

Teaching notes for *Tommy Bell, Bushranger Boy #3 – The Gold Escort Gang*

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Summary

The gold escort gang is the third book in the 'Tommy Bell, Bushranger Boy' series, in which Tommy, an ordinary modern-day boy from regional New South Wales, travels back in time to have adventures with real-life bushrangers. *The gold escort gang* features Frank Christie (better known as Frank Gardiner). Tommy Bell met the charming but dangerous Gardiner in book two (*The horse thief*), and the pair are wary of each other.

As in the previous books in the series, there are parallels between Tommy's contemporary life and his adventures in the past. In this episode, Tommy is worried by his friend Francis's behaviour. He likes Francis, but the popular new boy's ethics are troubling; Francis is planning a theft and he wants Tommy to be involved. Tommy doesn't want to be kicked out of the gang but neither does he want to steal.

To escape the problem, Tommy travels back in time. He finds himself caught up in the infamous 'Gold Escort Robbery' at Eugowra Rocks, where he encounters Frank Gardiner and his gang – which includes Ben Hall, who was at the beginning of his bushranging 'career' at the time. While he realises that Frank Gardiner is simply bad news, Tommy finds Ben Hall likeable in spite of his criminal behaviour. He realises that Frank's bad influence could cause Ben real harm and resolves not to let his own friend manipulate him in future.

The gold escort gang is an excellent resource as a stand-alone novel for classroom units or to be enjoyed by readers as part of the ongoing series.

From the Author

I'm lucky that my favourite pastimes – reading and writing and learning about history – are also important parts of my job. I'm an author but I'm also a school librarian (which means I spend my days surrounded by books) and a school archivist – which means I also spend my days sorting, cataloguing and preserving old things, and finding out all the stories behind them. That's what history is, really: stories. Some of the stories we read are true and some are not, but all of them can be fascinating.

My interest in Australian history led me to write my true stories about the bushrangers in the *Australian Bushranger* series. In turn, these true stories led to the not-so-true stories about Tommy Bell, an ordinary boy who goes back in time to have extraordinary adventures with the colourful criminals of our past.

The Tommy Bell, bushranger boy series combines fact with fiction. The books contain true settings and events and some real people, but the main characters – Tommy and his friends – are characters that I made up. This is what we call historical fiction. I've tried to keep the history part as accurate as possible, and to help you to separate the fact from the fiction, I've included some historical notes at the end.

A final note: I owe my love of reading to many authors who wrote the wonderful books that brought me so much joy in my childhood. As a child I especially loved adventure stories, so it has been a thrill to have had the chance to write some adventure stories of my own. I've dedicated each book in my Tommy Bell series to characters in books that I enjoyed as a child. Can you work out who those characters are? Maybe your teacher or librarian or parents can help you to find the books they came from!

Emerging themes and issues

- Australian bushrangers – heroes or villains?
- Time travel
- The Gold Rush
- Transport in the past
- Friendships
- Moral dilemmas and the complexity of human behaviour
- Comparison of rural communities in the past and present.
- The importance of local knowledge in a region's history
- Criminal behaviour
- Adventure

Curriculum Links

Australian Curriculum English Year 3

Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts, and share responses with others ([ACELT1596 - Scootle](#))

Discuss how language is used to describe the settings in texts, and explore how the settings shape the events and influence the mood of the narrative ([ACELT1599 - Scootle](#))

Identify the point of view in a text and suggest alternative points of view ([ACELY1675 - Scootle](#))

Discuss the nature and effects of some language devices used to enhance meaning and shape the reader's reaction, including rhythm and onomatopoeia in poetry and prose ([ACELT1600 - Scootle](#))

Create imaginative texts based on characters, settings and events from students' own and other cultures using visual features, for example perspective, distance and angle ([ACELT1601 - Scootle](#))

Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning and begin to evaluate texts by drawing on a growing knowledge of context, text structures and language features ([ACELY1680 - Scootle](#))

Australian Curriculum English Year 4

Discuss literary experiences with others, sharing responses and expressing a point of view ([ACELT1603](#))

Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension ([ACELT1605](#))

Recognise how quotation marks are used in texts to signal dialogue, titles and quoted (direct) speech ([ACELA1492](#))

Understand, interpret and experiment with a range of devices and deliberate word play in poetry and other literary texts, for example nonsense words, spoonerisms, neologisms and puns ([ACELT1606](#))

Create literary texts that explore students' own experiences and imagining ([ACELT1607](#))

Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning to expand content knowledge, integrating and linking ideas and analysing and evaluating texts ([ACELY1692](#))

Australian Curriculum English Year 5

Understand that patterns of language interaction vary across social contexts and types of texts and that they help to signal social roles and relationships ([ACELA1501](#))

Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details or information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts ([ACELT1608](#))

Understand how the grammatical category of possessives is signalled through apostrophes and how to use apostrophes with common and proper nouns ([ACELA1506](#))

Investigate how the organisation of texts into chapters, headings, subheadings, home pages and sub-pages for online texts and according to chronology or topic can be used to predict content and assist navigation ([ACELA1797](#))

Recognise that ideas in literary texts can be conveyed from different viewpoints, which can lead to different kinds of interpretations and responses ([ACELT1610](#))

Create literary texts that experiment with structures, ideas and stylistic features of selected authors ([ACELT1798](#))

Identify and explain characteristic text structures and language features used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the text ([ACELY1701](#)).

Use a range of software including word processing programs with fluency to construct, edit and publish written text, and select, edit and place visual, print and audio elements ([ACELY1707](#))

Australian Curriculum Year 6 English

Understand how authors often innovate on text structures and play with language features to achieve particular aesthetic, humorous and persuasive purposes and effects ([ACELA1518](#))

Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts ([ACELT1613](#))

Identify the relationship between words, sounds, imagery and language patterns in narratives and poetry such as ballads, limericks and free verse ([ACELT1617](#))

Participate in and contribute to discussions, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing and supporting arguments, sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions ([ACELY1709](#))

Analyse how text structures and language features work together to meet the purpose of a text ([ACELY1711](#))

Select, navigate and read texts for a range of purposes, applying appropriate text processing strategies and interpreting structural features, for example table of contents, glossary, chapters, headings and subheadings ([ACELY1712](#))

Suggested Pre-Reading Activities

- What do you know about bushrangers? Think about this and share your thoughts with a partner. Share those ideas with the class and make a list: What do We Know – What do We Want to Know – How will we find out?
- View maps and photographs (from the past and present) of the settings.
- Identify the period of Australian history in which bushrangers were prevalent. Show or locate on a timeline. Discuss other events which were occurring in Australia's history during this time.
- Show students the cover of the novel and read the blurb to them. Ask them to write down their predictions of what might happen to Tommy throughout the story.

Suggested During Reading activities

- As students progress through the story, create a story map which outlines the generic features of the novel (Introduction, conflict, resolution, further action, conclusion)
- As more about the 'Gold Escort Gang' is revealed as the story unfolds, research online to see if any of the settings or events in the story happened in real life (Refer to Jane Smith's 'Australian Bushrangers' series books, *Frank Gardiner* and *Ben Hall*.)
- Create a word wall, including unknown words and words relating to the era in which Frank Gardiner lived.
- Choose words from within the text to include in spelling lists.

Suggested Post Reading Activities

- Write a letter to author and historian Jane Smith asking further questions about Frank Gardiner, Ben Hall or Australian Bushrangers in general.
- Create and film a "book talk" reviewing the book
- Produce a new book cover and blurb for the story
- Compile a book review, outlining details of the storyline, recommended readers, etc.
- Create an advertising poster which could be displayed in a bookstore which would persuade readers to purchase the book.

Chapter Summaries and Comprehension Questions

Chapter 1

Tommy has made friends with Francis, a new boy from his school. Francis is jealous of a wealthy fellow student's bike and decides to steal it. He puts pressure on Tommy to become involved. What will Tommy do?

1. What was Francis planning to do at school on Monday? And why?
2. Why didn't Mrs O'Grady trust Francis?
3. How does Tommy feel about Francis' suggestion?
4. Outline Tommy's experience with stealing.
5. How does Tommy feel about Martin?
6. If you were Tommy, what would you do?
7. Combo is very important to Tommy. Describe him.
8. What was special about Tommy's cabbage-tree hat?

Chapter 2

With the help of the cabbage-tree hat Tommy travels 150 years back in time. As Tommy sees the bushranger Frank Gardiner he thinks back over his previous adventures and meets a trooper with the Gold Escort.

1. How does Tommy feel when he puts on the cabbage-tree hat?
2. Read the author's description of the landscape on page 13. Visualise the area and draw a picture to show what you think it would look like.
3. Tommy finds himself back in the 19th century. If the 21st century is the 2000's, what would the 19th century be?
4. On page 14 we read that Tommy has travelled 150 years back in time. What words does the author use to show what Tommy sees and hears? List.
5. When Tommy sees the men in the water, he feels mixed emotions. What shocked him? What made him laugh?
6. Tommy met Frank Gardiner in a previous adventure. Write a timeline of Tommy's adventures with Frank.
7. Tommy shuddered when the policeman mentions Cockatoo Island – Why? Explain.
8. How long was Frank's sentence?
9. What does the word 'reformed' mean?
10. List the similarities between Tommy's friend Francis and the bushranger Frank Gardiner.
11. Explain what is meant by the Gold Escort coaches.
12. Frank's friend had a number of pseudonyms – what were they?

Chapter 3

Tommy wakes to find himself back in 2016. But with the thought of the household chores in front of him, he decides to head back in time.

1. Tommy woke up back in 2016. If Tommy had travelled back in time by about 150 years, then roughly what year would that be?
2. When Tommy put on the cabbage-tree hat again he knew there would be trouble later. Why?
3. Predict what you think might happen next.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, Tommy travels back in time again. He surprises and impresses the locals by reading a current newspaper where he finds out more about Frank Gardiner.

1. Fill in the table of descriptions from page 30:

Noun (name)	Adjectives (description)
<i>Village</i>	
<i>Men</i>	
<i>Women</i>	
<i>Corner Store</i>	

2. For what purpose did Tommy really need the newspaper?
3. Explain why the shopkeeper won't let Tommy pay for the newspaper.
4. Tommy finds that he has travelled to 1862. How many years would he travel through to get to today's date?
5. Tommy is surprised to see a letter to the editor from Frank Gardiner. Compare Frank's argument to that of the shop customer.
6. Does Tommy believe, or disbelieve Frank Gardiner? Why?

Chapter 5

As Tommy and Combo ride out to explore the countryside around Eugowra, Tommy finds himself caught up in a robbery...

1. What sentence indicates that Tommy is familiar with the surrounding country?
2. What milestone did Tommy find?
3. Use Google Maps or an Atlas to find Eugowra on a map of Australia.
4. The author uses many descriptive phrases to help the reader visualise: '*quiet rustling*', '*tree branch flickering*', '*crackling of twigs*', '*low muttering*', etc. Read page 40 and list as many descriptive phrases as you can.
5. Describe the gang of men blocking the road.
6. One of the men in the gang steps forward – who is it? What does he look like?
7. How did Tommy feel about Frank?
8. What does Frank force Tommy and the bullock drivers to do? Why?
9. Look at the illustration on page 44. Which one is Tommy? How do you know?
10. The author describes Frank's mates on pages 46 and 47. Table their characteristics/descriptions:

Name	Description
Johnny Gilbert – 'Flash Jack'	
O'Meally	
Harry	
Dan	

11. Explain how Tommy and the bullockies helped to rob the coach.
12. How did Frank's gang plan to rob the coach without being recognised?
13. What happened when the gang jumped out onto the road?
14. What did the robbers steal?
15. What else was in the coach?

Chapter 6

Ben Hall befriends Tommy and offers him a safe place to sleep in his home. Will Ben take Tommy's advice and try to turn his life around?

1. Why does the man return Combo to Tommy?
2. 'Tommy nearly exploded!' Explain why.
3. Does the man with the sad eyes feel that the troopers are fair? How do you know?
4. What is the name of the man who has been helping Tommy?
5. What surprises Tommy about the man?
6. Does Tommy trust Ben Hall? What makes you think that?
7. Ben Hall has had some challenges. What are they?

8. *'I've got nothing to lose.'* Explain why Ben Hal believes this. Is this fact, or opinion? Why?
9. Compare Tommy's experiences at Ben's house with his home in the modern day.
10. What did Ben offer Tommy for his dinner?
11. Describe Tommy's sleeping quarters.
12. *Ben smiled sadly. 'Mrs O'Grady sounds like a clever lady,' he said. 'But it's too late.'* Explain.

Chapter 7

Tommy learns more about the robbery and the character of Sir Fred Pottinger, the local police superintendent. Tommy receives some sound advice from a surprising source.

1. Frank Gardiner and his men stole £14,000 (pounds). Research to find out how much that would be in today's currency.
2. Earlier in this story Sir Fred Pottinger was accused of being weak and disorganised. He catches the criminals but does the general public change their opinion of him? How do you know?
3. Compare the descriptions of Sir Fred Pottinger and Ben Hall.
4. Do you think that Tommy agrees with him? Why, or why not?
5. *'Ben's one of us. Hard worker. Fine horseman. He's twice the man of Sir Fred Pottinger!' / 'And that Ben Hall: he'll come to no good.'* How can Ben be a good man, but come to no good?
6. When Tommy says goodbye, the shopkeeper gives him some advice. What does it is? Will Tommy take it to heart?

Chapter 8

When Tommy returns to his own life he has a big decision to make – will he stay in Francis' gang, or will he stand up for what is right?

1. Tommy has just had another adventure. He wakes to the news that his 'friend' Francis has called. How would Tommy feel?
2. Tommy initially says 'No' to calling Francis, but then asks to go over to his place. Tommy rides over on Combo. Why does he do this?
3. How does Tommy show Francis that he is a friend?
4. Tommy stands up to Francis. How does he do this?
5. What would you do in Tommy's situation?
6. If Tommy was to have another adventure, what would it be?



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Character Profile

Combo

Draw a picture of Combo	Describe how Combo looks
Describe your character's personality	Describe your character's role in the story

Policeman's Shopping List

Imagine that you are a policeman in the gold rush days. What sort of supplies and equipment would you need to catch a bushranger?

Write a list of items that you think you would need below.
