

OFF THE TRACK

Author: Cristy Burne

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Year level: Y4–7

Cross-curriculum priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures; Sustainability

ABOUT THE BOOK

City kid Harry is doomed to spend his weekend hiking with his phone-addict Mum, her bossy bestie Ana, and Ana's kid Deepika, a camping fanatic who can't seem to stop talking. But Harry discovers hiking's not as bad as it sounds. Step by step, he and Deepika discover a new friendship—and a new confidence in the world around them. Then disaster strikes and the pair find themselves lost. Or is it Mum and Ana who are lost?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cristy Burne grew up climbing trees, jumping drains, chasing cows and inventing stories. She has a passion for learning through doing and loves to inspire creativity, daring and resilience in her readers. Cristy is a children's author and science writer with degrees in biotechnology and science communication. She has also worked as a science circus performer, garbage analyst, Santa's pixie and atom-smashing reporter.

THEMES

- Bushwalking
- Camping
- Friendship
- Family
- Technology

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y4–7 English

Y4–7 Biological Sciences

Y4–7 History and Geography

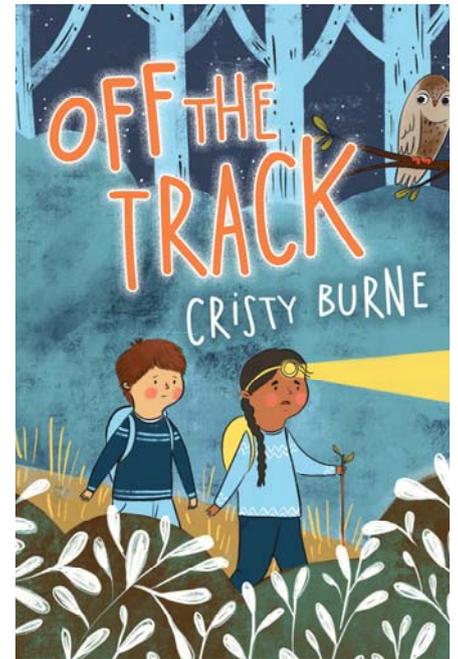
USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: www.cristyburne.com

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Discussion questions

1. Why do you think Ana takes so many things out of Harry's backpack? In pairs, make a list of essential items you would take on an overnight camping trip in the bush.
2. Why is Harry desperate to take his mobile phone along on the hike? Do you think this is a good idea? Why/why not?
3. Unlike Deepika, Harry has never been hiking before. He claims he prefers gaming and Netflix. What kinds of things do you like to do on the weekend? What makes them so fun?
4. As a class, brainstorm a list of likely scenarios for why the red car has been abandoned in the bush. Whose theory will prove correct at the end of the story?
5. Harry is apprehensive about potential dangers on their hike (e.g. spiders, snakes, getting lost). In pairs, divide an A3 piece of paper into three columns. In the first column, create a list of possible hazards in the bush. In the middle column, research how to minimise each of these risks. In the final column, explain the actions you would take if each emergency occurred. Include references.



6. Why do you think Harry's mum is obsessed with taking photos? When does he begin to become frustrated with her? What kinds of things is she missing out on by always looking at her phone?
7. Compare and contrast Harry's attitude towards the following at the beginning and the end of the book:
 - a. Camping and the great outdoors
 - b. His friendship with Deepika
 - c. Mobile phones and technology
 - d. His relationship with his mum
8. How does Harry change as a result of his experiences in the bush? Does his mum change too?
9. Have you ever predicted that an activity would be boring – but actually found that it turned out to be fun? Turn to a partner and share.
10. What message/s do you personally take away from this story?

Creative writing

1. **Story Map:** Use an A3 narrative planning framework to map the different parts of this book:
 - a. *Exposition:* e.g. Harry and his mum are new in town and aren't used to the great outdoors.
 - b. *Conflict:* e.g. Harry is forced to go on an overnight camping trip with his mum's friend and her daughter.
 - c. *Rising action:* e.g. Harry begins to enjoy himself and he and Deepika take off on their own.
 - i. They lose the trail.
 - ii. They find it again and make it to the cabin.
 - iii. Night falls but the mothers do not arrive.
 - iv. They realise something has gone terribly wrong.
 - d. *Climax:* e.g. The children set off in the darkness to find their parents.
 - e. *Falling action:* e.g. They find them and help organise an ambulance for Deepika's mum and the lost hiker (owner of the mysterious red car).
 - f. *Resolution:* e.g. The four enjoy another hike a few months later once Ana's leg has healed.
2. **Narrative Writing:** Use the narrative planning framework above (exposition; conflict; rising action; climax; falling action; resolution) to draft your own short story about one of the following: 'A misadventure in the bush' or 'An adventurer breaking new ground in an unexplored land.'
3. **Continue the story:** Write the story of Harry and Deepika's next camping trip – where will they go? Will anything go wrong this time?
4. **Metaphorical language:** At the end of the story, Harry describes his mum by saying '*Her smile danced with the warmth of the fire.*' What is a metaphor and how can it enhance imagery? Can you find other similes/metaphors throughout the book? Can you create your own to use in your stories?
5. **Role-play:** In groups of 2-4, choose your favourite scene from *Off the Track* to transform into a script to perform for your class.
6. **Nature walk and haiku poetry:** Go for a class bushwalk. Take a clipboard, piece of paper and pencil and make notes on the following: *I am walking in the bush. I see ... I feel ... I smell ... I hear ... I notice ... I wonder ...* Upon returning to school, write a set of three Haiku's about the landscape (a traditional form of Japanese poetry consisting of three lines: the first and last lines have five syllables, while the middle line has seven. Note: Haikus rarely rhyme and often depict ideas about nature).
7. **Debate** for/against one of the following claims: 'Children under age twelve should not be allowed mobile phones' or 'Mobile phones should be banned from schools' or 'Kids these days spend too much time looking at screens and not enough time playing outdoors and exercising.'
8. **Jokes:** Deepika enjoys telling jokes such as 'What kind of music do kangaroos listen to?...Hopera!' In pairs, come up with some Australian bush themed jokes of your own!

Biological sciences

1. As you read the story, create a list of the plants and animals Harry and Deepika encounter (e.g. crevice dragons; Marri etc.) Choose one and create a fact sheet with the following headings: name; habitat; diet; life cycle; interesting facts; labelled diagram; endangered or not? Include a reference list.
2. '*In places the hard dirt was layered with pea gravel, in others rain had eroded the road into jagged channels, eating it away like termites into wood.*' What does the term 'erosion' mean? What effects does this have on the environment?
3. What are fire breaks and why are they important in the bush?
4. Why can't Harry and Deepika drink the creek water? What is meant by the phrase '*treat the water*'?

History and Geography

1. Using the descriptions in the book, create a map depicting the children's journey on their hike.
2. The trail marker is the Waugal, or Rainbow Serpent. What is the story of the Waugal Dreaming?
<https://www.noongarculture.org.au/spirituality/>
3. Shade Noongar country on a map of Western Australia. Have students research the traditional culture of this Indigenous group using the following sub-headings: *diet; shelter; hunting/gathering tools and techniques; laws; spiritual beliefs.*

Visual Art

1. Illustrate your favourite scene from the story on A3 paper using any medium of your choice (water colour paints; acrylic paint; oil pastels; pencils etc.) Display around the classroom.
2. Deepika appears very knowledgeable and connected to the bush. Do you have a place where you feel especially close to nature? Create an artwork endeavouring to capture the emotions you experience when you are there.



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