

Teaching Notes for Tommy Bell Bushranger Boy #2 – The Horse Thief

Written by Jane Smith

Teaching notes by Jodi Lundie-Jenkins and Rebecca Crichton

Summary

Tommy Bell is happy when the popular new kid at school, Francis, wants him to join his gang. Francis is fun, but Tommy is uneasy about the mischief he causes.

Tommy thinks he'll be able to forget about his friendship dramas on the school holidays, when his parents take him on a trip to Victoria for a horse show with his beloved Combo. But on the way, seeking a bit of adventure, he dons his magic cabbage-tree hat and finds himself back in the gold rush days.

He encounters the bushranger Frank Christie (better known as Frank Gardiner) and is swept up in the police chase to capture this rogue who has stolen a mob of horses. Gardiner is a charming, clever and manipulative man, and Tommy finds himself thrown together with this frightening character a number of times as he ventures back and forwards in time throughout the story. The action includes a chase, a jail-break, a theft and a dramatic capture.

Tommy's brush with Gardiner shows him that hanging out with law-breakers can be dangerous, and he draws parallels with his own troubled relationship with Francis. As in the first book, *Shoot-out at the rock*, this novel opens the discussion about right and wrong, and shows young readers how the personal charms of some of the bushrangers in our past led people to view them as heroes despite their criminal and sometimes violent behaviour.

The horse thief is the second book in the 'Tommy Bell, Bushranger Boy' series and 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
- 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
- Horses
- 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

- Discussion: If you could travel back in time and visit a certain place or event, where might you like to go? What might you choose to see or do? What might be different?
- 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 at 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 Frank 'Christie' 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 book, Frank Gardiner).
- 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 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

There is a new kid named Francis at Tommy's school. He quickly becomes popular with everyone, even Tommy. However, when the boys get called in to see Mrs. O'Grady after stealing mulberries, Tommy realises that Francis might be trouble.

1. The author uses the first few pages of the book to recap Tommy's adventures from the previous book. Who did Tommy meet in his travels back in time?
2. Why did Tommy like Francis?
3. What was Tommy daydreaming about?
4. Where did Francis want to meet Tommy at lunch time?
5. How would you react if someone asked you to go outside the schoolgrounds during the day?
6. Identify how Mrs. O'Grady knew out about the incident at the mulberry tree.
7. Explain how Francis got the boys out of trouble. Do you think he was clever? Why, or why not?
8. Describe how Mrs. O'Grady felt about Tommy's involvement in the mulberry episode.
9. Riding Combo is Tommy's happy and safe place. What is yours?

Chapter 2

Tommy and his parents are ready to leave for the horse show when Tommy goes back for his special hat. Tommy reminisces about where he found it and the special powers it seemed to hold.

1. Just before they left home, Tommy went back inside for an old hat. What words does the author use to describe it?
2. What type of hat had Tommy's grandfather told him it was?
3. What would happen if Tommy put the hat on his head?
4. Who did Tommy meet when he last wore the hat?
5. Explain how Tommy felt about putting the hat on again.
6. What sentence in this chapter makes you feel that Tommy is in for another adventure?

Chapter 3

Tommy's family stop at Dunkeld, and while his mum prepares lunch Tommy decides to go for a ride on Combo. He is transported back in time and ends up in front of an old-fashioned pub. There he meets a man called Tommy Taylor.

1. Why did Mrs. Bell look cross?
2. When Tommy puts on his hat, he discovers that he has somehow travelled back in time again. What around him had changed?
3. Draw a picture showing how the picnic area changed when Tommy put on his hat.
4. What words does the author use to describe Tommy's feelings as he heads back in time?

5. On pages 20 – 23 the author cues us in to a different era. List 6 things that show the differences between now and then. (compare and contrast)
6. Describe what Thomas Taylor looked like.
7. Who did Thomas Taylor remind Tommy of, and why?
8. Why did Thomas have the horses tied up outside?

Chapter 4

Tommy wakes to find an angry horse owner looking for the thief who stole his horses. He and Tommy ride to Hamilton to speak to the police, then move on to an inn beside the Fitzroy River. Tommy helps to catch Frank Christie (Thomas Morton) and receives a threat.

1. Who was the angry man in the pub when Tommy woke up?
2. What was Thomas Taylor's real name?
3. Describe how Tommy feels about Mr. Morton.
4. Morton says it's '20 miles to Hamilton'. How far is that in kilometres?
5. What date did this take place? How did Tommy find out what time he had travelled to?
6. Guess how Tommy would have felt at night time as they rode through the dark countryside.
7. Describe what made Tommy laugh when they all arrived at the inn on the Fitzroy River.
8. How did the troopers catch the men?
9. What happened when Tommy passed Frank?

Chapter 5

Tommy is confused when he wakes to find himself at the Hamilton Show. As Tommy prepares to compete he feels less excited about the challenge of taking part in the children's dressage event. However once Tommy and Combo begin to compete they work in complete unison to win the event.

1. How did the riders prepare themselves and their horses for the event?
2. What did Tommy say was the most important thing about dressage?
3. List three things that Tommy loved about Combo.

Chapter 6

In this chapter, Tommy returns to 1850, and encounters Frank Christie and a gang of prisoners. Christie escapes and forces Tommy to help him escape. Tommy learns more about the bushranger as they sit together around a warm campfire.

1. Tommy decided not to wear the cabbage-tree hat again. Why?

2. Explain how the surrounding area changes when Tommy's mum clamps the hat onto his head.
3. Draw a picture showing what Tommy saw in the clearing.
4. Compare what the prisoners have to do to what their supervisors are doing.
5. How does Frank escape?
6. "In the country, the only job a young man can do is herd sheep or work with stock." List at least 6 jobs that are available to young men today.

Chapter 7

The two travelers say goodbye when Frank waves down a wagon heading for the goldfields. Tommy, feeling hungry and more confident now with the cabbage-tree hat, travels back to his own time. Relieved to be back with his family, Tommy has a big lunch and dozes off, only to head back in time again...

1. When Tommy meets Frank Christie again, he is going by some other names. What are they?
2. List the jobs Frank has had since he last saw Tommy.
3. How did Tommy feel about Frank stealing the horses? Why?
4. What are the similarities between Mrs. O'Grady and Francis, and the policeman and Frank?
5. What was Cockatoo Island?
6. Explain how Tommy's feelings about Frank Christie changed throughout the book.
7. How has his adventure helped Tommy with his new friend Francis?

Character Profile

Frank Christie (Gardiner)

<p>Draw a picture of Frank Christie (Gardiner)</p>	<p>Describe how Frank Christie (Gardiner) looks</p>
<p>Describe your character's personality.</p>	<p>Describe your character's role in the story</p>

Bushranger's Shopping List

Imagine that you are a bushranger like Frank Christie (Gardiner).

What sort of supplies and equipment would you need to escape from jail?
