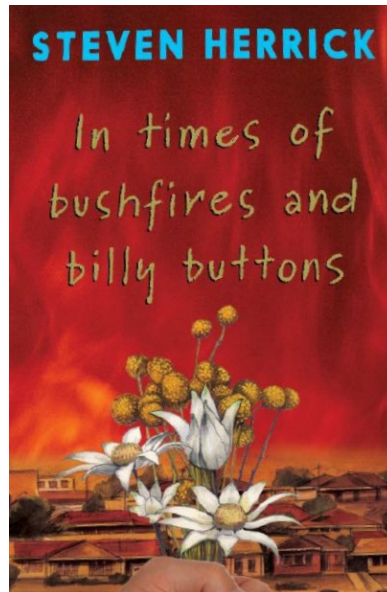


# IN TIMES OF BUSHFIRES AND BILLY BUTTONS

WRITTEN BY STEVEN HERRICK

## Teacher Notes



These notes were written to provide teachers with Australian Curriculum linked lesson plans that are related to the text, In times of bushfires and billy buttons.

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### SUMMARY

Ethan, Biggsy, Joshua and Audrey are four young adults grappling with societal changes, navigating familial hardships and maturing quickly when faced with tough decisions. As a firestorm threatens their homes, they find hope for their future in a climate change rally. A captivating tale of growth and resilience for young readers.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Herrick's books have twice won the NSW Premier's Literary Awards; been shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year Award on ten occasions; and won the prestigious Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2019. He is internationally regarded as a pioneer of the verse-novel genre for young people.

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

It is recommended for teachers to read this novel before assigning it to students in order to be sensitive of students' personal circumstances. It is important to note that whilst the author approaches these topics in an appropriate way that is pivotal to the storyline, the text covers domestic violence, climate change and parental incarceration.

The learning activities below include a unit of four lessons, recommended to be completed in sequence. Questions are provided for students to use throughout reading, either as written response or as a group discussion. The text is aimed at a 13-18 year old audience and the accompanying lesson plans are designed for Year 8 and 9 students, although would be appropriate for older year levels with accompanying curriculum alterations. The lessons cover a range of Literacy and Literature skills from the Australian Curriculum version 8.4.

## LESSON ONE – SUMMARY

**Sequence:** After reading the first chapter

**Learning Intention:** We are learning to reflect on a chapter and identify the main themes and ideas.

**Success Criteria:**

- I can identify the main themes and ideas presented within a chapter of the text
- I can justify my opinions using evidence from the text
- I can discuss various opinions others may have and reflect on how this may change my own viewpoint

**Curriculum Links:**

Year Level	Strand	Australian Curriculum Link
Year 8	Literature	Share, reflect on, clarify and evaluate opinions and arguments about aspects of literary texts (ACELT1627)
Year 9	Literature	Present an argument about a literary text based on initial impressions and subsequent analysis of the whole text (ACELT1771)

**Tune In:** After reading the first chapter either as a class or individually, ask students to discuss what happened and what we learnt about the characters.

**Class Activity:** As a class, write a short summary of the events of the chapter. Discuss how a summary is usually a fairly objective piece of text. We can't argue that these events didn't happen. What is subjective though to each reader, is how significant each of these events in the chapter was.

**Individual Activity:** Students will reflect on chapter one and choose six words that summarise the most important themes, ideas or events from the chapter. This can be continued throughout the text for each chapter.

Students will provide their list of six words and justify their choices to their peers. Having meaningful discussions as to why certain words were chosen, why did everyone choose the same word, or why was a word only chosen by one student.

**Reflection:** Students to keep a record of their six words over the course of the book to identify any reoccurring themes. This can lead to a broader discussion at the completion of reading regarding the ongoing themes prevalent throughout the novel.

**Extended activity to be completed at the end of the novel:** Write the themes of the novel on the board, climate change, family, resilience, perseverance, and ask the students to reflect on their six word chapter summaries and place the words in the category where they best fit. Have a discussion about the spread of words within each category and how that speaks to the importance the author placed on each theme.

## LESSON TWO – CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Sequence:** After a few chapters, once students have a good grasp of each character

**Learning Intention:** We are learning to identify the tone that characters speak in and how the author uses devices to create varying tones.

**Success Criteria:**

- I can identify different tones in character's voices
- I can analyse how the author has utilised devices to create tone
- I can replicate the author's devices and write dialogue for that character using a similar tone

**Curriculum Links:**

Year Level	Strand	Australian Curriculum Link
Year 8	Literature	Identify and evaluate devices that create tone, for example humour, wordplay, innuendo and parody in poetry, humorous prose, drama or visual texts (ACELT1630)
Year 9	Literature	Experiment with the ways that language features, image and sound can be adapted in literary texts, for example the effects of stereotypical characters and settings, the playfulness of humour and pun and the use of hyperlink (ACELT1638)

**Tune In:** Write each character's name on the board and have a whole class brainstorm of words that describe each character. Once the discussion has died down, ask students to analyse why they interpret the characters this way?

**Class Activity:** Discuss with students that authors use devices when presenting their characters so that we receive them in a particular way. Authors can present a character's tone through vocabulary, sentence structure, actions, punctuation and even infer tone through physical descriptions of a character.

Challenge students in groups to find quotes in the text that represent the tone of each character. How is their dialogue written to convey their tone? Use the example of Ethan's dialogue often containing ellipses to convey uncertainty in his character.

**Individual Activity:** Once the class has a collection of quotes for each character, challenge students to write a new piece of dialogue for each character using the devices the author has employed to convey that character's particular tone. Students need to explain the devices they used and why they wrote their new dialogue in that particular way.

**Reflection:** Students collate their quotes for each character and give peer feedback to improve each other's dialogue.

### LESSON THREE – PERSPECTIVES

**Sequence:** Nearing the end of the novel, or after completing the novel

**Learning Intention:** We are learning how to recognise and understand differing viewpoints characters may have.

**Success Criteria:**

- I can analyse an important event in a text
- I can evaluate each character's perspective of the event and other characters' actions
- I can use evidence from the text to support my opinion

**Curriculum Links:**

Year Level	Strand	Australian Curriculum Link
Year 8	Literature	Recognise and explain differing viewpoints about the world, cultures, individual people and concerns represented in texts (ACELT1807 )
Year 9	Literacy	Interpret, analyse and evaluate how different perspectives of issue, event, situation, individuals or groups are constructed to serve specific purposes in texts (ACELY1742)

**Tune In:** Write all the characters names on the board. Have a class discussion of what each character thinks of the other. Even characters who don't interact in the book (for example Aunt Helen and Joshua's dad), based on what we know, would they get along?

**Class Activity:** As a class, zoom in on the event in chapter 5 where Ethan moves in with his Aunt Helen when he is only 7 years old. How would each of the characters involved in this event (Uncle Bill, Aunt Helen, Ethan, Ethan’s parents) view the situation? Use this event as a model for the class to collaborate on and develop ideas and an understanding of how to delve into each characters perspective.

**Individual Activity:** Using the worked model as an example, students choose their own event from the text. It may help to brainstorm events as a class. Examples may include Ethan bringing flowers into class or Joshua’s first day of school. Students will choose an event and reflect on how each character would have perceived that event from their viewpoint.

**Reflection:** Students find someone who has chosen the same event as them as compare their character perceptions.

## LESSON FOUR – INNOVATION ON TEXT

**Sequence:** After finishing the novel

**Learning Intention:** We are learning to write an epilogue of the story based on what we know about the characters and setting.

**Success Criteria:**

- I can predict what a character’s life will be like in one year and ten years
- I can create a text written in the tone of a character
- I can refer to other characters and predict what their lives will be like

**Curriculum Links:**

Year Level	Strand	Australian Curriculum Link
Year 8	Literature	Create literary texts that draw upon text structures and language features of other texts for particular purposes and effects (ACELT1632)
Year 9	Literature	Create literary texts, including hybrid texts, that innovate on aspects of other texts, for example by using parody, allusion and appropriation (ACELT1773)

**Tune In:** As a class, revisit how each character was left in the story. How did the author represent them at the end of the novel? How does the author want us to feel?

**Class Activity:** Discuss what each character would do in the following week after the storyline of the novel has ended.

**Individual Activity:** Students are to focus on one character and imagine what their life would be like one year and then ten years in the future. They will need to innovate on the character and text as they will be predicting the character’s future, based on the character’s personality, actions and storyline that was presented by the author within the novel.

Prompts for the epilogue might be; describe the main character’s daily life, describe their family, what have they done since the end of the novel, what is their personality like now, how did the decisions they made in the story effect their lives, what impact did the rally have on their lives?

**Reflection:** Students share their epilogues with each other, discussing the merit of each other’s predictions.

## COMPREHENSION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions aim to provide teachers with a flexible resource to conduct various formative literacy assessments. The comprehension questions are designed for students to work individually to provide a written answer that highlights their understanding of the text, whilst the discussion questions aim to promote communication amongst students in a small group.

The questions are split up into chapters so you can distribute them as your class progresses through the text.

### Curriculum Links:

Year Level	Strand	Australian Curriculum Link
Year 8	Literacy	Use comprehension strategies to interpret and evaluate texts by reflecting on the validity of content and the credibility of sources, including finding evidence in the text for the author's point of view (ACELY1734)
Year 9	Literacy	Use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse texts, comparing and evaluating representations of an event, issue, situation or character in different texts (ACELY1744)

### 1 The New Kid

- How would you react if you were in the classroom watching Joshua interact with the teacher?
- What is your first impression of each character? Use evidence from the text. For example, what impression does Joshua's scar on his arm give you?
- Why do you think Joshua is acting stoically?

### 2 Returning Beer Cans

- Why do you think Ethan follows Joshua?
- What do we learn about Joshua from what Ethan witnesses?
- How does the theme of resilience feature in this chapter?

### 3 Plywood and fibro

- Why do you think Ethan knocked on the door? Would you have done the same thing?
- Why do you think the truck driver mentions that Joshua could use some friends?
- Do you think a friendship will form between Biggsy, Ethan and Joshua?

### 4 Living on a Greek Island

- How does Ethan feel about the new development?
- What do we learn about Aunt Helen in this chapter?
- What do Ethan's comparisons to a Greek island tell us about how he views his life?

### 5 Rust in the Family

- What impact did Ethan's parents' incarceration have on his life?
- Discuss Ethan's relationship with his uncle.
- How does this chapter make you feel about Ethan's character?
- How did Ethan and Biggsy's friendship develop? How does this differ to Joshua's first day at the new school?

### 6 Where There's Smoke

- Why do you think Ethan was waiting for Joshua at the front gate?

- What similarities are there between Joshua and Ethan?
- How do you think Biggsy and Ethan will try to help Joshua?

### **7 The Meaning of Trifle**

- What does the interaction between Biggsy, Ethan and Mr Marshall tell us about each character?
- How do the two boys react to Mr Marshall's lack of tangible reward for their help?

### **8 Purple Eyebrights and Billy Buttons**

- How does Ethan's fascination with flowers reflect his personality?
- Why do you think Ethan chooses to bring the flowers to English class?
- Why do you think Mr Marshall has set this particular assignment?

### **9 The Power of the Moon**

- What image does the chapter paint of Ethan's neighbourhood?
- Why does Ethan want to sleep on the roof staring at the stars?
- How does Ethan's family history shape his identity?
- What impact are the fires and heat having on the characters at this point in the story?

### **10 The Weight of These Sad Times**

- How does the author use analogies to convey the severity of the fires?
- What role does Aunt Helen play in shaping Ethan's perception of the climate crisis?
- How does Mr Marshall feel about the climate crisis? Why does he feel this way?

### **11 Fathers and Sons**

- Why do you think Ethan is trying to pursue a friendship with Joshua?
- What are the similarities and differences between Joshua and Ethan's experiences?
- Why do you think Joshua reacts the way he does to Ethan's offer?

### **12 Salt and Vinegar Potato Crisps**

- How does Ethan's perception of his parents change during this chapter?
- Why do you think Ethan's mum is acting distant?
- If you were in Ethan's shoes, would you want to visit your parents?

### **13 Welfare Avenue**

- What do we learn about Audrey from the description of her house?
- Why do you think Ethan makes English Audrey's favourite class?
- What similarities in their lives could Audrey and Ethan talk about on their date?

### **14 The Proud Vandal**

- How does the Ethan's encounter with the old man shape his perspective on the fires and the history of the suburb?
- Why does the man proclaim 'and proud of it' when Ethan calls him a vandal?
- How does Ethan compare his life to the fires?

### **15 The Lure of the Drumstick**

- 'Everyone talks about climate change.' How do Biggsy and Ethan feel about climate change in this chapter?
- If you were Ethan, would you want to stay living with your Aunt Helen, or move in with your parents?
- How does Biggsy support Ethan in making a choice and feeling comfortable?

### **16 The Correct Way to Eat Pancakes**

- How has eating pancakes helped Ethan and Helen's relationship develop over time?
- What does Ethan's conversation with Aunt Helen tell us about how they have bonded since Ethan moved in?
- What comparison is made between school and change rooms? What do you think of this analogy?

### **17 Waiting for the Apocalypse**

- How does the tone of this chapter compare to the previous chapter?
- Describe how Joshua and Ethan's relationship developed throughout this chapter.
- How would you support a friend that was in Joshua's position?

### **18 Hunting Gazelles**

- Why do you think Ethan suggests taking Audrey to the deli?
- Discuss the significance of the discussion about gender expectations and relationships between Ethan and Audrey.
- Why do you think Ethan and Audrey want to keep their relationship a secret?

### **19 The Big Nowhere**

- How does the presence of Joshua's father affect the atmosphere in the workshop?
- What do we learn about Biggsy's personality in this chapter?
- How do you think Joshua will react when he hears about the conversation between his father and Biggsy?

### **20 Knives in the Woodblock**

- How do you think Mr Marshall is feeling during class? What evidence from the text supports your opinion?
- 'Mr Marshall can barely suppress a smile.' Why is this?
- What impact does Aunt Helen's story have on Ethan's feeling of helplessness?

### **21 A Glimpse of the Sky**

- What choice does Ethan make in this chapter?
- How do you think Ethan's perception of his parents' freedom be different if they kept in touch with him while they were in jail?
- Ethan and Audrey discuss gender roles as mature young adults, and then contrast that by engaging in a 'pinky shake'. How does this epitomise their relationship?

### **22 An Answer for Everything**

- Why does Ethan go to Joshua's house?
- What significance does the author give the cockatoo in this chapter?
- How does Ethan and Joshua shift the power dynamics during the altercation?

### **23 Unhooking the Past**

- How does Ethan's description of the tree mirror his attitude towards conflict?
- Discuss Joshua's change in demeanour in this chapter after his father left.
- What importance does Biggsy's dad have on Ethan's perception of men?

### **24 A Love Letter**

- Why does Ethan think that Mr Marshall hasn't forgotten what it is like to be young?
- How does Ethan try to convince the government to take action in his letter?
- Why do you think teachers have been advised not to attend the rally?

### **25 A Morning Shower**

- How does the grassfire impact the pace of the storyline in this chapter?
- Why does the situation cement Ethan's decision to join the rally?
- What effect do you think the characters are hoping the climate rally will have?

### **26 Among the absconders**

- What would your sign say if you attended the rally?
- Why do you think Ethan wants to offer flowers to the police at the rally?
- How does each character's attitude toward the rally differ?

### **27 Saving the Planet, One Sausage Roll at a Time**

- What is the atmosphere like at the protest?
- How does the author portray the riot police in the chapter?
- How does the author control the pace of the chapter as the police are walking towards Ethan offering the flowers?
- What is the significance of the characters offering flowers to the police officers?
- How does the acceptance of the flowers change the tone of the rally?