

## TEACHER NOTES FOR *FLOOD*

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**JACKIE FRENCH** was born in Sydney but grew up in Brisbane. When Jackie lived there it looked very different to the Brisbane of today. She remembers there being lots of dirt roads and people had toilets or ‘dunnies’ outside in their back yards. She also remembers times when Brisbane flooded: “Every year the floods would swirl under our verandah posts, and we didn't have to go to school. One year Mum's car floated down the road and we had to tie it to the peach tree.”

Jackie has written a lot of books – 132! Many of these have been published in 23 different languages. Jackie wrote her first children's book, called ‘Rainstones’ while living in a shed with a wallaby called Fred, a black snake called Gladys and a wombat called Smudge. Smudge left his droppings on the typewriter every night so her writing was very messy!

Jackie has been awarded many prizes for her books, including a 2000 CBC Book of the Year for Younger Readers, and the 2010 NSW Premier's History Award. Her book ‘Diary of a Wombat’ won many awards in Australia and overseas. Three of Jackie’s books have also been on the CBCA Notables list (*Ned's Kang-u-roo; Plagues and Federation - The Diary of Kitty Barnes* and *Mr Noah and the Cats*).

Jackie and her husband Bryan live in the Araluen valley, in a stone house they built themselves. They have a home-made waterwheel as well as solar panels to power their house. Jackie also describes herself as a ‘wombat negotiator’ and has spent many years studying the wombats in her valley.

**BRUCE WHATLEY** was born in South Wales, UK and moved to Australia when he was 5. He lived in Adelaide when he was young then he moved back to the UK when he was 15.

Bruce loved to watch television when he was little, and he remembers that the goodies wore white hats and the baddies wore black! He especially liked a show about a cowboy called Roy Rogers who had a horse called Trigger and always did the right thing. He also loved a cartoon called Rocky and Bullwinkle and he still likes it now, even though he is a grown-up!

Bruce has been drawing for as long as he can remember. He found reading hard but loved drawing. Bruce loved Rupert the Bear annuals because he liked looking at the pictures, and sometimes he made his own stories up without having to read the words.

From an early age Bruce could draw portraits that were recognizable, and he got really good at drawing realistically. Now he is a grown-up Bruce thinks his drawings are too realistic! He thinks it is important that his drawings are powerful and tell a good story, so now he experiments with lots of different styles of drawing.

Some of Bruce's favourite illustrators are Norman Rockwell and Joseph Leyendecker. His favourite book is 'Wreck of the Zephyr' by Chris van Allsburg. Bruce also admires many Australian illustrators such as Shaun Tan, Armin Greder and Ron Brooks.

Bruce lives south of Sydney with his wife Rosie. He has two grown-up children who are also very artistic: his daughter is a sculptor and his son is very good at computer animation!

## **SYNOPSIS**

The cattle dog looks out and sniffs the air. At first the rain is a welcome arrival after the dry spell, and the land looks green again. However the rain soon becomes too heavy and causes a surge into the river. The river bursts its

banks and the water flows into the town, causing a great flood. Everyone is scared as they escape onto roofs and into boats. The flood causes a lot of destruction to homes and buildings, and even the boardwalk gets swept away down the swollen river. But there are lots of brave heroes, like the tug boat that stops the board walk from crashing into the bridge, and the strangers that wade into the water to rescue people. As the water finally recedes lots of people came to help with the clean-up and to offer food and hope.

## **THEMES**

The story is a response to the devastating floods suffered recently by many in Queensland. Because the text and images are highly emotive the story relates to both rural and urban areas that were affected, rather than being about one particular place. The story begins with a sense of foreboding as the water rises. Jackie remembers floods from her childhood when “Sometimes, no matter what you do, the weather can be too strong for you.” For Jackie, it was important to write a book that helps us “remember what happened last year so we can work out how to live in the future... ..all of us need to learn about the floods, the fires and storms of our land, so we can learn to live with them.”

The story uses a clever way to connect with different people: it has an animal as a central character, or a narrator. Lots of authors and illustrators use animals instead of humans because no matter whom we are, we can relate to an animal more easily than a human who might not look like us. Jackie didn't know that Bruce would make a dog the main character, but for Bruce “The dog became the symbol of Australia and the Australian spirit. It became the eyewitness for us in this particular narrative.”

Although the story begins with a terrible event, it takes a more positive turn as people come together to help each other. Jackie also wanted to celebrate the Australian spirit in a time of great difficulty: “More than 60,000 volunteers helped with the cleanup. My brother and nephew were among

them. My nieces kept cooking, to make sure food was where it was needed, cakes, choc chip biscuits, cases of apples, bottles of fresh water. For me the most amazing thing was that no one thought it was amazing at all.”

So although the story is about a natural disaster, for Jackie and Bruce it is also a story to help celebrate the heroism of the Australian people.

It wasn't a very easy book to write though. The floods affected many people, and some even lost their lives. Jackie realized it was a big challenge: “I tried to write a history of the flood; how it happened, and why. It wasn't easy. It really needs 100,000 words to tell it properly, and I have only a couple of hundred.” Jackie had to choose very carefully what words to include and what to leave out, to make sure the story made a big impact. Bruce also had to think very carefully about how to make the right kind of pictures for the story: “I wanted the whole book to look wet. The paintings are done in acrylics on thick paper on a vertical easel. I used them very thinly so they would run and drip. Most of the illustrations are based on photographs taken at the time. This was important as I wanted it to have a genuine feel and honesty about it.”

Jackie and Bruce are quite happy with the book but are not sure what everyone will think of it.

## **DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY IDEAS**

- This story is written about a real event. Stories, pictures and films that do this are called ‘reportage’. Do you know of any other books that are of real events?
- This story begins with a feeling of suspense, it then has moments of sadness then ends positively. Discuss how writers often make the story interesting by making us feel different emotions. Where in Flood are there suspenseful, sad, positive moments?

- Jackie has said she had to choose her words carefully. What words in the book describe the effects of the flood?
- Think about a real event that you have experienced or heard about. Write a story about a real event. Think about carefully choosing the right words to describe the event.
- Have a close look at the illustrations. Think about the technique the illustrator may have used to achieve this effect. Collect photographs of things that relate to your event. Make some drawings from your photographs with a 2B pencil. When you are happy with your drawing make 2 photocopies of it.
- Use paint and water to mix up some colours that resemble the colours in your photograph. Make sure your paint is thin and runny.
- Tape your photocopy onto a board and prop it up on some newspaper. Paint your photocopy so that the paint runs down the page. Make two versions using different colours.
- When your photocopies are dry you can draw more details on top of them and add thicker paint. This will cover up the runny paint underneath.
- Make a display by putting your photocopies, original drawings, photographs and written story together onto a large sheet of cardboard.