

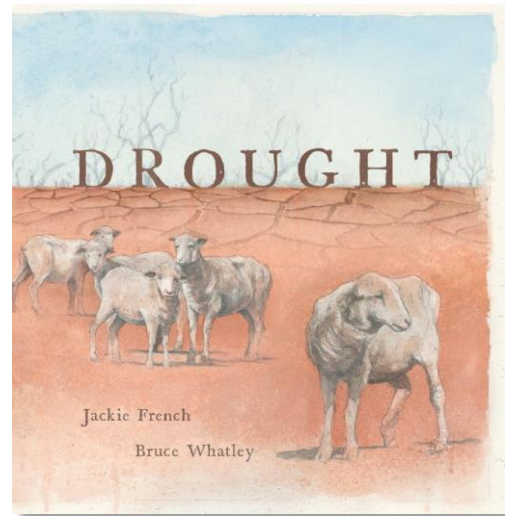
Drought

Author

Jackie French

Illustrator

Bruce Whatley



Synopsis

Drought is the fourth title in the series of picture books featuring the challenges of natural disasters that come with living in a country with a climate as harsh as Australia's. As the years pass, and the rains never come, the land slowly dries up and the stock start to die. Drought can be as destructive as a cyclone, flood, or fire, but it is a slow and creeping devastation rather than a sudden shocking one. The award-winning team of Jackie French and Bruce Whatley have once again brought to life the heartache and fear that such events bring, as well as the hope that comes with openhanded help from the wider community, and the first steps on the path to recovery. While the series is tied together by the overarching theme, each situation brings specific challenges and difficulties with it, and as such, *Drought*, like its precursors, is an exploration of the physical and emotional realities of living through such circumstances, in a format accessible to the youngest of readers, as well as to older children and adults.

About the Author

Jackie French's incredible writing career spans more than 16 years, 42 wombats, 120 books for kids and adults, translations into 19 languages, and slightly more awards than wombats. Her books range from provocative historical fiction such as *Hitler's Daughter* to the hilarious international bestseller, *Diary of a Wombat* with Bruce Whatley. *Flood*, illustrated by Bruce Whatley, was named a CBCA Honour Book in 2012.

About the Illustrator

Bruce Whatley has produced some of the most popular and awarded books in Australia, including *The Ugliest Dog in the World* and *Diary of a Wombat*, his best-selling collaboration with Jackie French. He has illustrated more than 40 books, including several co-written with Rosie Smith.

Themes

Natural Disaster; Drought; Community; Hope and Despair; Death; Rural Lifestyles; Endurance and Perseverance.

Writing Style

Written in the same style as the previous three books in the series, French has chosen to present the story entirely in verse. The descriptions are both realistic and evocative, and the narrative structure adheres to a traditional balladic pattern. Plot tensions are represented in the descriptions of the increasing devastation and changes that the countryside slowly undergoes, and the effects of the long dry on both people and animals is made clear. The story is told in the first person by an unnamed protagonist, which serves to present the tale as the story of the land and all the people affected by the drought, rather than it being confined to one particular individual's experience and perspective. The language used is simple enough to be understood by young readers, yet evocative and sophisticated enough to maintain the interest and attention of more senior students and adults. The understated nature of French's verse serves to highlight and enhance the emotional impact of the events she describes, and she brings to life the harsh nature of a lengthy drought.

Illustration Style

Whatley's paintings are stark and moving. The theme of the story is emotionally distressing, and the visual narrative faithfully echoes this distress. The opening scene of greenery and moisture contrasts with the artwork depicting the slow inexorable progression of a lengthy drought on the land, the creatures that live on it, and on the people. Whatley's paintings are realistic, while also encompassing a strong symbolic element with his usage of colours bleeding and running down the page and over the edge into the surrounding white space. This technique can be variously interpreted as reminiscent of or symbolising rain, water, blood or tears. The visual narrative consistently parallels the text, and Whatley has chosen a palette of dry earth tones with minimal colour contrasts that accurately depicts the variety of sun-bleached brown tones seen in the Australian landscape after a long time without rain.

TEACHER NOTES

- 1) As a class discuss the cover and title of *Drought*. Some things to include in your discussion are:
 - What is a drought?
 - What happens during a drought?
 - Who is most immediately affected by a drought and why?
 - What problems can droughts cause?
 - What are some of the ways we can help people affected by droughts?
 - Why is it so important that we help people when there are droughts?
 - Why are droughts a problem in Australia?
 - Do other countries also have droughts?
- 2) As a class, discuss the previous three books in the series: *Flood*, *Fire*, and *Cyclone*, and whether anyone has read any of them. What is the difference between a natural disaster and a man-made disaster? Can you think of any other natural disasters that don't have a book in the series? Why do you think that Jackie French and Bruce Whatley chose these four types of natural disasters to write books about?
- 3) After reading the story, discuss what happened in the book. Some things to include in your discussion are:

- What happened in the story?
 - How long did the drought last?
 - What happened to the people?
 - What was the effect on the animals?
 - What was the effect on the land?
 - What were some of the things that people did to save water?
 - How did the people try to save the stock during the drought?
 - What help did the people in the story need during the drought?
- 4) Visit your school library; and find a book, story, or poem that involves drought. Ask the librarian or library teacher for ideas on where to start. Share the story with the class.
- 5) Research the history of drought in Australia. Some questions to ask in your research are: When have there been droughts in Australia? What parts of Australia were affected? How long did they last? Choose one drought in recorded Australian history and present a report on it to the class. You might want to create a computer slide presentation, or you can make a poster.
- 6) How much rain does your local area typically get? Investigate the rainfall statistics for your area (The Australian Bureau of Meteorology website is a good resource for this). Some things to include in your research are:
- What time of year do you typically receive the most amount of rain?
 - What time of year do you typically receive the least amount of rain?
 - What is the longest period without rain that has been recorded?
 - What is the most rain in a short period of time (day/week/month) that has been recorded?
- 7) Make a rain gauge from a plastic bottle, and collect rainfall data for your school or home.
- Cut the top off a plastic bottle one third of the way down.
 - Turn the top part of the bottle upside down, and put it inside the rest of the bottle to form a funnel.
 - Mark the sides of your rain gauge to measure how much rain you collect.
 - Place your rain gauge outside in a place where it will receive any rain that falls but won't be tipped over. You may need to place rocks or bricks around the outside of it to hold it upright.
 - Check your rain gauge at the same time every day, and record how much rain has fallen. Be sure to remember to empty it after you have recorded the day's results!
 - You can choose to collect data for a week, or for a month. At the end of your collection period, make a poster to present your findings.
 - Create a table to show your results, and make several graphs to display what you found out. You might want to use a bar graph to show each day's rainfall, a pie graph to show days without rain compared to days with rain, and a line graph to show cumulative rainfall results over the collection period.
 - Compare your results to the average rainfall for your area at this time of year.
- 8) Ask your family members at home what their experiences with droughts are. They may remember what it was like during an Australian drought, or during one in another country that they have lived in.
- 9) As a class, look carefully at Bruce Whatley's artwork in the book. Discuss your impressions of his illustrations. Some things to include in your discussion are:
- What colours has the artist chosen to use in these illustrations?

- How might you describe the selection of different colours, what words could you use to describe them collectively?
 - Why do you think the illustrator chose to use these colours?
 - What media do you think the illustrator might have used when creating his artwork? What evidence is there in the illustrations that supports your hypothesis?
 - Whatley's artwork contains one fairly unusual feature that is not commonly seen in illustrations of this nature. Can you identify it? Hint: start by looking closely at the bottom edges of the illustrations.
 - Why do you think Whatley chose to incorporate this type of effect?
 - What do the lines of paint running down the page remind you of, and what do you think they might symbolise?
 - How does seeing these lines make you feel about each painting as a whole, what is the emotional impact on the viewer?
- 10) Experiment with watercolour paints, brushes and water, and see what you can create by using extra paint or water on your page, and then holding your page vertically before it has all dried.
- 11) After completing exercises 9 and 10, create a watercolour painting of an Australian landscape of your own, using Whatley's artwork in *Drought* as your inspiration. Write a paragraph describing what you were trying to achieve and why, what worked well, and what proved to be a challenge.
- 12) Jackie French uses figurative language when she writes: *Drought spread its withered, deadly hand and its ceaseless dry hands*. As a class, discuss why you think she might have chosen to describe drought as having hands. Draw or paint a picture of what you think Drought would look like if it was an actual person. Use the artwork and the descriptions in the story to help inspire your creation.
- 13) What is your favourite page in the story? Why? In small groups share which pages are your favourite and discuss what you think makes them good. You might even have two favourite pages; one page your favourite illustration, and a different page with your favourite descriptive phrase.
- 14) Read one of the other books in the series. After reading it discuss as a class or in small groups the similarities and differences that you can see between the two books.