

# Timefire

AUTHOR

**NEAN MCKENZIE**

**SCIS:** 5453708

**ISBN:** 9781922858030

**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Upper Primary



## SYNOPSIS

In the scorching summer of 2033, Gilbert Black is accused of being a firebug, just like his mother was thirteen years previously. That night a fire starts on his family's farm. A fire with a tunnel in the centre of it. And that's when things start to get really weird.

Pulled repeatedly back and forth through time, Gil finds himself at all the big Australian bushfires from the last two centuries. He searches across the years, determined to unlock the secret to his family's legacy.

Gil can't change the past, but can he learn from it in time to return home and save his family from the biggest inferno ever known?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nean McKenzie is a children's writer and optometrist who lives in western Melbourne. Originally from Bendigo, Nean lived in New Zealand, Europe and North East Africa before returning to Victoria. Nean has had three middle-grade novels published with MidnightSun Publishing: *Cryptosight* (2019), *Xenoflight* (2022), both adventure stories about Australian cryptozoology (creatures that may or may not exist). Her new novel *Timefire* (2023) is a time travel story about bushfires.

Nean was awarded a Maurice Saxby mentorship in 2016, a KSP Writers Centre fellowship for 2023 and has a diploma in Professional Writing and Editing from RMIT. She is a fan of bushwalking, cats, coffee and running.

## THEMES

### Family

- By travelling in time, Gil is in the unusual situation where he can meet family members of different generations, when they are the same age as he is. This means he can more easily relate to them and realise no matter the time, some things don't change, such as bullying and the need to be brave in difficult situations. It also highlights the differences between the earlier and later times in terms of technology, the environment and understanding of the original inhabitants of the land.

### The environment

- Bushfires happen in each time period during the novel, but it is mentioned the fires are getting worse and that the cause of this is climate change. Indigenous fire management is shown as a way to try to naturally control the ecosystem and the growing acceptance of this over the years is demonstrated. Sustainable sources of energy are

envisaged as being mainstream in 2033 along with the replacement of plastic with biodegradable alternatives.

### Resilience

- Gil is bullied by Minnie Minogue at school and the other students follow along, sending messages on their phones and ignoring him on the bus. Jenny is also bullied in 1981. Gil notices that even though there are no phones, his bullying is not that different from the smoking tough kids Jenny has to deal with in Fairhaven. During the course of the story Gil gains a lot of confidence from being brave enough to face bushfires and make his own decisions. He eventually is able to stand up for himself against Minnie.

### Learning From Experience

- All through the story, Vargo tells Gil, 'You can't change the past, you can only learn from it. The future is the only thing you can change.' It takes a while for Gil to understand this and he keeps trying to change things in the past, only to find it is, as Vargo says, impossible. However his trips to the past give him valuable information so that he is the only one that can make a difference, and just when it counts.

### STUDY NOTES

- How do community attitudes to indigenous fire management vary in different times during the novel. Why do you think this is?
- Gil has a dog called Yip, but what other pets do the characters in this story have? How does Yip help Gil to deal with his problems?
- What would you take with you if a fire threatened your home? What items would be most important to you to not lose in a bushfire?
- What time in Australia's history would you most like to travel back to and why?
- How would you feel if you met your mum or dad when they were the same age as you? Do you think you would get along? What would you do together?
- What are Vargo's three rules of time travel? Can you think of any other rules that would be useful if you go back in time?
- What do you think life will be like in ten years? Choose three things you imagine will be different and write about them.
- Draw either your own family tree from the past or made-up one for the future and look at or imagine the important events that happened in these years. This can be in Australia or overseas. How would these events affect the members of your family?
- Design a flowchart of safety procedures that could be used to prevent or minimise injury or damage in the case of a bushfire.
- What other places around the world are prone to bushfires? Mark these places on a map of the world. How are they different to Australian bushfires and how are they the same?