



MAX: THROUGH MY EYES – AUSTRALIAN DISASTER ZONES

Written by PRUE MASON, with Series Editor LYN WHITE

RECOMMENDED FOR: Ages 11–14 YEARS OLD (UPPER PRIMARY/LOWER SECONDARY)

GENRE: Middle Fiction, Contemporary Realistic Fiction

THEMES: Climate change, flood, disaster resilience, courage, friendship, family, community, identity, homelessness, coping with change and loss, multiculturalism, environmentalism and activism, Vietnamese culture

CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:

- English: Literature, literacy and language
- Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS): Civics and Citizenship, Geography, Science
- Visual Art
- Cross-curriculum priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Sustainability

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INTRODUCTION

Max is an active twelve-year-old boy living in Brisbane. He loves footy, playing trombone and helping his mum make goi cuon on Sunday nights. One day, while practising one-eighties on his new bike, Max meets Trent. Trent is small, but really fast, and might be even better at footy than Max. The two boys hit it off, but Max can't shake the feeling that there's something wrong, and that Trent is lying about his family. When Brisbane is hit by a sudden flood, it's up to Max and his community to come together to keep each other safe. But will Max be able to save Trent?

PLOT SUMMARY

Twelve-year-old Max and his friend and neighbour Bianca share a love for Brisbane's wetland, realising their importance in mitigating the effects of climate change. Max's mum Anh is an 'ace' helicopter pilot, and his dad Thom is an environmental engineer. Anh takes them on a helicopter ride to view the wetlands from above, where Thom tells Max and Bianca that Brisbane was built in the middle of a flood plain. Since it's only meant to flood once every hundred years, Max isn't worried.

One day, Max cycles down to the local oval where he meets Trent. Trent explains that he, his mum and little sister Shaelyn moved up from Newcastle because his mum lost her job during COVID. Max really likes Trent, but he gets the feeling that Trent isn't telling him everything.

Brisbane is having an unusually wet summer, and Anh has to rescue stranded people in her helicopter. Meanwhile, Max tries out for the football team at school, and is thrilled when he and his schoolfriend Mahoney both make the team. Later at the oval, Trent confides in Max that he isn't enrolled in school because he has to look after Shaelyn while his mum interviews for jobs. Max promises to keep his secret.

Thom tells Max he's heard rumours that there's a family living in their car on the oval. Max realises it might be Trent, but doesn't want to say anything in case he is wrong. Overnight, more surrounding areas experience flooding, including Ipswich, where Mahoney lives. Knowing someone affected by the flooding suddenly makes it all feel real for Max. He goes to the oval to look for Trent and finds him and his family in their car. Trent's mum Lou is aggressive towards Max, and tells him to go away, saying they don't need help. Max reluctantly leaves.

The street starts flooding in the night and Max receives an SOS text from Trent: Lou has taken Shaelyn to hospital for her asthma and Trent has stayed with their car. The water is rising fast and the car is rocking. Meanwhile, Max is worried his mum won't be able to fly home, while the rapidly rising waters inundate neighbouring houses, including Bianca's. In a moment of high suspense and stress, Max helps an elderly neighbour, Mr Vickers, to safety.

Max and Bianca's dad Daniel kayak to the oval to rescue Trent. They find him hanging on to a branch of a mango tree while the water rages underneath. They finally get Trent safely back to Max's house.

The neighbours come together to keep each other safe, and the next morning the storm has passed. Max and Thom help reunite Trent with his mum and sister at an evacuation centre. Trent's family embrace each other and Lou thanks Max and Thom for everything they've done, explaining that it's hard for people in her position to know who to trust.

Afterwards, Daniel takes a job in Sydney to design flood-resistant houses. Bianca plans to study urban design so she can help create sustainable cities. Trent and his family move back to Newcastle after Lou gets a new job. Through it all, Max learns the value of friendship, community and the importance of taking responsibility to work towards a more sustainable future.

BEFORE READING

- **Learning about Country**

- *Max* is set in Brisbane and the surrounding areas during the 2022 floods. Ask students to share any information they have about Brisbane and locate the city on a map of Australia. Locate the key places that are located on the map of south-east Queensland at the front of the text.
- The affected region covers the land (Country) of several First Nations language groups, including:
 - Turrbal
 - Kabi Kabi
 - Jinibara

Separate students into three groups, and assign each with a different First Nations name to research. Guide students with the following prompts:

- What area of land does the name cover?
- Does the name refer to the place (Country), the people, or both?
- What is your understanding of Country? Is it more than the physical space? Visit [Welcome to Country](#) for more information.
- What is one tradition or custom from this region?
- Why is this region now known by a different name?
- Consider: who gets to decide land ownership and the names of places?

Have students make notes in whatever format they prefer: bullet points, mind-map, short answer, etc. Once groups have gathered their information, engage in a class discussion about what they have learned. Use the prompts to encourage questions and debate.

- **Extension I**

- Students can make posters about their assigned First Nations language group to display in the classroom.

- **Extension 2**

- Invite students to research other First Nations language groups affected by the floods:
 - Quandamooka
 - Kombumerri
 - Ngarang-Wal
 - Mununjali
 - Wangerriburra

You can link the above activities to the Cross-curriculum priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

- **Floods**

- Ask the class: what do we know about the 2022 floods? What do we understand about floods in general? Create a class mind-map on the interactive whiteboard with '2022 floods' in the middle. Students may be unfamiliar with the event, so you can scaffold the discussion by adding terms like *Brisbane*, *climate change*, *high- and low-pressure systems*, *La Nina* and *El Nino*.
- Have students call out terms they associate with either the event or flooding in general. Other useful terms to include are *poverty*, *loss*, *grief*, *damage* and *destruction*. Review the mind-map together as a class.
- Further information about the event and flooding in general can be found in the Online Resources section at the end of these notes.

- **On the Cover**

- Examine the front and back covers of the book as a class. Consider everything that is made available to the reader: the title, design/style, image choices, blurb, etc. Afterwards, pose the following question to the class:
- What do we **know** from the information available? What **predictions** can we make about the book based on this information?

Q&A WITH PRUE MASON

What important message do you hope to convey?

'I'm pleased to be able to highlight the courage and resilience of the people not just in Brisbane but those in Gympie and the Sunshine Coast, and particularly the farmers who lost their homes and livelihoods overnight. I also believe it's important to highlight the challenges we all face with the weather extremes that are occurring around the world so we can learn to adapt and develop strategies that allow us all to live with our changing environments.'

What inspired your writing of the story?

'I was pleased to contribute because memories of my own experiences of that flood were still vivid as we were living in the Moreton Bay region, which was severely impacted.'

'Our small town of Beachmere was cut off for two days by water across the only two incoming roads. During that time we lost power and drinking water and no one could get in to solve the water problem. Because our house is built up on stumps we only suffered minimal damage, but a number of our neighbours were not so lucky. There was a lot of help with sandbagging more vulnerable homes and, as the power cut continued, our local IGA opened its doors and allowed those who needed it to take food that would go off otherwise. Through the community Facebook page (while phones remained charged), people asked for help moving their animals that included goats, horses, cows, dogs and cats to safer grounds, and there was always a positive response. During this time, it never stopped raining.'

The continual heavy rain was oppressive but the way neighbours helped each other was inspiring, so although my book is fictional it is based on real-life events.'

What did you learn by writing this book?

'It was fascinating doing research for the story because it opened up new insights for me about Brisbane. The main one being that it appears to be built in the wrong place – right in the middle of a major flood plain. With environmental damage and catastrophic weather events around the world due to climates changing with various knock-on effects, the frequency of the Brisbane River flooding is becoming the new normal.'

'Also, now thanks to writing this book, I've learned that mangroves are the superheroes of the natural world. They not only reduce coastal erosion but act as a filter from the land to the ocean. They support biodiversity by offering homes to birds, crustaceans and even baby sharks, plus they store carbon so they can help reduce global warming. Definitely, absolutely, completely mangroves are the superheroes in my book!'

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

ENGLISH

LITERATURE

Year 6: Identify the relationship between words, sounds, imagery and language patterns in narratives and poetry such as ballads, limericks and free verse (ACELT1617)

Year 6: Create literary texts that adapt or combine aspects of texts students have experienced in innovative ways (ACELT1618)

Year 7: Compare the ways that language and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts (ACELT1621)

Year 7: Create literary texts that adapt stylistic features encountered in other texts, for example, narrative viewpoint, structure of stanzas, contrast and juxtaposition (ACELT1625)

Year 8: Identify and evaluate devices that create tone, for example humour, wordplay, innuendo and parody in poetry, humorous prose, drama or visual texts (ACELT1630)

Creating Tension

- In Chapter 2, on p. 15, consider how the language choices create rising tension:
 - *'This helicopter isn't equipped ... for flying in bad weather.'*
 - *Bianca was starting to sound freaked out.*
 - *Max's own chest was beginning to tighten.*
 - *Max could tell [Dad] was trying to sound more cheerful than he looked.*
 - *Mum's voice was terse.*

With a partner, discuss the following:

- What techniques can writers use to create tension?
- How can we tell from the examples above if a character is feeling anxious or scared?
- What information is given to the reader to signpost that there might be danger coming?

Using this information, write your own short paragraph that creates rising tension. You can use characters from the book or make up your own.

LITERACY

Year 6: Participate in and contribute to discussions, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing and supporting arguments, sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions (ACELY1709)

Year 6: Analyse how text structures and language features work together to meet the purpose of a text (ACELY1711)

Year 7: Analyse and explain the ways text structures and language features shape meaning and vary according to audience and purpose (ACELY1721)

Year 8: Apply increasing knowledge of vocabulary, text structures and language features to understand the content of texts (ACELY1733)

Character Description

- Read the character description of Mr Vickers on p. 42 and consider the following:
 - What tools does the author use to make Mr Vickers 'come alive' to the reader?
 - How does she create imagery with descriptive language?
- Write a paragraph describing one of the following characters: Max, Bianca, Trent, Simone, Daniel or Anh. Based on what you know about them from the book, use your imagination to 'fill in the blanks' about any details that aren't known to the reader. Be as detailed as possible. You can use the following prompts to help:
 - What is the character's hair like? Thick, wavy, curly, short? Do they style their hair?
 - Would the character wear jewellery? Do they have earrings, a necklace, rings, etc.?
 - What state would their clothes be in? Neat, muddy, ironed, crumpled, etc.?
 - What would they smell like? Do they have a favourite perfume they wear?

Afterwards, share your work with others who chose the same character. How are your descriptions similar or different? Why do you think this is? Expand on your reasoning for your choices as a group.

Imagery

- Read the following descriptions from the book:
 - *As rigid as a cricket bat*
 - *Concrete mountain [to describe Gateway Bridge]*
 - *Line of cars and trucks crawling along the four lanes of each side of the long, steep bridge. Further below the wide, brown Brisbane River meandered lazily out to sea*
 - *'The river really is like a big brown snake curling through the city'*
 - *a build-up of bubbling, cauliflower-like clouds in the afternoon that got greyer and darker as they covered the sky*
 - *plinking and plunking of drops*
 - *trains clunking and clanking*

- *The thin beam of the torch on his head danced on the swirling, muddy water ahead of him*

As a class, discuss how similes, metaphors, adjectives, personification and onomatopoeia are used to create imagery through descriptive language. Afterwards, use these tools to create imagery for one of the following prompts:

- A dog playing at the park
- Someone stuck in traffic
- Going to a festival
- Running late for a meeting

Consider the sights, sounds and smells of the place. Is it crowded? What is the weather like? Is it hot, cold, muggy? How are people feeling? Are they relaxed, stressed, exhausted? Be as descriptive as you can!

LANGUAGE

Year 6: Investigate how vocabulary choices, including evaluative language can express shades of meaning, feeling and opinion (ACELA1525)

Year 7: Investigate vocabulary typical of extended and more academic texts and the role of abstract nouns, classification, description and generalisation in building specialised knowledge through language (ACELA1537)

Year 8: Recognise that vocabulary choices contribute to the specificity, abstraction and style of texts (ACELA1547)

Vocabulary Exercise I

- Individually, research the vocabulary words below and write down their definitions. Note: to read these words in context, visit the corresponding page numbers to see how they are used in a sentence.
 - 12 Meandered
 - 33 Reneging
 - 34 Exertion
 - 43 Quadrangle
 - 48 Disgorging
 - 66 Inundation
 - 77 Louvres
 - 77 Sullen
 - 81 Alkalinity

- I10 Incorporated
- I43 Impassable
- I43 Catastrophe
- I44 Disorientated
- I52 Fusty
- I53 Impose
- I61 Miasma

Vocabulary Exercise 2

- Choose one vocabulary word from the list above (or the teacher can assign), and complete the accompanying worksheet at the end of these notes. If time permits, students could complete worksheets for multiple vocabulary words.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING AREA: VISUAL ARTS, YEARS 7 AND 8

Experiment with visual arts conventions and techniques, including exploration of techniques used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to represent a theme, concept or idea in their artwork (ACAVAM118)

Practise techniques and processes to enhance representation of ideas in their art-making (ACAVAM121)

Present artwork demonstrating consideration of how the artwork is displayed to enhance the artist's intention to an audience (ACAVAM122)

Mangroves Are Superheroes

- In pairs or small groups, design a slideshow on the importance of mangroves and the wetlands for our planet. Include images and information on wetland eco systems, the creatures that live there, the birds that use them as migratory places to stay, and where wetlands are in Australia and around the world. Use the text to point out the wetlands around Brisbane and the important places for birds, such as High Tide Roost, that Max and Bianca fly over in the story.
- Individually, have students create a picture of a mangrove tree that includes three reasons why mangroves are superheroes. Students might like to visit the [Q&A](#) with the author for more insight.
- Encourage students to experiment with different styles and mediums, and to research the techniques of the First Nations language groups from the region (see Before Reading). Students can research [Indigenous artists](#) to better understand differences in style, medium/s, content and colour between language groups, and experiment with applying these techniques in their work.

- Join all these pictures together to make a banner for the classroom.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING AREA: VISUAL ARTS, YEARS 7 AND 8

Year 6: Develop appropriate questions to guide an inquiry about people, events, developments, places, systems and challenges (ACHASSI122)

ADDITIONAL LEARNING AREA: CIVICS AND CITIZENSHIP

Year 7: Appreciate multiple perspectives and use strategies to mediate differences (ACHCS057)

Year 8: Different perspectives about Australia's national identity, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, and what it means to be Australian (ACHCK066)

Year 8: How national identity can shape a sense of belonging in Australia's multicultural society (ACHCK067)

Year 8: Appreciate multiple perspectives and use strategies to mediate differences (ACHCS071)

Exploring Culture

- Discuss: Revisit Chapter 3 and discuss as a class. Consider the following:
 - What do I already know about Vietnam and Vietnamese culture? What new things did I learn from this chapter?
 - What new words/vocabulary did I learn?
 - Where is Saigon, where Ba ngoai is from? Why did Ba ngoai leave?
- Research
 - What is the tradition of li xi?
 - Ba ngoai calls Max a 'tiger child' because he was born in the year of the tiger. Research [what year you were born in](#) and what it means.
- Compare and contrast
 - How do the traditions in the book compare to any traditions or customs in your family?
 - Max's family have 'goi cuon night' every Sunday. Does your family have any similar traditions or a favourite food you like to share?
- Extension
 - Students can bring in a recipe (from their own culture or a family favourite) to make a class recipe book that celebrates diversity and multiculturalism.

What Does It Mean to be Australian?

- On p. 28, Trent says to Max, 'But you don't look Australian.' What does this mean?

As a class, consider the following:

- What does an Australian 'look like'? Is there only one way to 'look' Australian?
 - What makes a person Australian?
 - Max explains: 'Mum always said everyone who wasn't an Indigenous Australian came from somewhere else.' What does this mean?
 - What is a 'ten-pound Pom'?
 - Why does Trent assume Max's parents weren't born in Australia?
- Family history poster

Max discusses how his family came to Australia from different countries. What is your own family history? Create a poster with as much detail as possible. Consider:

- Did your family come to Australia from somewhere else? If so, where, when and why?
- Whereabouts is your family from in Australia? What Indigenous Country are you from? Use [this map](#) as a guide.

This activity can be linked to the Visual Arts modules listed above. Encourage students to use a range of mediums in creating their posters and to experiment with different styles and designs.

Note: Use teacher discretion as not all students will know details about their family history or be willing to share this history, particularly those living in foster or kinship care. You can focus this activity on researching the area students live in now if family history is unknown.

- Expansion

As a class, read the picture book *My Place (2008)* by Nadia Wheatley or *I'm Australian Too (2017)* by Mem Fox, illustrated by Ronojoy Gosh. Consider what message the book makes about being Australian and compare this to *Max*.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING AREA: GEOGRAPHY & SCIENCE

Year 7: Causes, impacts and responses to an atmospheric or hydrological hazard (ACHGK042)

Year 7 & 8: Apply geographical concepts to draw conclusions based on the analysis of the data and information collected (ACHGS052)

ADDITIONAL LEARNING AREA: SCIENCE

Year 6: Sudden geological changes and extreme weather events can affect Earth's surface (ACSSU096)

Year 7: Predictable phenomena on Earth, including seasons and eclipses, are caused by the relative positions of the sun, Earth and the moon (ACSSU115)

Understanding Climate Change & Weather Events

- Reread the discussion on La Nina and El Nino on p. 40 and high and low-pressure systems on p. 41. Discuss your understanding in small groups, making note of any questions you have. Research your questions to enhance your understanding (you may like to use the links provided at the end of these notes). Afterwards, create a mind-map on the board based on everyone's findings and discuss as a class.

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

LEARNING AREA: FUTURES

This also links to **GEOGRAPHY** as follows:

Year 7: The influence of environmental quality on the liveability of places (ACHGK045)

Year 7 & 8: Reflect on their learning to propose individual and collective action in response to a contemporary geographical challenge, taking account of environmental, economic and social considerations, and predict the expected outcomes of their proposal (ACHGS062)

Year 8: Human causes and effects of landscape degradation (ACHGK051)

Year 8: Ways of protecting significant landscapes (ACHGK052)

How Can We Help?

- Discussion: Reread this section from p. 14:

Max had only been a toddler during [the 2011] floods, so it hadn't affected him. He'd never really thought about another flood threatening Brisbane. Surely it couldn't happen again. Could it?

At this stage of the book, Max believes flooding in Brisbane to be a 'once-in-a-hundred-years' event. Does this mean it is someone else's problem? Or a problem for the next generation?

Now consider the following Greek proverb:

A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit.

Discuss as a class. What does the proverb mean? Who is responsible for the future?

Taking Action

- After your discussion, brainstorm in groups about how you might help make positive changes for the future and advocate for your local environment. Think about the examples shown in the book. For example:
 - Max, Bianca and Thom removing rubbish from the creek (see p. 10)
 - Bianca's T-shirts with her own captions printed on them
 - How the community comes together to help each other during and after the flood

- As a class, decide on a project you can complete together to take action. You might consider:
 - Cleaning up a local greenspace or hosting a 'clean up' day at school to raise awareness about littering and pollution
 - Writing to local politicians about your concerns about your local area
 - Creating a petition
 - Putting on a show about climate change

Extension

- Go on a nature walk as a class and complete the accompanying worksheet. You can use this to help formulate plans of action for your local area.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prue Mason has travelled Australia and the world as a flight attendant and sometimes co-pilot on a private aeroplane with her husband, a professional pilot. They lived in Canada for three years, then the Gulf region of the Middle East for twelve years where she worked for children's newspaper *Young Times* writing feature articles, short stories and a counselling column. As a CELTA trained teacher, Prue also taught English as a foreign language to Arabic speakers. Prue returned to Australia in 2001. Her award-winning book *Camel Rider*, as well as *Destination Abudai* and *Zafir: Through My Eyes*, were written based on her experiences of living and travelling in the Middle East. Prue and her husband own a vintage plane and often fly over Cape Bridgewater at sunset in south-west Victoria near where they live.

ABOUT THE SERIES EDITOR & SERIES CREATOR

Lyn White has been a primary school teacher, teacher-librarian and EAL teacher for more than 20 years and an editor for 12 years. She is passionate about children's literature, committed to developing life-long reading habits in children, and has great expertise in engaging students with quality texts and teachers with quality resources. Her work with refugee children inspired the first series of *Through My Eyes* set in war zones. The second series, *Natural Disaster Zones*, won the 2019 Educational Publishing Award for Primary Chapter Book. The third series, *Australian Disaster Zones* was inspired by Lyn's commitment to building resilience and student activism in the face of escalating climate disaster. Lyn is an education consultant and conference presenter.

ABOUT THE WRITER OF THE NOTES

Dr Sarah Mokrzycki lives and works on Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung land. She has a PhD on the importance of family diversity in Australian picture books, with research interests in child welfare, representation and environmentalism in children's literature. Sarah has been a guest speaker for the National Centre of Australian Children's Literature, the Australian School Library Association and Care Experience and Culture. She has published peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on her research, and presented at conferences both locally and internationally. Sarah is a non-bio mum of three children from fostering backgrounds, and a passionate advocate for children at risk.

CORRESPONDING LITERATURE

Additional background information can be found on the sites listed below:

First Nations and Country:

- First Nations: <https://www.museum.qld.gov.au/learn-and-discover/first-nations>
- Connecting with Country: <https://www.qld.gov.au/firstnations/environment-land-use-native-title/connecting-with-country>

Climate change:

- Climate change explained in 5 minutes (video):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXvIP9Zyxss>
- How El Nino and La Nina cause extreme weather (video):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TC7Pg8tUuqQ>

Figurative language:

- Figurative Language Examples: How to Use These 5 Common Types:
<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/figurative-language/>
- Onomatopoeia: Definition & Usage Examples:
<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/onomatopoeia/>

ONLINE LINKS IN FULL

From 'Before Reading>Learning about Country'

- Welcome to Country:
<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/welcome-country>

From 'Before Reading>Floods'

- Brisbane flood/rain event:
<https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/community-and-safety/community-safety/2022-severe-weather-event-recovery>
- Flooding in general:
<http://www.bom.gov.au/australia/flood/knowledge-centre/understanding.shtml>
<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/flood/>

From 'Mangroves are superheroes'

- Indigenous Art Code
- <https://www.indigenousartcode.org/>

From 'Exploring culture'

- Vietnamese zodiac
<https://www.vietnamonline.com/culture/vietnamese-zodiac.html>

From 'What does it mean to be Australian?>Family history poster'

- Indigenous Australia map
<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>

From 'Understanding climate change and weather events'

- What is climate change?
<https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>
- How do high and low weather systems work?
<https://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2013/01/31/3679358.htm>

WORKSHEETS

Nature Walk Worksheet

Location/Area	
Ecosystem/habitat type	
Description of local flora Note: are you able to identify native wildlife compared to introduced or invasive species? If you aren't sure what is native and what is not, research this when you return to the classroom.	
Description of local fauna Note: are you able to identify native wildlife compared to introduced or invasive species? If you aren't sure what is native and what is not, research this when you return to the classroom.	
Can you identify any threats to the local habitat? For example, is the area near a busy road? Is there litter that could hurt local wildlife?	
Based on what you observe, what are some ideas you have for protecting/preserving the area?	
Provide a hand-drawn map of the area and label accordingly.	

WORKSHEETS**Vocabulary Worksheet**

Word	
Meaning/Definition	
Synonyms	
How does this word choice express a particular feeling or meaning?	
How does it add to the style or tone of the story? (Consider: would it 'feel' different if another word was used?)	
Use the word in a sentence	