

Plague

AUTHOR

JACKIE FRENCH

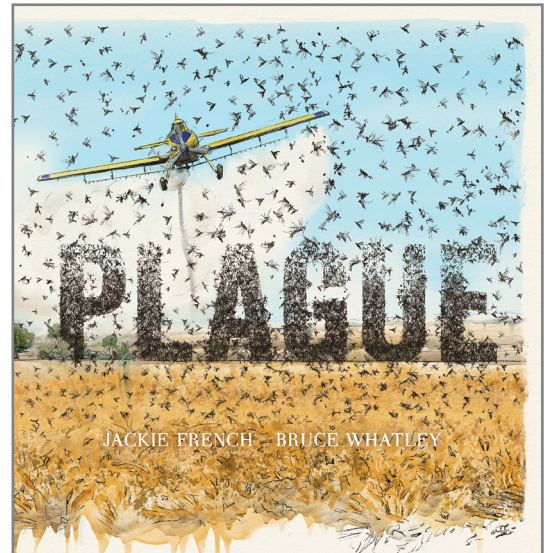
ILLUSTRATOR

BRUCE WHATLEY

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Primary



SYNOPSIS

*Grass—and wheat-lands spread to the horizon,
and so did we, with too few ibis to control us.
We could rage across the land.
We ate the grass, the leaves, the wheat . . .*

From the award-winning creators of *Flood, Fire, Cyclone, Drought, Pandemic and Earthquake*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jackie French AM is an Australian author, historian, ecologist and honorary wombat (part time), 2014–2015 Australian Children' Laureate and 2015 Senior Australian of the Year. Her multi-award-winning books range from provocative historical fiction to hilarious international bestselling picture books.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Bruce Whatley jumped into the unknown world of picture books after a career in advertising as an illustrator and art director. Since 1992 Bruce has written and/or illustrated over 80 children's picture books. Though based in Australia his work is published internationally and in 2014 was included in the Bologna Children's Book Fair Exhibition.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What is a plague?
 - What are some of the different types of plague?
 - What can you see happening on the cover?
 - What type of plague do you think the title might be referring to, and why?
 - Where do you think this book might be set?
 - When do you think this book might be set, and why?
- From whose point of view is the story told? Why do you think the author chose to tell the story from this perspective? How do you think the impact of this story on the reader is affected by the choice of narrator/viewpoint?
- Look carefully at the cover artwork. How has the artist created the letters for the book title?

- Create an artwork of your own featuring a large word of your choice, where the letters are formed from a collection of smaller images of something that is related to what the word refers to. You can draw and colour each individual image by hand, you can use images that have been photocopied or printed to create a collage or you can create your entire artwork digitally. Once you have finished, share your artwork with the class and talk about what you found difficult about this task, what you found easy and what you like the most about your finished product.
 - Create a class wall display of everyone's artworks, and as a class discuss the different techniques chosen and what impression each specific technique creates in the final product.
- Have you seen an ibis? Why do you think that they are often called bin chickens? As a class, discuss the impact of colonisation on native animals and the ecosystem. Some things you might like to include in your discussion could be:
 - Where did ibis traditionally live?
 - What did ibis eat before colonisation?
 - Ibis have adapted to an urban lifestyle, how have they done this?
 - What other native animals have adapted to the urbanisation of Australia and now successfully live in cities?
 - What animals, birds and plants are now critically endangered in Australia? Is this a direct result of European colonisation of Australia?
 - What are some of the indirect impacts of colonisation, European farming practices and the growth of urbanisation on the Australian environment and ecosystems?
 - Individually, create a two-panel artwork showing a native animal or your choice. Panel one should show it in its traditional habitat, and panel two should show it in a post-colonisation environment.
- What is the mental image that you have when you read the line 'we could rage across the land.'? In small groups discuss the mental imagery that accompanies this line. Individually create an artwork inspired by this sentence—your artwork can reflect the events in the story, or it can come purely from your imagination of what this statement could mean.
- How have people dealt with the plagues of insects eating everything?
- Do you think that poison is a good solution to the problem seen in the book? Why/why not? As a class discuss both the direct and indirect impacts of spraying poison to kill unwanted insects that eat crops. Some things you might want to include in your discussion could be:
 - What is the long-term effect of spraying poison on the ecosystem?
 - What other animals does the poison kill?
 - How does poisoning the birds that eat the insects bodies affect the life-cycle of the insects, and the local environment?
 - How might eating food that has been sprayed with insecticide while it is growing affect the people who consume it?
 - What might some of the other indirect impacts of spraying poison be?
- What percentage of the grain grown in Australia is exported, where is it exported to, and why?
- As a class, discuss the difference between long-term thinking and solutions, and short-term thinking and solutions. Some of the things you might like to include in your discussion could be:
 - What is an example of short-term thinking and planning? What is an example of short-term thinking and problem-solving in the book?
 - What is an example of long-term thinking and planning? What is an example of long-term thinking in the book?
 - What are some of the long-term problems caused by short-term thinking in the book?
 - What are some problems faced globally that are the result of short-term thinking in the past?
 - How can we change our responses to problems to ensure that we don't cause more problems for everyone in the future with our short-term 'solution'?
 - What effect would revitalising and restoring the wetlands where ibis live have?
 - How would replanting and expanding felled Eucalyptus forests impact the Australian ecosystem?
 - How would growing grain in Australia exclusively for domestic use (ie. none for export) impact the insect population in the long run?

- What would the impact on the farming community be of limiting grain exports?
- What would be the global impact of reducing/eliminating Australian grain exports? What might be some possible long-term solutions to the problems that would be caused by limiting grain exports?
- In your opinion, should the concept of caring for Country, of cherishing it, and of being responsible stewards for the land, be implemented on a global scale? As a class, brainstorm as to what this might look like, and how it could be put in place.
- In small groups, write a proposal for the foundation of a new global stewardship organisation, that draws inspiration both from modern scientific understanding and knowledge, and traditional beliefs that Country should be cherished, and the ecosystem nurtured so that all might thrive. Create a slideshow presenting your proposal, and share it with the class.
- What have you learnt from this book, and what do you consider to be its most important message?