describe to each other what their secret place might be like even if they don't have a real one. How would they build it or make it comfortable? Who else would they invite in? Who would they ban? What adventures could they have?

LANGUAGE

5. Keep a class glossary of words and phrases that people use in the book that we wouldn't use now, including technical terms. Children can contribute to the list as the book is read. Each group of words offers an opportunity to discuss the way everyday language has changed, as well as the change in the way boys talk, and the change in food we eat and everyday tools and clothing (ACELY 1687) (ACELA1500). Such a list also offers opportunity to talk about guns and weaponry then and now (ACELA 1500).

A class project might be to find examples of the guns that are used in the book and describe with drawings and pictures how they were loaded, cleaned and fired (ACELT1602).

6. Older children might be asked to think why there are such changes to our language. What words do we use instead? Do you think that children another hundred and sixty years from now will still be using those words? Why? Why not? A research task might be to get older family members and friends to help them with lists of words and phrases and popular slang terms they used when they were young that are no longer used. (ACELA 1500)(ACELA 1516)

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

7. This is a rollicking yarn, with lots of emphasis on the story line. It is told in the third person in chronological order (ACELT1610). Older children could rewrite parts of the story in the first person, perhaps with different outcomes from the novel (ACELT 1601). Suggestions are provided in the chapter-by-chapter summaries below. The chapters have no headings. The class could be invited to suggest a chapter heading for each chapter as they are read.

8. The children could look at other ways to tell the story. Interested children might draw up a comic book version of parts of the story with speech balloons (ACELA 1524). The class could write a play, choosing scenes to act such as the hold up of Captain Ross in Chapter 1. Video could be taken. Children could be asked to consider what roles they would like to play and the reasons they prefer one character part over another. Is it because a character has more action? Or is it because you like the character or because the character gets to say things you would like to say? After a child has played a part, he/she could be asked if they understood the person any better afterwards, and how.(ACELY1692)(ACELT1603)

9. There may be an opportunity to show the children how plot tension is created. Can you predict what will happen next? At the end of each chapter did you want to find out what happened next? Or didn't you care"? Why? Why not? How do you think the author might have been preparing you for worse to come (ACELT1605)(ACELY 1680)?

CHARACTERISATION

13. But the plot isn't all there is to the story. We care about Jem and we want him to win out against the baddies (ACELT 1605).

14. What kind of a boy is Jem? (ACELY1792). How is he different from the other boys, Tommy and Alfie (ACELT1605)? Which boy is most like you? How does each boy in his different way help beat Captain Ross and his men and give the bushranger another chance? One child could be given the task of reporting to the class as each chapter unfolds on each of Tommy and Alfie, telling the class what his character did how he felt and what made him behave as he did (ACELY1675)(ACELT 1610). The idea would be to have the class consider how a bookish or inventive boy might contribute to problem solving and what role an Indigenous boy might play as well (ACELA 1500). Jem is an action figure, but action men need to take account of other things or they will get it wrong.

Interested children could pretend to be Alfie, who can read and write, and keep a journal or diary of events from his perspective, reading it to the class at appropriate points in the narrative (ACHHS105)(ACELT1601)(ACELY1675).

15. Do you think everything Jem does is the right thing? Give some examples of him making mistakes. Can you explain why he does some things he shouldn't (ACELT1604)(ACELT 1609)(ACELT 1605)? What would you have done?

16. What has happened to Jem's dad? Why can't he fight back against Captain? How does Jem feel about his Dad? Find the parts of the story that tell you (ACELY1692). Have you ever wanted to protect someone grown up and fight on their behalf, even though you are just a kid? Write your own story about it, imagining that you could save that person from their problem (ACELT1607). How would you do it? What would change as a result of the problem being solved (ACELT 1596)?

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Some projects that might assist with experiential learning are suggested under chapter discussions. For instance some children with mechanical or practical interests might construct a kettle or a trebuchet arrangement similar to the one set up by Alfie in Chapter 4 to see how it might work. The class might construct a fort arrangement and act out the siege on the fort at Chapters 13 and 14.

DISCUSSIONS FOR EACH CHAPTER

Ch. 1.

Jem and his Dad are waiting to meet Captain Ross to pay him for the land they farm with money they have saved over many years. But Captain Ross puts up the price and demands that Jem come and work for him. When Jem's dog chases them Captain Ross shoots her. As they cross the river Captain Ross is stripped and robbed by a bushranger, and Jem is full of admiration. The class could list the emotions Jem feels: as they wait; when he sees captain Ross; as Captain Ross betrays his word; as Captain Ross forces Jem to leave home; as the dog is shot; when Captain Ross is robbed.

The children could write a play and re enact this robbery scene (ACELT1798) (ACELT1610). They could change the story so there are different endings or so that people behave differently – Jem's dad could save Captain Ross and earn his respect and get the land he wants to buy; The bushranger could be killed by some of Captain Ross' men lying in wait and strung up in the bush as an example; the bushranger could kidnap Jem and ride off with him; Captain Ross could be treated cruelly by the bushranger and beg for his life, Aboriginal people could intervene...and so on. The idea is that they see the different ways a writer can craft a plot to make things happen (ACELT1601).

Ch. 2.

Jem is taken to Ross Vale Station and he sees a different way of life. He sees the way the Aboriginal people are treated. How (ACHHS100)? He meets Alfie, the cook's son and finds a puppy in the stables to comfort him in his loneliness and sadness. The children could be asked to look at how their houses are arranged differently to Ross Vale Station or Jem's home with his Dad. Why do they think these things have changed since 1841(ACELT1613)(ACELT 1619)?

Ask the children to write an imagined story about being saved by an animal (ACELT1612).

Ch. 3.

Jem starts to learn the ropes as a stable hand and also starts on a small act of revenge against Captain Ross by stretching the girth strap. Was this a good idea? Why? Why not? (ACELT1609)

When he is caught playing with the puppy he is sent to help in the scullery washing up; there he and Alfie get to talking and he hears about Alfie's lessons, reading about the life of Captain Nelson. Why does he start to like Alfie? What do you think it would be like not to be able to read or write, like Jem? Do you think he will get interested enough to learn? Why? Why Not? A class discussion on the difficulties of not being able to read and write could ensue. (ACELY1796)

Some children may like to find about Captain Nelson for themselves using the internet and the school library, and perhaps report to the class on what made him famous (ACELY1702).

What is a girth strap? Someone could research the riding gear that goes on a horse and draw a horse wearing all the gear and naming them (ACELY1703). Why were horses important in 1841(ACHHS100)?

What is a scullery? What was a "government man" (ACELA1500)?

Ch 4.

We meet Tommy. And we discover Alfie's project, built with Tommy's help, a fort with a kettle, a ladder a lean-to shelter and a catapult (a trebuchet). They start to construct some battlements. From their lookout the children see that the overseer is about to drown Jem's puppy and they hurry down the hill to get to the river in time. The children could research a trebuchet and draw one (ACELY1703). Some children might like to draw the fort. What other things might make the fort work better?

Ch 5.

The boys try to rescue the puppy from the river but Jem is on the point of being swept away when he is hauled in by a young man; and they are both saved. Is Jem silly to risk his life for a dog (ACELT1603)? Notice that neither Timmy nor Alfie think he should put himself in so much danger. Who is correct (ACELT1596)? As the chapter ends the boys realize the young man is the bushranger. Ask the children to predict what happens next (ACELY 1680). The writer of the book has ordered the story to make us interested and want to go on turning the pages. This is called plot tension. As the children read through the book some may be able to identify other points where plot tension has been carefully created by the author (ACELT1605).

Ch. 6.

William Westwood tells his story. We are finding out more about the boys, too as they find themselves in new and dangerous situations. What does Jem show about himself? Tommy? Alfie? The boys offer the bushranger to hide in the fort for a few days until his lame horse recovers, in exchange for hiding Horatio. Each boy reacts differently to the bushranger's story. Which one do you think would most like to be a bushranger too? Tommy seems to think the bushranger is mad, but were there any Aboriginal bushrangers? Ask someone to find out and report back to the class (ACELY1703). They will need to note where they get their information from so others can find it too (ACHHS101)(ACHHS102). Why does Tommy call the bushranger "boss"?

What was a "cove"? (P66). What is "blabbing (p67)"? What would we say these days instead (ACELA 1500)?

Ch. 7.

The bushranger needs food. The Aboriginal people can't help as their food supplies are being reduced by the impact of the European settlement (how?) (ACHHK080)(ACHHK094). Why doesn't Tommy meet Jem's eyes and why does he say "maybe" instead of "no" when asked to help find food (ACELA 1475)(ACELA 1501)?

At first Alfie is very reluctant to help steal food from the Stores. He is worried about his mother's job and the boys would be flogged with whips if caught. Besides, he says, "Stealing is wrong". What does the class think? Is stealing always wrong? Ask them to give examples to prove their point of view (ACELT 1596)(ACELT1603 and 1609).

The boys settle the matter in Jem's favour with an arm wrestle. Alfie reluctantly steals his mother's keys and Jem steals cheese and flour from the stores. As he is about to be discovered Alfie lays down some red herrings (what are red herrings?) and Mr. Blain is diverted away from where Jem is hiding to the stables.

Ch. 8.

The theft is discovered and Captain Ross summonses everyone except the Aboriginals to a muster (what is a muster?). Jem is able to attract Tommy's attention and hand him the stolen food to take away. Alfie and his mother come under suspicion as Captain Blain remembers he spoke to Alfie last night but there is now no evidence in Alfie's bed. Alfie and Jem each react differently to the pressure. Alfie is miserable and so is Jem but Jem is able to feel anger. When an innocent stockman is sentenced to five lashes of the whip and tries to deflect the blame on to the Aborigines, Jem is angry with him. Is Jem wrong (ACELT1603 and 1609)?

These are complicated moral issues. A way of helping the children understand the complexity is to have them write the story from the point of view of the stockman, or Alfie (ACELY1675), and/or to create an alternative story where Alfie and his mother or the Aboriginals are blamed and punished. (ACELT 1596)

Ch. 9.

Alfie and Jem continue to argue the morality. When they get the stolen food from Tommy, some of it has been eaten. Was that wrong (ACELT 1596)?

At the fort, the bushranger is pleased with their haul. And the boys have another opportunity to get to know him.

Tommy seems especially nervous of the bushranger's pistols. Why?

What does "flash" (p98) mean here? What are "barking irons"(p100) "belly timber"(p103), and "cobbers (p102) (ACELA1500)?

Ch. 10. Jem is tempted to betray the bushranger for the twenty pounds reward that would allow his father to buy his land from Captain Ross. The class could act out in pairs and then discuss as a group the debate between Alfie and Jem (ACELY1796)(ACELT1609). What would they do? Is Alfie right or wrong? Why? Is there something that Jem could learn from Alfie (ACELT 1596)? The boys learn that Captain Ross and Mr. Blain are blaming the bushranger for the theft from the food stores and that there will be a posse riding after him the next day.

Ch. 11. The boys break into Captain Ross' study and Alfie spikes his gunpowder by spitting in it so his weapons can't kill William Westwood. They gather Tommy and hasten to the fort to warn the bushranger.

The plot is moving towards its crisis (ACELT1605).

Ch. 12. The bushranger is preparing to leave. Jem tries not to cry as he bids the boys farewell. He acknowledges Alfie's brains. He gives Jem some advice, telling him not to follow in his bushrangering ways. What qualities do the bushranger see in Jem that are both good and dangerous (strength, boldness, leadership, courage and spirit-how can they be dangerous) (ACELT1609)?

Tommy spots a red flash from the Captain's jacket through the mist. Horatio's howls alert the searchers to the direction of their hideout and William Westwood makes a quick decision to leave without the dog. Behind him he leaves a cut of his loot for the children and his musket. Jem refuses to leave as Tommy tells them the Captain and his men are getting closer.

We need to read the next chapter to find out why Jem won't split. Plot tension happens when the author creates curiosity to find out what is going on. Ask the children to make predictions about what happens next (ACELY 1680)(ACELY1801).

Ch. 13

Jem has a plan to give William Westwood time to get away and to cover his tracks and confuse the pursuers. We won't find out all the details of the plan until we get to the very last chapter, but we know (how?) (from Alfie's comments and questions) that it will take courage(ACELY1692). The three boys –and Horatio – all agree to play their part in the plan. Ask a child to follow the actions of each of Tommy, Alfie, Jem and Horatio as the plan is put into action so we can see how they work as a team and perhaps have a class discussion at the end of the book, about leadership and teamwork and the importance of each person in a team once they agree to a plan (ACELY1713)(ACELT 1620). Older children could explain what they learn of the character of each boy and how the text bears out their view (ACELT 1621).

Another child might research how to load and fire a musket to see if Jem got it right on p136 (ACELY1713). Ask the class to write a script and act out the next few minutes as Jem fires the musket and the men fire back. Someone could record gunshot and replay them at the right time. Ask the people playing the parts to consider how they would be feeling. What shows that Jem was frightened too (ACELT1613)? If you are frightened and still stick to your plan, is that courage? Notice that Jem was thinking all the time. He didn't just react blindly. He was planning. In that way he was able to ensure none of the horses or the men were injured. That's called being cool under fire.

Chapters 13 and 14, where the boys are fighting off the hunters from the fort, represent the crisis in the story, the point of highest tension (ACELT1605).

Alfie knows what will happen next. Jem has again showed leadership to his team member by explaining what was happening and why. But the author doesn't tell us all of the plan to keep us interested and guessing.

Ch. 14 However the plan goes a little wrong. The musket misfires. Jem doesn't take any chances with the gun's safety and throws it away. The gun explodes wildly and safely. What does this tell us about Jem's leadership (ACELT1620)? As the pursuing men get closer Alfie gets to use his slingshot (trebuchet) to fire cowpats at the approaching horses. It spooks them and creates chaos. The boys are ready to surrender as part of the plan.

Ch. 15

Chapters 15 and 16 represent the denouement of the story, where all the problems can be brought together, explained or solved (ACELT1605).

The boys find a spot where they can safely steer the search party away from the bushranger's retreat path. In doing so they hand over most of the bushranger's loot. How do Tommy's uncle and Tommy help? Why do the boys need to hand the loot back (ACELY1692)?

Have the children notice that the word “damnation” was a very bad swear word in Jem’s day, not used in front of children or women. How does the writer let them know this (Jem’s father protests)? Swear words, like other language usages, change over time, and in a more religious age, words that referred to hell or took religion lightly were regarded as only to be used by men of wicked intention (ACELT1613).

Jem is sent back to live with his Dad, but not before he gets the final satisfaction of seeing the Captain upended on his horse, thanks to the work he had done on the girth strap.

Ch. 16

The end of the story is a happy one. Jem and his mates have triumphed over evil. What does it mean, “In Horatio’s round, cheese-stuffed stomach, she had guarded the pick of Westwood’s loot” (ACELY1692)? What was the plan, how did it work, and why was it stinky (ACELY1692)? Ask the class members who were following each of the characters to tell the part each boy and the dog played. Who was the leader? Why was he the leader? Who asked the questions to keep the leader on track? Who had special skills the team needed to put its plan into action?

Looking back over the book consider whether there was a hero. Justify your answer and discuss with other class members who have a different view. (ACELT 1620)(ACELA 1782)

Explain why the offer of a gold ring was no use to Tommy (ACELT1622)(ACELT 1613).

When Jem’s dad strides on to Captain Ross’ verandah, he has a new hat, not in his hands this time, but on his head. Ask the children to compare how he feels now with how he felt in Captain Ross’ presence at the beginning of the book, and in the chapter before. Ask them to notice that the hat is a symbol of his oppression and fear when it is in his hands and a symbol of his confidence and power when it is on his head (ACELT1617)(ACELT1615).

This is a metaphor; an example of the way imagery compresses meaning and expands on it at the same time. The hat is a metaphor for masculine success. Other, more common, metaphors might be discussed so they get the idea –the sun or daylight for happiness or truth, for example (ACELT1611).

What is a “flash gang”?

WRITING STYLE

Written in the third person but full of action and providing excellent opportunities for studying dialogue, *The Bushranger Boys* encourages empathetic identification with a young hero. Jem is a complex character and there are moral and ethical dilemmas to study, including those based around betrayal and theft. There is lighthearted dialogue and use of humor throughout the story to entertain young boys and increase sympathy with sympathetic characters.

The story highlights the manners and speech of the time and offers children aged eight to eleven opportunities to expand their vocabulary and to understand the ways in which vocabulary including technical terminologies change with time and in accordance with the cultural standards of the time.

There are opportunities for children to compare life today with life 180 years ago and to see something of the plight of Aboriginal people in those early years of settlement.

The author takes time to describe some of the technical aspects of musketry and nineteenth century pistols and other weaponry (trebuchet) to provide windows for appreciation of the story by boys with a practical bent.

OVERALL MESSAGE

Boys who want to be leaders can enjoy but should ultimately resist the glamour of rebellion. Heroes are rightly angry when their principles are attacked, but are also inclusive of others and tolerant of difference.

FURTHER READING

ON LINE

alisonlloyd.com.au

[wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Westwood_\(bushranger\)](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Westwood_(bushranger))

australia.gov.au/about-australia/Australian-story/early-australian-bushrangers

<http://scs.une.edu.au/Bushrangers/home.htm> The Bushranger Site: A Discovery Site for Kids; School of Education University of New England

www.localhistories.org/weaponshist.html A History of Weapons

BOOKS

Boxall, G .1988 *An Illustrated History of Australian Bushrangers*, Penguin, Ringwood.

G Hocking, 2002. *Bail Up! A Pictorial History of Australia's Most Notorious Bushrangers*; Five Mile Press, Noble Park.

Firearms: The Illustrated History; Penguin Books Australia

ACTIVITIES

Wooden trebuchets for kids can be purchased cheaply online.