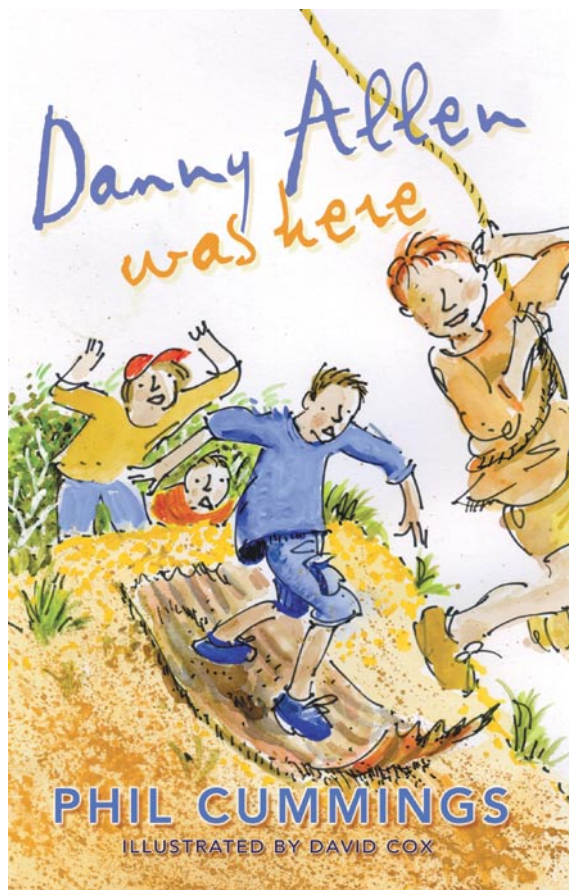


# Danny Allen Was Here

## Phil Cummings

### Teachers' Notes



These notes contain material designed to assist teachers in the study of this novel. There is a synopsis as well as a list of characters and significant landmarks, followed by suggested activities relating to basic comprehension of the text, the characters and landmarks, and the various themes and issues that have been introduced into the text. Teachers are encouraged to select and adapt activities to suit the standards and interests of the students, in order to provide them with opportunities to explore, analyse, discuss, research, write and identify with the situations, characters, themes and issues in *Danny Allen Was Here*.

The notes are presented in the following format:

- Synopsis
- List of characters
- List of significant landmarks/settings
- Comprehension questions – in chapter sequence
- Questions/activities relating to the characters
- Questions/activities relating to various landmarks/settings
- Questions/activities relating to various themes/issues

## SYNOPSIS

Danny Allen lives an idyllic, adventurous life on his family farm in the township of Mundowie, where there is always lots to do. His constant companions are his dog Tippy, big brother, Sam, friend and neighbour Mark Thompson and little sister, Vicki. He is so engrossed in his varied and numerous activities – which include catching tadpoles at the forbidden dam, tobogganing and surfing down sand dunes, sliding down muddy creek beds, encounters with snakes and building tree houses and rope bridges – that he is oblivious to the problems facing his parents. Eventually, the financial burdens, caused by the drought bring an end to Danny's life in Mundowie, and he finds himself city bound, where new and different activities await.

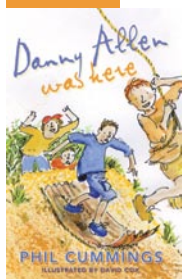
## LIST OF CHARACTERS

- Danny Allen – central character
- Tippy – Danny's pet dog
- Sam – Danny's older brother
- Vicki – Danny's younger sister
- Mark Thompson – Danny and Sam's friend, playmate and neighbour
- Mrs Allen – Danny's mother
- Mr Allen – Danny's father
- Mrs Wallace (also known as Aunty Jean) – elderly lady who lives on one of the few farms in Mundowie
- Mr Wallace – elderly farmer
- Mr Thompson – Mark's father, an ex-farmer turned truck driver
- Stanley the Ram
- Billy – Danny's new dog
- The Miller Family

## LIST OF SIGNIFICANT LANDMARKS/SETTING

- The Mundowie township
- The Allen farm
- The Mundowie Institute Hall
- The soldier statue – next to the Hall
- The old pepper tree – next to the soldier statue
- The Thompson's shed
- The dam
- The creek
- The old Miller place
- The sand dunes
- The playground
- The Wallace farm
- Danny's secret place





## COMPREHENSIONS QUESTIONS

### Chapter 1

1. Why do Danny, Sam and Vicki go to the dam?
2. What happens when the rain begins?
3. Why do Danny and Sam become frozen with fear when they tell their mother that they have left Vicki at the dam?
4. Why did decide to Vicki remain behind at the dam?

### Chapter 2

1. Give a brief description of what was supposed to have happened to the Miller mother and children.
2. Where do the boys go tobogganing and surfing?
3. What happens when Sam goes surfing?
4. Why does Mark faint?

### Chapter 3

1. In your own words, give an account of the incidents Mark uses to describe why Stanley is a mad ram.
2. Describe the relationship between Danny and Stanley.
3. Why does Stanley chase Mark and Sam?
4. What happens to Mark as a result of Stanley's chase?

### Chapter 4

1. What are Danny's most favourite smells?
2. Why is Mrs Allen called out of the kitchen?
3. Why is Mrs Allen angry with Danny?
4. What happens when Mrs Allen tells off Danny?
5. What happens when Danny returns home?

### Chapter 5

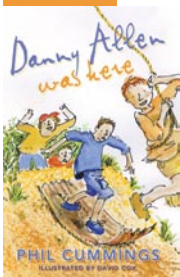
1. What is the purpose of the tractor ride?
2. In to what were the three rusty drums originally made?
3. What finally became of the old drums?
4. Why does Sam sit on one of the drums?
5. What prompts Mr Allen to tell the brothers to remain still?
6. Describe what happens when Tippy decides to take control of the situation. What is Tippy's fate?
7. How does Billy get his name?

## Chapter 6

1. Why does Mrs Allen send Danny and Sam out of the house?
2. How do Sam, Danny and Vicki spend the rest of the day?
3. Why won't Sam let Danny cross over the rope bridge?
4. For what reason does Mr Allen return to the creek to fix the fence? What is Danny's reaction to this reason?
5. Why do the Allens have to leave the farm?

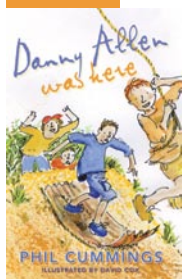
## Chapter 7

1. Why does Vicki like the empty house?
2. What happens when Mrs Allen says she hope they have left nothing behind?
3. Why does Danny get to ride in the truck with his father and Mr Thompson?
4. What is the song playing on the car radio during the trip to the city?



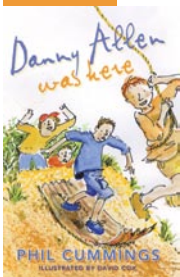
## CHARACTERS – QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

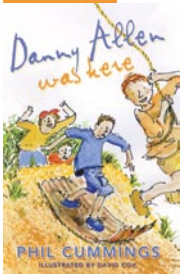
- Draw a chart with the names of your five favourite characters heading up five separate columns. In each column list the descriptions and characteristics of each person.
- With which character do you most identify? Give detailed reasons why.
- With which character do you least identify? Give detailed reasons why.
- Describe and discuss how many of the characters in *Danny Allen was Here* are familiar to you in your own life.
- Phil Cummings has written a story about a real-life character, living in a small country town, involved in everything town life has to offer. How has he portrayed Danny's strengths and weaknesses? How do conflict, human nature and relationships evolve in Danny's life?
- Danny's mother sets aside cooking/baking days. Living on a farm means that she is able to help out on the farm while still remaining at home to look after the family. List and describe any occupations/jobs that mothers can do from home? How many mothers do you know who work from home? What do they do?
- Danny has an older, and sometimes bossy, brother to whom he looks up, and a younger sister, who is sometimes a pest. Can you identify with Danny and his relationship with his siblings? If so, describe your relationships to each other.
- Mark Thompson starts off as a hero in Danny's eyes – after all, he believes Mark knows everything about everything! Mark is supposed to be able to kick a footy over the Mundowie Institute Hall; he rides his bike down the playground slide; he has spent the night alone in the haunted Miller place. How accurate is Danny's estimation of Mark? What evidence gradually emerges to make Danny change his opinions about Mark?
- Describe and discuss any people you have met who boast about their ability to do great things. How would you deal with such a person?
- List and discuss the occasions that show the sensitive and caring side of Danny's character.



## THE SETTING – QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

- Describe the following:
  1. The Mundowie township
  2. The Miller place
  3. The big creek
  4. Danny's secret palce
- Draw a chart listing and comparing the differences you would encounter living on a farm in the country and living in a suburban house in the city.
- Draw a map of the area where you live, showing your home, school, shops, playgrounds and locations of other activities with which you occupy your time. How does your living space compare with Danny's?
- How does Mundowie, and Danny's life there, compare with your notion of life in a country town? Would you find lots of things that you would like to do? Perhaps you have spent some time living in a small country town. If so, what parallels can you draw between Danny's experiences and your own?
- Describe and discuss what a youngster like Danny would find to occupy his time in the city.
- On pages 187–8, Danny and Sam are in bed discussing their move to the city. Sam says that there are heaps of things to do in the city. Danny replies that there are heaps of things to do in Mundowie. What are some of the activities that Danny enjoys? Describe these and then list and describe some of the activities children may enjoy in a city setting.





## THEMES/ISSUES

The book touches on many themes and issues, all of which relate and are relevant to the lives of adults and children in rural and urban environments. While the author uses a rural setting in which to illustrate these, and the central character is a child, everyone can identify with many of the themes and issues within this text. Below are some these.

### GUILT/FEAR/RESPONSIBILITY

- In Chapter 1, Danny becomes petrified and even loses his voice when he remembers that he and Sam have left Vicki at the dam. Why is Danny feeling so guilty and frightened? Describe an experience in your life when you felt guilty and/or frightened – how did you react?
- In Chapter 1, Vicki stays behind at the dam, during a thunderstorm, to catch more tadpoles. Why do you think she does this? Would you have done the same? Why?
- In Chapter 1, How much do believe Vicki's feelings of guilt and responsibility for losing the tadpoles play a role in her disregard for her personal safety and her fear of thunderstorms when she remains at the dam? Might she have had other motivations for her actions? If so, what do you think they might be?
- In Chapter 4, Danny's mother takes out her anger and frustrations on Danny, resulting in his running away. Why do you really think she lost her temper? She does apologise to Danny, but he still runs away. What does Danny's mother do to make amends to him for her out-of-character behaviour? Why wasn't saying sorry enough?

### PEER PRESSURE/PRIDE

- Describe what you think is the meaning of peer pressure?
- Describe what you think is the meaning of pride?
- In Chapter 1, Danny knows that he may get hurt trying to cross the creek by the old sheep track. He also knows it is foolish to ride a bike down the playground slide. Why do you think Danny does these things anyway? What have you ever done that you know you shouldn't have, and why?
- Danny is a boy with pride. Provide examples where his pride influences his actions and discuss them.

## DEATH/LOSS/GRIEF

- In Chapter 1, Vicki's frog, Snot, dies. In Chapter 5, Danny's pet dog, Tippy, dies, after being bitten by a snake. How do the members of the Allen family deal with these deaths? Have you ever suffered the loss of a pet? If so, how did you deal with your loss and grief?
- In Chapters 6 and 7, we see the Allens lose their farm and prepare to move to the city. They have lost their home. Danny is losing the life he loved to lead. How do the various members of the Allen family react to and deal with this loss? Have you ever lost anything precious? If so, how did you deal with your loss?
- In various parts of the text, reference is made to the Thompson family losing their farm. How have the Thompson family reacted to the loss of their farm? How does this compare with the Allen family? The loss of the Thompson farm may also have resulted in another loss for Mr Thomson and Mark – what is this other loss?

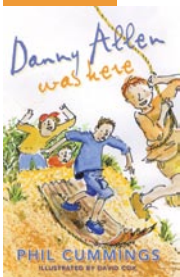
## CHANGE/ACCEPTANCE

Life never stays still. Even if you never move away from your original home and things in your hometown do not appear to have changed, you change – you grow from being a child into an adult and then into an old person. However, mostly things around you change as much as you do. The biggest change to Danny's life is about to take place when the Allen family move from the little township of Mundowie to the city.

- List and give evidence, then discuss how each member of the Allen family accepts their fate.
- How do you think the Allen family will cope with life in the city? Discuss your reasons.

## INNOCENCE/NAIVETY

- Throughout the whole book, Danny is oblivious to the hints that all is not well with the farm. List and discuss all the hints that Danny misses. Why do you think he never realises what was going on? Why do you think Sam does? Apart from Mr and Mrs Allen, who else suspects that things are not going well?
- Danny cannot understand why his father doesn't like the bank man. Why do you think Danny likes him? Even Mark appears to dislike him – what does Mark say on page 40 to prove this?
- Danny is not quite sure why his father refers to the bank man as 'Adolf'. Why do you think Danny's father calls the man Adolf?





## DROUGHT

Drought is to blame for the loss of the Allen farm.

- What is drought? Research newspapers and keep a scrap book of articles which discuss the drought in Australia.
- We think about drought effecting people on the land, the farmers. However, even city people are affected; the whole country can suffer. Draw up a chart with three columns. In one column list all the effects a drought might have on the farmers, in the second the effects on people living in the city, and in the third the effects on a country as a whole.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout the text we follow Danny's exploits which describe his relationships with the people around him, the animals in his life, and his environment.

- Describe Danny's relationship with:
  1. Tippy
  2. Each member of his family
  3. Stanley the Ram
  4. Mark Thompson
  5. His environment

