

About fire safety and bushfires

Continuing ideas for exploring the environment now in the
2020 International Year of Plant Health

by Jeanie Clark

This summer has been horrific with fires across our land. Is fire something that you would want to explore with your children? If so, what sorts of topics and issues would you want to cover? Where you live or go on holiday may affect this. The ages and experiences of your children may also direct what you want them to know. This article will cover some online fire safety educational resources first, mostly suited to primary levels, and then some better suited to secondary levels for several of the curriculum areas.

Because this is a topic that may evoke different reactions in different people, especially young people, I can't stress enough that you think about what is important for your young people to know about fire in these times and how they will handle that, before you explore this topic with them. This article will provide some resources, but I strongly suggest that you, the educator, check them first and choose those that are the right fit for those you teach.

Fire safety

What should you teach as fire safety? 'Fire Safe Kids'¹ is a Victorian Country Fire Authority (CFA) primary school age program. It progresses through four levels: pre-school, lower, middle and

upper. The content on the webpage lists fire safety education topics at home and/or in the bush for each level. This program is intended for delivery by a CFA member.

What if you prefer not to have this direct contact? You could use the NSW Fire and Rescue Service's educational website² instead. It has lesson plans and resources in the 'Teacher's Kit' pdfs for pre-school and lower primary levels. There is also a link to a 'Brigade Kids Activity book'³ of games.

The CFA website also has links to games, word puzzles and colouring pages as support materials on its 'Activities'⁶ page. The 'Neville Numbat gets dressed for safety' game³ is a quick introduction or reminder as to what clothing one should have if fire is close, but it is designed to use with pre-readers.

The Queensland Fire and Emergency Services also have fire-ed resources⁴. A cute koala (Blazer) features in their safety tips, colouring book, quizzes, fire truck model and 000-game.

Looking for what to do in a week? Rachael Alley has a week's home education program in her 'Fire Safety activities for kids' page⁵ at TeachingMama. She has some great craft and role-play activities as the theme is

developed through the week. Forget the American base, there are some great ideas here that could be adapted anywhere.

For more messages about home fire safety, the 'Fire Safety with Hi-5'⁷ video⁸ from NSW runs through several actions in 2½ minutes. I'd play it through, then replay stopping to practise its actions in situ.

What actions do fire danger ratings imply? 'Survive and Thrive: a bush fire message from Strathewen PS-CFA'⁹ is a child-friendly clay-motion video. Made by survivors of the 2009 fires, it covers appropriate actions for each fire rating. Well worth its six minutes. There is a follow-up video⁸ about the production which includes some fire-ed science that is more suited to older students.

Secondary targeted resources are provided by the CFA website. There is a section for lower to middle secondary students⁹ with detailed unit plans and resources. They cover home and summer fire safety, disaster resilience and landscaping. There are further links to more detailed and advanced resources.

Bushfires

What's next in learning about 'fire'? While following interests and being age-

Fire-ed Educational Webpage references for page 32

- 1 Fire Safe Kids <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/kids-schools/fire-safe-kids>
- 2 NSW fire-ed educational resources <https://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/page.php?id=71>
- 3 CFA primary student activities <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/kids-schools/activities>
- 3 Fire safe dressing <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/kids-schools/flash-game-neville-numbat-gets-dressed-for-safety>
- 4 QLD Fire-ed resources <https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/community-safety/kids/Pages/default.aspx>
- 5 a practical week's plan of fire-ed by Rachael Alley <https://teachingmama.org/fire-safety-activities-for-kids/>

appropriate, there could be many topics that fit in to any of the eight learning areas, e.g. Fire safety is a part of the Health area. A few suggestions based in bushfires and for older students, follow.

English is included in most of education. We can discuss things in the media, e.g. the fire safety adverts on TV. Do they seem relevant to your area? Who do they seem to be focussed on? What type of fire danger is their focus? Then if you design a fire safety poster that is relevant to your home, local area and/or perceived danger, it is part of Technology.

There is so much that can be read too. What about some classic Australian fiction and poetry? Ivan Southall's *Ash Road* (1965) should be available from libraries. Look up study notes for it on the web. Henry Lawson's story *The Bush fire* is a romance with four chapters that ends in a bush fire. It is part of his 1907 *Romance of the Swag* collection. The web has both a story reading (by Short Stories Café) and the story (see Project Gutenberg Australia). Lawson also wrote a great poem *The Bush-Fire* (1905).

History - Lawson's poem and story are good reads, with an historical insight in to similarities to, and differences from, this summer's tragic fire experiences in how people respond to and fight bushfires compared to a century plus ago. Other historical information is in these stories. What can you find? Look for communications, transport, crops, tools, and squatter v selectors social differences.

What about our First People's use of fire for farming?

Monroe's *austhrutime.com* 'Fire-stick farmers' webpage covers this topic well. The mosaics created by 'Fire-stick farming' also reduced damage done by lightning fires. (How?) Bruce Pascoe's "*Young Dark Era*" (2019) reports that East Gippsland was burnt on a 5-year rotation in Feb or March when there were morning westerlies and afternoon northeasterlies, so that fires back-burned naturally (p 64).

Arts - Fire photos and videos abound in the media, a part of the arts. What about paintings? Google 1851 Black Thursday Victoria for "images". The story is on a Port Phillip Pioneers webpage with a b/w sketch. Radio National's *Bushfires in literature and art* is an interesting ¼ hour discussion which includes this 1851 bush fire and its painting. Of artworks, one may ask: What is happening? What feelings does it evoke? Is it scary/ beautiful? Why? If desired, create!

Mathematics - How many bushfires have been recorded in Victoria and how often have they occurred? The earliest recorded Victorian bushfire is 1845 in Central Victoria. Bushfire Education has a list from 1851 to 2009. *Forest Fire Management* has a descending list from 2013 to 1851. Both have details. From the last decade add: 2014 Latrobe Valley and Southern Gippsland; 2015 Otways; 2018 South Western Vic; 2019 East Gippsland. Timelines of dates would be the simplest way to analyse this data to answer the above questions (number, frequency).

Geography - Geographic and mathematical skills are used in knowledge of Victoria's

regions, places in the media and maps showing fire warnings and impacts. Maps can make clear summaries, e.g. the map on the CFA's '*Ash Wednesday (1983)*' pdf. The location and losses information on the above *Bushfire Education* pdf could be used to make similar maps for other past bushfires. What about globally, e.g. changes in bushfires from one year to another? Have a look at Phys.org's '*Is Earth on fire?*' map (2018-19).

Understanding weather patterns that create extreme fire danger days is both Geography and Science. The ABC's webpage '*What makes a horror fire danger day?*' has some great maps and diagrams with explanations of bushfire triggering weather patterns. The Australian Academy of Science's '*Bushfire: Understanding Bushfires*' webpage covers more factors that affect bushfires.

Science is very much about life. Bushfire recovery is a long-term part of life. Within a month, 'green' will dot the black landscape. Epicormic growth from tree trunks is a joy to behold. Changes can be followed over months and years. Yes, we live in a land where fire occurs, but our natural ecosystems need fire to survive and thrive - growing, producing oxygen, shade, creature homes and the pleasure of a green landscape. Is there a place where you can monitor this return? This could become an activity for your children for this the International Year of Plant Health.

Weblinks to references for page 33

Henry Lawson's *Bushfires*

The Bush-Fire read by Short Stories Café at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzxokwyhCEg>

The Romance of the Swag (1907) collection at <http://www.gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0607191h.html> contains *The Bush-fire*, or the story on its own is at <http://www.telelib.com/authors/L/LawsonHenry/prose/romanceofswag/bushfire.html>

The Bush-Fire (poem 1905) at <http://ironbarkresources.com/henrylawson/BushFire.html>

Black Thursday 1851

William Strutt's *Black Thursday 1851* painting at the SLV

<http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/image/black-thursday-february-6th-1851>

Black Thursday bushfires 1851, Port Phillip Pioneers. <https://portphillippioneersgroup.org.au/pppg5df.htm>

RN "*Bushfires in literature and art*" 10 Feb 2016 <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/booksandarts/bushfires-in-art/7154532> ; interview at https://abcmedia.akamaized.net/rn/podcast/2016/02/bay_20160210_1042.mp3

Bushfire frequency

Bushfire Education '*Bushfires in our History 1851-2009*' http://www.bushfireeducation.vic.edu.au/verve/resources/Bushfires_in_our_History.pdf

FFMVIC *Past Bushfires chronology 2013 back to 1851* at <https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/history-and-incidents/past-bushfires>

Bushfires in maps

CFA *Ash Wednesday Factsheet* pdf is at https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/documents/20143/74279/fs_ash-wednesday.pdf/a8b2bb0f-0c70-8603-0f94-c29e73803bf2

Phys.Org's map "*Is Earth on fire?*" (click on the map)

<https://phys.org/news/2019-10-earth-wildfires-year.html>

ABC News '*What makes a horror fire danger day?*'

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-01-24/what-makes-a-horror-fire-danger-day/10685918>

Aust Ac. Sc. *Bushfires 1- Understanding bushfires*

<https://www.science.org.au/curious/bushfires>