

Teaching Notes for Tommy Bell Bushranger Boy #4 – Outback Adventure

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Summary

Outback Adventure is the fourth 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.

Tommy has made friends with Martin, the gentle boy from whom he stole a donut in the first book. Tommy is on holidays with Martin's family at an uncle's farm in central Queensland. Martin finds a pair of old bushranger's boots that have the same power as Tommy's hat, and so, for the first time, Tommy has the company of a friend on his time-travelling adventures.

The boys encounter Harry Readford, better known today as the bushranger 'Captain Starlight'. They join Readford and his gang on a long journey, droving 1000 cattle across the outback to Adelaide. They don't realise until they're in too deep that the cattle are stolen.

Along the way, they camp out under the stars, they encounter an Aboriginal man who helps them when they're lost, and they attend a criminal trial. The contradictions in Readford's character shows young readers that bushrangers' behaviour and motivations could be complex, which can open the discussion about how and why they are viewed by some as heroes, some as villains and others as victims of circumstance.

As in all the 'Tommy Bell, Bushranger Boy' books, a historical note at the end gives young readers a little more of the true story, and a mock 'Q & A' with Harry Readford adds colour to his character.

Outback adventure 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
- Cattle droving and stockmen
- Friendships
- Moral dilemmas and the complexity of human behaviour
- Indigenous Australians - history
- Comparison of rural communities in the past and present
- The importance of local knowledge in a region's history
- Criminal behaviour
- Criminal trials
- The outback
- Survival
- 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 that 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 the 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 Harry Readford 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, *Captain Starlight*).
- Create a word wall, including unknown words and words relating to the era in which Harry Readford 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 Harry (Henry) Readford 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 Martin, one of the boys from his school. They travel to Bowen Downs Station, where they spend their time helping out and riding their horses, Combo and Kevin. One day Martin finds some old boots...

1. The author uses the first few pages of the book to introduce Martin and Tommy's new relationship. Things had not always been good between the two boys. The author writes that 'their friendship itself had been a surprise.' Why?
2. Compare Tommy's thoughts about Martin with those of their other school mates.
3. In the first Tommy Bell book, Tommy finds a magic cabbage-tree hat. What is so special about it?
4. 'In the past [Bowen Downs Station] was nearly 4000 square kilometres. That's about ten times what it is now.' How big is the station?
5. The author gives a detailed description of the boots Martin finds in the small cavern in the rocks. Make a list of the descriptive words used to help the reader visualise Martin's find.
6. Compare how Martin and Tommy felt about finding the boots.
7. *'What harm could a pair of old boots do?'* Predict what might happen next.

Chapter 2

In this chapter Martin finds the time to clean up the old boots. Both Tommy and Combo are nervous, but before they can stop him, Martin pulls on his new find.

1. Despite the cruelty of branding cattle, Martin's uncle believes it is necessary. Why?
2. Martin feels strongly about protecting animals from cruelty. What do you feel strongly about?
3. What happens as Martin pulls on the boots?
4. What does Tommy do next?

Chapter 3

Tommy and Martin find themselves back in time at Bowen Downs Station. Tommy recalls his previous adventures with the cabbage-tree hat, while Martin takes in his new surroundings. The boys soon learn all about the 'thievin' McKenzies'...

1. When Tommy and Martin put on the hat and boots, they discover that they have somehow travelled back in time again. What around them has changed?

Real Time	Back in Time

2. What had happened every time Tommy had put on his old hat?
3. On page 20, Tommy found an idea ridiculous. What was it, and why did it seem so strange to him? Explain why you do or don't agree with Tommy.
4. Is Martin keen to take off the boots and go home? How do you know?
5. Use Google Maps or an atlas to find Bowen Downs Station. Where is it? What is the nearest town?
6. *'Surely there's no bushrangers way out here at Bowen Downs'...* Do some research and find out whether there were many bushrangers in Queensland.

Chapter 4

Tommy and Martin meet Harry Readford travelling with a huge herd of cattle. Harry offers them an opportunity Martin just can't refuse, but Tommy isn't so sure...

1. What time is it when the boys meet up with the huge herd of cattle?
2. Tommy and Martin meet Harry Readford. Using the author's description of Harry, draw a sketch of his face.
3. Harry claims he is a 'remittance man', but Tommy notices some things that don't make sense. What are they?
4. Why doesn't Tommy say anything to Harry?
5. Compare Tommy and Martin's feelings about working for Harry.

Chapter 5

Tommy and Martin must get used to living out in the bush. They meet Harry's friends and begin the long ride to Adelaide.

1. According to Tommy, what are the pros and cons of sleeping outside in the bush? List them.
2. In the story, Adelaide is 1600 kilometres away. Look on a map and find a place that is the same distance from where you live. Would you like to drive cattle that far? Why or why not?
3. *'Kevin is a champion! Of course he'll make it!'* List the adjectives used by the author to describe Kevin.

4. Make a table of features and characteristics of the drovers:

James Johnson	George Dewdney	William Rooke	Harry Merrick

5. Explain why the trip was going to be dangerous.
6. What line gives the reader an idea of what is to come in the next few chapters?

Chapter 6

As the friends travel through the desert, they work hard to learn how to find water. However, disaster strikes when Harry and Martin head off towards something unusual on the horizon...

1. On page 48 the author uses a simile to describe Martin in the desert. What is it? List three other similes you could use to describe characters in this book.
2. Explain what a mirage is.
3. When Tommy and Martin realise they are lost, what do they do? Was this a good idea? Why, or why not?
4. Martin has a suggestion for how to solve the problem. Why is Tommy so unsure about the idea?
5. Who rescues the boys?
6. Tommy is concerned about what will happen when Harry meets the boys' rescuer. Explain why.

Chapter 7

On the journey to Artacoona, Tommy and Martin learn more about Harry and the cattle muster. The boys overhear some things that make them wonder if all is really as it seems...

1. In this chapter the author develops Harry's character by adding details of his life. List at least 4 things that Tommy learns about Harry during the journey.
2. What skills made Harry a good bushman?
3. After many days the drovers arrive at Artacoona. Use Google Maps or an atlas to find out if this is a real place.
4. The boys had a problem with bathing at Artacoona – What was it? How did they overcome this problem?
5. Why did the men only buy 'boring things like flour and sugar and tea'?
6. How did Harry pay for the goods?

7. The author mentions the shopkeeper (Allan Walke) by name. Predict why this may be important later in the book.
8. 'Everything was starting to add up' – what does Tommy realise?
9. Explain why the boys decided it was time to go back to their own time.

Chapter 8

The boys remove their boots and hat and find themselves back in Bowen Downs in the present. They enjoyed just being boys again at Bowen Downs before heading home. Martin, who loves reading, finds a piece about "Henry (Harry) Readford". As the boys reach Roma they decide that it's time to head back to 1873...

1. What routines did the boys return to when they came back from 1873?
2. What did Martin find when he was reading historical books on the drive home?
3. Make a timeline showing Harry's time in Artacoona until his trial.
4. Where and when was Harry tried?
5. How did Tommy and Martin react?

Chapter 9

Tommy and Martin attend the trial of Henry (Harry) Readford – what was the verdict?

1. The author refers to 'Whitey' as being the evidence that will convict Harry. In what chapter was Whitey introduced, and what happened to him on the journey?
2. What was Harry charged with?
3. What evidence was put forward to convict Harry?
4. In your opinion, do you agree with the verdict that was handed down? Why or why not?
5. List the various reactions of people to the verdict.

Chapter 10

Back in their own time, the boys learn more about the future of Harry. Throughout their journey they have learned that no one is all bad.

1. Why do you think the boys could hardly recognise the Roma Courthouse?
2. Why did Harry become famous?
3. What happened to him after he was found 'Not Guilty'? List.
4. 'He wasn't a bad man – not completely.' What does this mean? Explain.

Character Profile

Harry Readford

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

