

# Teachers Notes (Middle Years)

## by Michelle Praver

# Bridie's Fire

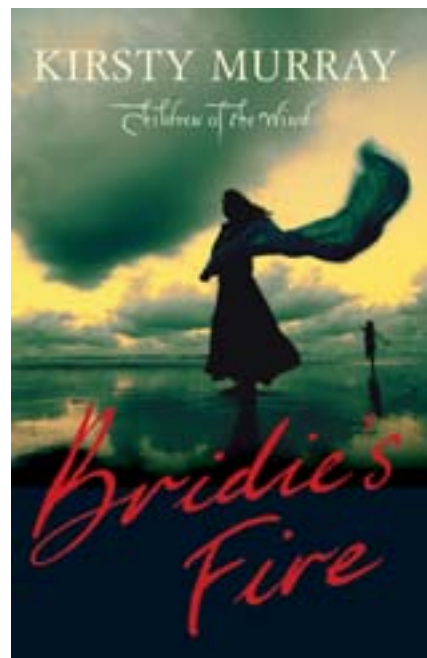
## Kirsty Murray

ISBN 9781865087276

Recommended for ages 10 - 14.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE CHILDREN OF THE WIND SERIES

The **Children of the Wind** quartet is made up of four inter-linked novels for 10- to 14-year-olds, dealing with the lives of three Irish child immigrants to Australia and a modern Australian girl of mixed Chinese/Irish heritage.

<i>Bridie's Fire</i>	1848 – 1852	Published 2003
<i>Becoming Billy Dare</i>	1898 – 1902	Published 2004
<i>A Prayer for Blue Delaney</i>	1952 – 1956	Published 2005
<i>The Secret Life of Maeve Lee Kwong</i>	2003 – 2005	Published 2005

The central child character of each story becomes the adult mentor of the child in the succeeding book. The sweep of time covered, and the buffeting of the winds of change, allow Murray to take in and link numerous themes beyond that of the Irish contribution to Australia:

The lost child/parent	Australian theatre tradition	Refugees
Working children	Organised child migration schemes	Families – natural and made
Immigration	Servant life	Economic migration and the globalised workplace
Poverty and survival	'Belonging' in an immigrant nation	
Change and continuity	Mixed heritage – choosing our identity	
The search for identity		
The child moulding her own destiny		

Settings include: Colonial Melbourne (Toorak and turn of the century Fitzroy), Victorian gold fields, Fremantle, the deserts of Western Australia and South Australia, the Dingo Fence, the Melbourne Olympic Games, Ireland, Hong Kong.

## PLOT SUMMARY

*Suitable for middle years and higher, this book tells an exciting story and is a gripping tale. There are moments of tears, moments of exasperation and moments of tension. Because this story brings history to life, it would make a valuable contribution to both the SOSE and English classroom. In a school where SOSE and English are taught by the same teacher and are dealt with under the one umbrella, this book would be ideal.*

The potato famine of 1845 strikes with a vengeance in the town of Dingle, Ireland, and forces people to take to the streets in a desperate search for food and shelter. Bridie O'Connor is a passionate and fiery girl who leads her brother Brandon to the safety of the workhouse after being directed by their desperately ill mother to leave her in a ditch to die. As an 11 year old, she burns with the vision of a better life and this book takes us on her journey to find a safe environment in which to build a future. Having buried her father and her two siblings, her final promise to her mother is to protect Brandon and bring him to safety. She therefore drags him against his will to the workhouse where she is befriended by Caitlin, an opportunistic young girl with a good heart.

In spite of the hardship of working all day, Bridie is fed and clothed and she begins to learn the rudiments of English from Caitlin as they vow never to be separated (a promise Caitlin easily discards when confronted with the opportunity to better her own situation).

When Bridie is offered the opportunity to travel to Australia to be indentured there, she has to choose to separate from her brother in order to seize the opportunity and carve out her own future. She hopes to earn enough money to bring Brandon out to Australia at a later time. The separation is agonizing both for the children and the reader yet Bridie and Caitlin persevere in their quest to make their way with over two hundred other girls on board the ship 'Diadem' to Port Philip Bay. The trip brings a true **wind of change** and in spite of being indentured as a scullery maid and working long hours answering even to the needs of children younger than herself, Bridie carves out a place and becomes an indispensable member of the servant staff of Melbourne's De Quincy family. Her wonderful ability to tell stories endears her to young Gilbert De Quincy. When time allows, she escapes from duties to fill his head with the delightful tales which used to entertain her cousins and siblings before they all perished in the famine.

Gold fever strikes and the promise of earning enough money to bring Brandon to Australia causes Bridie, disguised as a boy, to flee to Ballarat to seek her fortune. Gilbert De Quincey, desperate to escape from the promised threat

of being sent to school in England, joins her and in spite of being tricked and robbed, sleeping under the elements and shooting bushrangers, they do indeed find a nugget! But life in the gold fields is gruelling and Gilbert is eventually reclaimed by his family. With no such choice available to Bridie, and having committed the criminal offence of escaping an indenture, she makes her way alone, finding work instead as a maid and seamstress for Eddie and Amaranta Bones who eventually establish the first theatre in the goldfields.

Although the reader yearns to see Bridie reunited with Brandon and the promise to her dying mother kept, there is no hint at the book's closure of any contact being made between them. The reader is however satisfied that Bridie does find happiness when she falls in love with a charming and handsome young member of the theatre troupe.

Spanning several significant moments in history, the book succeeds in making each one a palpably real current event.

*Bridie's Fire is a strong and engaging story firmly based on historical fact. Between 1848 and 1850, more than twelve hundred girls aged between 9 and 18 were taken from the workhouses of Ireland and shipped to Melbourne to become serving girls to the colonial middle class. Kirsty Murray has travelled to Ireland to research the Great Hunger, as the potato famine was called, and her research on the workhouse girls and the early gold rush period is equally thorough; from that she has woven a heartfelt story that is rich in incident and detail.*

## INVESTIGATING HISTORICAL FICTION

### WHY HISTORICAL FICTION?

Although based on real periods in history, this book is clearly a fictionalized account of the events of the time, interwoven with Murray's imaginative description of Bridie's emotional life, her concerns, and thoughts. Geraldine Brooks in the Afterword to her book *Year of Wonders* (a novel of the plague)<sup>1</sup> asks herself, "What would it be like, I wondered....two thirds of your neighbours were dead within a year? How would faith, relationships and social order survive?" Teachers should direct students to think about how Murray answers this same question for her own character, Bridie O'Connor. How do the famine and her ordeal affect Bridie's faith, her relationships and her social order? Brooks goes on to say, "...the historical novelist works best if fed on 'short rations' by the factual record."<sup>2</sup> Teachers should discuss this concept with students.

Discuss:

- How true to the historical period must a work of historical fiction actually be?
- Must it contain lots of historical data?
- Must it be totally faithful to the period it describes if it is indeed historical *fiction*?
- How is a book of historical fiction to be judged?

Gary Crew, author of many works of historical fiction argues<sup>3</sup> that good historical fiction aims to breathe life into characters, relationships, emotions and feelings so that the readers understand what it was truly like for an individual to live in those times.

Discuss:

- Do you agree with this explanation of the purpose of historical fiction?
- Is Bridie's' Fire successful historical fiction?

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<sup>1</sup> Brooks, Geraldine. *Year of Wonders: a novel of the plague*, Fourth Estate, London 2001 p.308

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*,

<sup>3</sup> CBC ASLA conference Hobart, Tasmania October 2003 'Oh no not history'

## WRITING HISTORICAL FICTION: HAVE A GO!

Choose a period of history which you are currently studying. Invent a character of your own age who is likely to have been involved even as an onlooker in the period you are exploring. Answer the following questions about yourself:

- How would this character have experienced this historical event?
- Where were they living at the time?
- How did the events change their life or the life of their family and friends?
- How did the event impact on their future?

Having considered these questions, write your own piece of historical fiction ensuring that you stay within the guidelines presented by Geraldine Brooks.

## WIDER READING EXTENSION

Older students could read *Year of Wonders* (2001, Fourth Estate) and critically analyse it in accordance with Brooks' own criteria. Younger students could read of the same events in Jill Paton Walsh's *A Parcel of Patterns* (1986, Puffin).

Younger students could also explore the series **My Story** (Scholastic Australia). Each book is written in diary form by a young child who was involved in the historic events of the particular novel. Explore this in Literature Circles<sup>4</sup>

A Literature circle based on fiction about the gold rush could also be included. It would include books like:

- *The Apostle Bird* by Gary Disher
- *Valley of Gold* by Jackie French

## STUDIES OF SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

### MAPPING

Study the map of Ireland and trace Bridie's journey from Dunquin on the Dingle Peninsula to Dublin. Try to guess from clues in the novel which town the workhouse might have been in.

Mark the *Diadem's* likely voyage from Plymouth to Williamstown, via Van Diemen's Land, on a map of the world.

Using a map of Melbourne, mark the places named in the book eg. Toorak Village, Flinders Street, St Kilda Road, Punt Road, Lonsdale Street.

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<sup>4</sup> Literature Circles are an effective method of reading in the multi-level classroom and provide students with an avenue for sharing their thoughts with peers using minimal teacher direction.

#### Methodology

Teachers provide multiple copies of selected texts (no more than 5 of each title for the best results) and students choose to read a particular one based on personal preference after hearing a short introduction from the teacher. Each student decides on the number of pages to be read that night and students share ideas about their reading the following day. In this way, books are completed in a condensed and limited time frame. Discussions are totally student directed.

On the completion of the reading, students do a brief presentation of their discussion to the class.

Finally, trace Bridie and Gilbert's journey to Ballarat. (The route out of Melbourne is marked by modern-day Ballarat Road.)

Using a map of your own region, locate the Irish place names.

## RESEARCH & EXCURSIONS

Using the Internet and libraries, students should try to find photos/sketches of the places in the novel as they were at the turn of the century.

Victorian schools also have the opportunities of excursions to these Melbourne sites and to Sovereign Hill - the living history museum of the gold fields at Ballarat ([www.sovereignhill.com.au](http://www.sovereignhill.com.au)). Also, students could visit the monument to the orphan girls and the Irish famine in Williamstown.

There are also monuments to the orphan girls in Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney and in Yass, NSW.

The author, Kirsty Murray, refers students to some of the resources she used in her own research for *Bridie's Fire*:

*Barefoot and Pregnant - Volume II* by Trevor McClaughlin (Melbourne, 1991) is full of primary sources about the orphan girls. It has photos of the girls in later life and images of famine Ireland plus newspaper articles and extracts and the ship's lists of all the girls. It also has a good printed extract of a ship surgeon's diary. It should be available in most public libraries. (Volume II is much more child friendly than Volume I.) There is information about the book and the orphans on the website of the publisher, the Genealogical Society of Victoria: [www.gsv.org.au](http://www.gsv.org.au)

The ship surgeon's journal is also included in a book called *A Decent Set of Girls: The Irish Famine orphans of the Thomas Arbuthnot, 1849-1850* by Cheryl Morgan & Richard Reid, published by the Yass Historical Society History Project. There's also a full copy of the diary in the State Library of Victoria. The following site tells a little about *A Decent Set of Girls* and the author of the original journal, Surgeon Strutt: [www.local.ie/content/54175.shtml/genealogy/emigration\\_studies/emigration\\_stories](http://www.local.ie/content/54175.shtml/genealogy/emigration_studies/emigration_stories)

[www.irishfamine.org](http://www.irishfamine.org) has some information on the 150th anniversary of the orphan girls' arrival and the construction of the famine monument in Sydney to commemorate them.

[www.sag.org.au](http://www.sag.org.au) - is probably a little difficult for younger readers to navigate. It has online primary sources, photos, etc. SAG is the Society of Australian Genealogists.

<http://famineorphans.freesevers.com/links.htm> - has links to a lot of Irish and international sites.

## ASSESSING SOURCES

The Irish Famine is so well-documented (and mis-documented), even on the Internet, that it offers the opportunity to discuss credibility and accurate sourcing with students. The hardest task for students using the Internet will be to isolate credible and accurately sourced eye-witness accounts/illustrations of the Famine.

## CREATIVE WRITING

Research the major historical events referred to in the book and then write diary entries:

- Dingle, Ireland and the Potato Famine
- Emigration to Australia
- Workhouse life

- Gold Fever

Below are several approaches:

### **The Potato Famine**

In the 1500's, conflict between Ireland's English rulers and its Irish inhabitants led to continual fighting. As a result, the Irish farmers had difficulty growing enough food to feed themselves and their families. Thus, the introduction from the New World of the potato was a blessing because aside from producing more food per capita than any other crop grown thus far in Ireland, it was a nutritious food which had the added benefit of growing under ground, hidden from fighting troops and marauding soldiers. Thus its popularity grew. In fact, by the 1800's, the potato had become the major food source in Ireland allowing the population of the country to grow rapidly. Unfortunately, Ireland became too reliant on the potato, which was its principle crop, so that when 'The Blight' reached Ireland in 1845, it was a devastating blow. Many resorted to begging in the streets; others began wandering from town to town looking for food and shelter. Some landlords evicted tenants forcing many to seek refuge in workhouses.

One million people lost their lives.

#### Become a character in Ireland

Research the era of The Potato Famine and then write

- a newspaper article which announces the arrival of 'The Blight'
- a letter to the editor from a farmer whose crop and hence livelihood has been affected.

Refer to [www.people.virginia.edu/~eas5e/Irish.html](http://www.people.virginia.edu/~eas5e/Irish.html), which includes actual newspapers of the era. (This and similar sites are easily reached through Google searches combining 'Irish famine' with 'photographs', 'newspapers' etc.)

Students will be exposed to the conventions of written language of the times, which they may have noticed being used in the novel (eg. Gilbert's letter to Brandon p.115)

#### Extension Activity

Students may develop an entire newspaper front page which also includes advertisements for products of the time (hoes, carriages etc) a For Sale section (land, cattle etc) a Hatch, Match and Dispatch section. All entries to the page must be historically accurate and a bibliography provided.<sup>5</sup>

### **Emigration to Australia**

Read and compare some personal accounts of those who travelled to Australia and those who travelled to America on the coffin ships. See the author's sources (above) and [www.people.virginia.edu/~eas5e/Irish/Keegan.html](http://www.people.virginia.edu/~eas5e/Irish/Keegan.html)

Using your knowledge of Bridie's journey on the *Diadem* and other accounts of similar journeys, write a few diary entries as either

a) a passenger on a ship bound for Port Philip Bay

Or

b) a seaman who made several journeys to the New World and witnessed many events on board.

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<sup>5</sup> A fine example of a newspaper of the past is the series 'Chronicles of the Past' published by The Reuben Foundation P.O.B 7113, Jerusalem, Israel.

## Workhouses

*Bridie's Fire* devotes several chapters to life in the workhouses and details the plight of the young inmates. Develop the students' vision of these workhouses by reading them the relevant passages from *Oliver Twist*.<sup>6</sup> Alternatively, show them the relevant sections of the movie<sup>7</sup>

Write up one week of the log kept by the master or matron of a workhouse.

## Gold Fever

If *Bridie's Fire* is used in a unit on the Gold Rush, it provides a good jumping-off point for a discussion of the different jobs available on a gold field, other than actually mining. It is Bridie's ability to sew, not mine, that saves her.

In the character of a young person who has come to the goldfields, choose the job you would like the most. Write a letter home to your family (in England/China/Chile/New York/Melbourne) explaining your choice and your prospects for the future.

# ENGLISH

## PRODUCING A CLASS NOVEL

Take on the role of Brandon whose story we cease to know from his arrival at the workhouse.

- In a creative piece, write Brandon's experience of the workhouse. Focus particularly on his thoughts and feelings and how he copes with the news of Birdie's departure for Australia. Teachers should draw students' attention to the fact that it is only when a relationship exists between reader and character that true sympathy can be achieved.
- Imagine that, miraculously, Brandon did receive Bridie's letter (p. 115-116). Write his reply—remembering that he has only just learnt to read and write or is using a scribe, as Bridie used Gilbert.

Brandon's story remains untold (but will be partly revealed in Book 2, *Becoming Billy Dare*). As a class, brainstorm two possible scenarios based on the following excerpts of the text:

Scenario One:

*"Brandon, you know I'll come back for you. I'll be like Ossian but I'll bring you to me, to the Land of the Forever Young like in the stories except it will be Australia and there'll be sun-bowers and maybe palaces and we'll have a home there together..."*

*"I remember Ossian, said Brandon in a small voice. I remember that Ossian stayed away for three years and when he came home, everything had changed."(p. 72)*

Scenario Two

*"You listen Brandon O'Connor, and you listen well. I promise you this. You'll sail across the sea too.... And you'll cross all the waters to come to me and you'll see all sorts of wondrous things like the paradise of Birds and then we'll have our house, one day just like I always told you...and gold house. (p72-73)*

Brainstorm in some detail what may have befallen Brandon after Bridie left. Base this on the text and also on the students' research into the famine.

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<sup>6</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, Penguin p.

<sup>7</sup> Movie *Oliver Twist*

Choose two different scenarios detailing what may have been Brandon's story and divide the class into two. Each group should divide their story into detailed chapters. Students are each given a chapter to write. An editor should be chosen from amongst the students to ensure that the chapters link; a proofreader takes on the important task of correcting copy and a cover designer and blurb writer are also selected.

#### Follow Up Activity

A book launch with drinks, nibbles and a visit from an author (or the head of department or principal) should be organized in the school library. Excerpts should be read from the two books and Drama students can perform selected scenes. The books should be catalogued for borrowing.

A publisher could also be invited to talk about book production taking the students on a journey from manuscript to the book on the shelf.

### **THEMES**

This book (and others in the Children of the Wind series) covers the universal theme of immigration, specifically child immigration and forces the reader to confront the question of the role of country and culture in the development of one's self-concept and identity. The concept of mixed cultural heritage is also explored. In addition, the subject of refugees and the treatment of them is opened up for discussion.

#### **Immigration**

Bridie is a child immigrant to the New World and faces physical hardships as well as the indignity of being indentured and having to work as a scullery maid answering even to the needs of children younger than herself. But what Murray explores here is the degree to which Bridie's identity is determined /influenced by the two cultures in which she finds herself.

#### Exploring identity: Oral Activity

To highlight the extent to which we as Australians are an immigrant culture, ask students to give a show of hands to the question: "How many of you are immigrants?"

Ask students of the class to share their personal stories/hardships/humorous moments of immigration and allow class members to question them further. Teachers should ensure that they create an atmosphere in which children feel comfortable to share—perhaps by sharing their own or their family's experiences of immigration

Ask students who are not immigrants themselves, to relate an immigrant experience of their parents or grandparents.

Invite parents and grandparents to the class to share their immigration stories. Ask them to what extent they consider themselves to be Australian and to what extent they consider themselves to be citizens of their birth country. Find out why this is the case and keep track of their responses on a class chart.

Bridie is often drawn back to the experiences of her motherland through smells, foods, countryside etc.

Students should ask the immigrants of their class, parents or grandparents about the role of food, religion, dress, landscape, music etc in determining identity.

Students should then return to the book and discuss Bridie's developing sense of identity. Is she Australian or Irish? Give detailed references to the text. Refer again to the scene on p. 86 where the young Bridie airs her possessions on the deck of the ship and becomes distraught that "there was nothing of her family, no memento from her own home, not one thing that made her soul yearn for her old life..."



Students should engage in an Oxford debate<sup>8</sup> on the topic:

'That we can never feel at home in another culture.'

Let's debate: English Activity

Write a formal argumentative essay arguing

'That birth is the significant factor in determining identity.'

### **Children of the Wind**

*Bridie's Fire* is the first in a series called Children of the Wind, a title inspired, says Kirsty Murray the author, by the poet Yeats in his poem 'The Faerie Dance' In the poem, a fairy lures a young child, unhappy in her own land, to the land of her heart's desire.

#### **The Fairie Dance**

The wind blows out of the gates of the day  
The wind blows over the lonely of heart  
And the lonely of heart is withered away,  
While the faeries dance in a place apart,

Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,  
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air:  
For they hear the wind laugh, and murmur and sing  
Of a land where even the old are fair,

And even the wise are merry of tongue;  
But I heard a reed of Coolaney say,  
"When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung,  
The lonely of heart is withered away."

W.B. Yeats

#### Extension Activity—English

Teachers should introduce their students to Yeats' poem and ask the following questions;

- What purpose does the wind serve?
- To whom does the wind bring comfort?
- Of what does the wind sing?

In a discursive piece, students should attempt to explain the connection to the title of the series. Students may suggest alternate titles which they must then justify.

On p.21 it says that Bridie:

*'stood face to the wind, fighting to hold her feet on the narrow winding path, and flung the basket crosses out into the churning sea.....'*

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<sup>8</sup> An Oxford debate is an impromptu activity which allows students to change sides as they become convinced by the strength of the arguments presented. Students who agree with the topic stand on the left of the room. Those who disagree, stand on the right. The teacher co-ordinates the discussion by allowing comments from alternate sides of the room.

- What happens to Bridie at this point in the story?
- Why does she throw the St Brigid's crosses into the sea?
- What is the symbolism?
- How does it link to the symbolism of the title? What brings Bridie comfort?

On p.89, Bridie refers to the sea breeze on the boat as "like the wind of freedom blowing off the new world and making me feel like the spark in me is alive again."

- Explain the connection between Bridie's internal fire and the winds of change referred to here and in the title.

### **Choice and chance: hope and reality**

*Bridie's Fire* investigates the dichotomy of the competing forces of choice and chance, fate and destiny. Bridie is forced to make many choices in her journey toward building a life for herself and Brandon. Her fate is determined partially by these choices but also by the chance events which fate sends in her direction.

Emigration offers hope of a new future but the loss of a known culture and a sense of belonging.

Indenture offers the hope of a better life versus the loss of immediate personal freedom.

The gold fields represent freedom and the hope of material success, possibly even overnight, versus the rigour and destitution of life on the gold fields.

Discuss the concept of fate and choice in this book. Open out the discussion so that students can contribute to the discussion using personal experience.

### **CHARACTERISATION**

Divide the students into small groups to investigate characters in this book. Each student group should receive a card with the page references listed below. Over several lessons, students should investigate these and other references to their particular character and then write a formal character study based on their investigation. Presentations should then be made to the entire class by a representative from each group. In this way students will also benefit from the research of others.

- Caitlin: see pages 55-6, 64-7, 77-83, 85-9, 92-5, 126-8, 131.
- Bidy Ryan: see pages 76-83, 92-3, 96, 131, 158.
- Honor Gauran: see pages 93, 95, 125-6, 131.
- Miss Charity: see pages 120-1, 137, 139, 147, 149-50, 152, 154.
- Mrs Arbuckle and Dora: see pages 99-100, 100-3, 108, 109-11, 117-22, 123-4, 128-9, 130-2, 137, 155, 157-9.
- Gilbert: see pages 104-8, 109, 112-16, 134-6, 137, 139, 140-45, 160-88, 189.
- The wizard Jacobus: see pages 170-5, 176, 190-2, 197-203, 204-7, 211-13, 216-18, 229, 241-5.
- Tom: see pages 222-3, 224, 226-7, 228-33, 234-5, 236, 239-40, 243, 245, 246-50.

The investigation could be guided by these additional questions:

- What does Bridie think of them, or they of her?

- Does Bridie's or their thinking change, and, if so, how?
- What moral issues are raised by Bridie's interactions with the character?

### **LINKING THE CHARACTER AND THE TITLE**

According to tradition, St Brigid is a fiery young thing (p14). Bridie's father urges her to retain the fire within. Bridie herself talks of her own fire:

*"Bridie closed her eyes and prayed for the fire inside her to grow stronger, strong enough to keep the darkness from swallowing up each of the people she loved." (p 17)*

*"She tried to make her feel the fire inside, the fire her dad had told her would never stop burning, but it felt like nothing more than dying embers" (p.63)*

Trace the development of the character of Bridie O'Connor throughout the novel making specific references to her fiery spirit. Quote from the text to substantiate your claims. Look again at the fight on board the *Diadem* (p.82). See also Bridie's explanation of how being angry kept the fire going for a while (p.89). Explain the relationship between "the fire" and Bridie's regular displays of initiative.

Students should choose one incident which provides them with a clear representation of Bridie's character and read it dramatically to the class.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF NAMES**

#### **"A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME WOULD SMELL AS SWEET"**

Some people believe that names are divinely inspired. To what extent does your name reflect your character and personality?

Names often reflect qualities or historical/religious figures associated with particular qualities. Ask students to volunteer names from their family's culture and a translation or explanation of the qualities they refer to. Create a multicultural book of names and their meanings, ordered alphabetically or by grouping different names with the same meaning.

Write a story in which the main character's name is subtly reflected in their actions. Some suggestions for names are: Faith, Charity, Frank, Ernest, Dawn etc

## **ABOUT THE WRITERS**

### **MICHELLE PRAWER**

Michelle Praver is a librarian specializing in Young Adult literature at Leibler Yavneh College in Melbourne. She is also Head of English and teaches English to middle and senior level students. Michelle reviews Young Adult fiction for the journal Viewpoint. She is the mother of 7 delightful children who are all keen readers.

### **KIRSTY MURRAY**

Kirsty Murray has written 3 junior fiction novels: *Zarconi's Magic Flying Fish* (Allen & Unwin, 1999), *Market Blues* (Allen & Unwin, 2001) and *Walking Home with Marie Claire* (Allen & Unwin, 2002) as well as several non-fiction titles. To find out more about the author, go to [www.allen-unwin.com.au/Authors/apMurray.asp](http://www.allen-unwin.com.au/Authors/apMurray.asp)

Kirsty Murray says: "I hope to empower children with a sense of the significance of their own personal role in history ... I believe the dearth of Australian historical fiction for children compounds the problem of kids perceiving

Australian history as essentially boring. For a nation of immigrants to gain a strong sense of identity we need narratives that we can relate to, set in landscapes with which we can identify ...Stories that deal with the immigrant experience, with the struggle to adapt to a chaotic new world are particularly relevant to contemporary children, living in a world of rapid change, a world where they will be obliged to reinvent themselves many times over.”

***Bridie's Fire* was written with the assistance of the Australia Council for the Arts.**