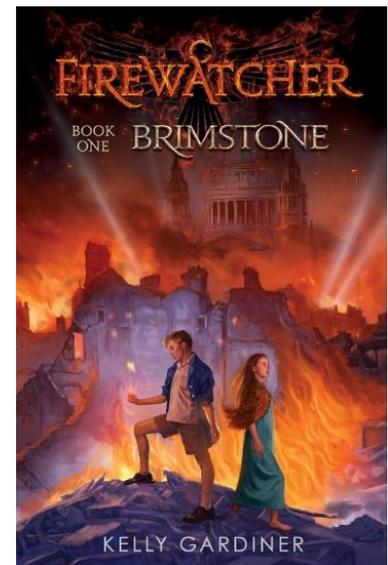


Firewatcher #1: Brimstone

Author
Kelly Gardiner



Synopsis

London in 1940 is a city in the midst of World War II and besieged by air-raids, fires, and fear, but daily life goes on for the people who remain. Christopher, sitting in his classroom at school and listening for the distinctive sound of the next wave of Luftwaffe bombers to arrive, fondly remembers the early days of the war when everything was exciting and danger was theoretical. His life now is far different, with nights spent crouched uncomfortably at the back of the damp church basement surrounded by his neighbours while his mother works as a firewatcher – one of the many volunteers watching the air-raids from the vantage point of the city's roofs and rushing to put out the fires started by incendiary bombs before their city can burn down. Even in wartime though, life can be filled with wonder and the unexpected, and when Christopher finds an ancient ring in the mud of the Thames, he is catapulted back to London in the midst of another time of fire and fear. How Christopher navigates the Great Fire of London in 1666, desperately trying to solve the riddle of the Righteous Brotherhood and the phoenix symbol on his ring, while simultaneously doing his part to save London in the time he was born in is a tale of adventure, danger, courage, and hope. For people are still flawed whenever they live, while kindness and caring can also be found in the most unexpected of places.

About the Author

Kelly Gardiner's novel *Australia's Great War: 1917* was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's History Award and also listed on the CBCA Younger Readers Notables 2018 list. Kelly has also written two books for young adults, *Act of Faith*, and its sequel, *The Sultan's Eyes*, Kelly is also an editor and educator and in her spare time she writes, reads, rides her bike, has a lie down, not necessarily in that order.

Themes

War; air raids; the Blitz; the great fire of London; family; courage; danger; fire; mystery; mythology; hope; time-travel; history; friendship; self-sacrifice.

Writing Style

Written in the third person throughout from the point of view of Christopher, the author conveys the flavour of two very different eras in the speech, customs, and descriptions of the various characters. The

language used varies depending on the time period, with the dialogue from 1666 being distinctly old-fashioned while the speech of the characters in 1940 is far more modern in tone, while still retaining colloquialisms and opinions appropriate to the time. Christopher's initial confusion and growing understanding of the situation carries the reader with him, and as the mystery starts to unfold, so too does the audience's awareness of the depth of his caring and concern for those around him. The pace is fast-moving and tension remains high throughout, with the eventual resolution being deeply satisfying while leaving plenty of room for future adventures to take place.

TEACHER NOTES

- 1) Before reading the book, as a class discuss the title and cover. Some things to include in your discussion are:
 - What do you think the picture on the cover shows – what is happening in it?
 - Looking at the cover, when do you think the story might be set?
 - What do you think a firewatcher might be?
 - What is brimstone, and how is it related to fire?
 - What genre do you think the book is?
 - What symbols can you find in the cover artwork, and what is their meaning?
- 2) In pairs or small groups, research life in London in either 1666, in 1940, or today. Look at food, housing, clothing, transport, common professions or careers, and features of the city itself. Create a slideshow or poster to present your findings and share it with the class. As a class discuss the differences between the two historical eras, and compare them both to what life in modern day London is like.
- 3) Do you think that it would be harder or easier for a child from 2018 to manage in London in 1666 than it was for Christopher coming from 1940? Why do you think this? What things would be easier or more difficult to adapt to and why?
- 4) If you could time travel to any place in the past, where and when would you want to visit and why? What sort of things would you have to do to prepare for your trip and to help you blend in with the local populace. Write a one page piece explaining when and where you would like to visit in history and why. Include information about your preparations for the trip and your reasoning behind them. What dangers might you find yourself facing and what could you do to keep yourself safe? Illustrate your piece with a picture of your intended destination.
- 5) During WWII in Britain, there were a lot of shortages, and many things such as food, petrol and clothing were rationed. In *Firewatcher: Brimstone* Christopher talks of the food rationing that everyone is subject to, and mentions the way it affects meals. Research online or in the library and find out what foods were rationed and how much of each people were allowed to buy. In small groups or pairs, use this information to plan a wartime menu for a family of two such as Christopher and his mother. What sort of meals would people have been able to have, and what do you think they would have tasted like.
- 6) Locate pictures of London during WWII online, and photos of the same places today. Print out your chosen images and use them to make a collage showing London then and now.

- 7) Christopher's mother was a firewatcher during the Blitz. What was a firewatcher and why were they needed? Research firewatchers and write a short piece explaining why they were needed, what they did, and who worked as firewatchers.
- 8) Visit a war memorial, cenotaph, or other similar memorial or exhibition.
- 9) Christopher can identify different aeroplanes by the sound of their engines. Look online and find videos and images of aeroplanes that were flown during WWII. Do the British and Allied forces' aeroplanes look very different to the Luftwaffe air force's? What similarities and differences between planes can you identify? How do the planes from the WWII era compare to modern fighter jets and bombers?
- 10) The closest air-raid shelter to Christopher's home was in the basement of a church. It was cold, damp, crowded and uncomfortable. What other types of places might have been suitable to use as air-raid shelters? Design a model air-raid shelter of your own that could have been used during WWII. You can base your design on real shelters that existed then, or you can create a completely new design. Think about what types of facilities would have made the shelter Christopher used more comfortable (Food, warmth, beds and bedding etc) and try to incorporate as many of these features as possible into your design.
- 11) On page 27 Christopher thinks History is just stories. Half of it is nonsense...They try to measure history by spreading it against time, but then all you get is mathematics. Do you agree or disagree with Christopher's opinion here? Why/why not? Write a one paragraph summary of whether you agree or disagree with him and why.
- 12) The ring that Christopher finds has a phoenix on it. What is a phoenix and why is it so relevant to the two time periods in the book?
- 13) On pages 30 to 31 Christopher states that flames change from red to blue and then back to yellow, but not like colours you've ever seen before. They burst open when you don't expect it. As a class, carefully observe a candle flame, and see how many different colours you can identify. Individually create an artwork featuring a phoenix rising from the flames using oil pastels on black paper. Use the colours mentioned in Christopher's description as well as those you observed in your artwork.
- 14) Reread the description of the sounds of the fire on page 153. In small groups or as a class, use this description to help you create a percussion piece based on the sounds of fire. Practice and perform your pieces for another class or at assembly.
- 15) What do you think Master Merriman means when he says any of us can make history dance to our own song (pg 160)? In pairs or small groups discuss this statement, and write a paragraph explaining how you interpret its meaning. Be sure to consider the context in which he is speaking, and use evidence from the text to support your conclusions.

- 16) Which part of the story in your opinion is the scariest, or has the greatest level of tension? Create a graph or other visual representation showing the five scenes in the story which you consider to have the greatest tension levels, and how they compare to each other. Write a brief analysis of which scene you consider to have the greatest level of tension within it and why. As a class discuss everyone's different visual representation, which scenes they chose, and their reasoning for these choices.
- 17) Write a short story titled 'The night of the great fire' from the point of view of Molly, Master Merriman, or another minor character from 1666.
- 18) Do you like how the story ended? Why/why not? Who do you think the man is in the final scene, what do you think has happened to him, and why do you think these things? What evidence is there in the text that supports your conclusions?
- 19) What do you think might happen next? Individually, write a description of what you think might happen to Christopher and his family next, and how the ring might play a part in the next part of his story. Include a brief explanation of why you think that this might be a good future sequence of events.