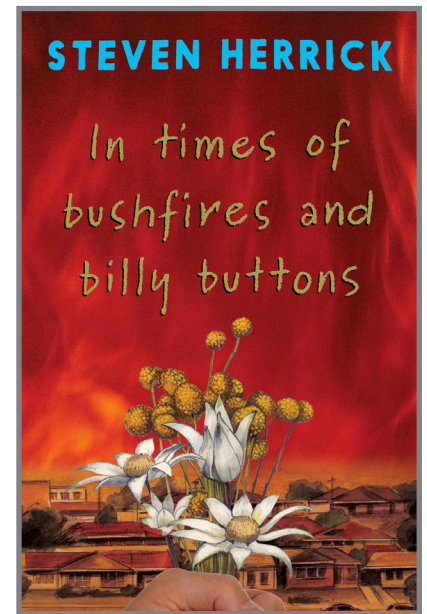


In Times of Bushfires and Billy Buttons

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Secondary

SYNOPSIS

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.

THEMES

- Climate Change
- Family
- Resilience
- Perseverance

STUDY NOTES

- After reading the first chapter either as a class or individually, ask students to discuss what happened and what they learnt about the characters. Then write a short summary of the events of the chapter.
 - Ask Students to reflect on Chapter One and then choose six words that summarise the most important themes, ideas or events from the chapter. As a class, discuss why they chose their six words. This can be continued throughout the text for each chapter. Were there any reoccurring words?
- After reading the novel, as a class, 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.
- 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.
- Separate the class into groups and challenge them 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.

- Once the class has a collection of quotes for each character, ask the 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.
- Write all the characters names on the board. Have a class discussion about 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, do you think they would get along?
- As a class, explore 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 character's perspective.
- Using the worked model as an example, ask students to 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 should choose an event and reflect on how each character would have perceived that event from their viewpoint.
- After reading the novel, 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?
 - Discuss what each character would do in an epilogue that shows what they are doing the following week after the storyline of the novel has ended. Students can then choose one character to focus on and imagine what their life would be like one year and then ten years in the future in a separate epilogue. 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 affect their lives?
 - What impact did the rally have on their lives?

COMPREHENSION

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.
- 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 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'd 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 towards 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?