



Balloon Girls

DARRELL PITT

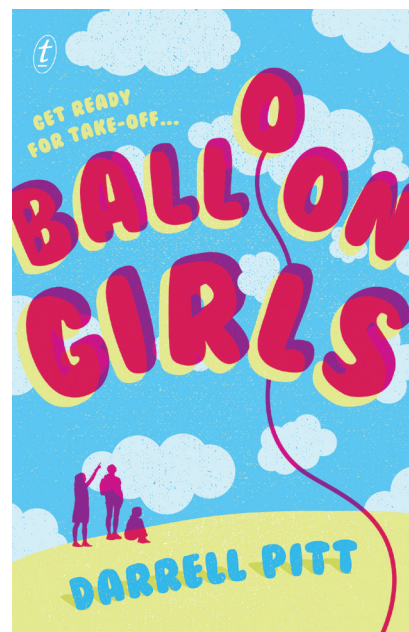
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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 8+

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CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning and connect it to an audience, purpose and context. They encompass a range of forms with a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they promote the integration of ICT and life skills.

SYNOPSIS

Times are tough in the small town of Yallaroo where Ally Simpson has lived her whole life. The whole area is in drought and people are going broke or moving away. So when Ally hears about a competition to win the trip of a lifetime to visit the Smithsonian Museum in the USA, she knows she's got to do everything she can to try and win.

Ally enlists her best friends Harmony and Ping to help her plan the most impressive experiment she can imagine: to send a video camera to the edge of space, and prove once and for all that the earth is round. At first, Ally is pretty sure she's got the whole competition stitched up. But then, as one disaster after another derails her plans, she begins to learn the importance of staying grounded even while she's aiming for the sky...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Darrell Pitt began his lifelong appreciation of Victorian literature when he read the Sherlock Holmes stories as a child, quickly moving on to H.G. Wells and Jules Verne. This early reading led to a love of comics, science fiction and all things geeky. Darrell is now married with one daughter. He lives in Melbourne.

BEFORE READING

1. Facilitate discussion with students about the subject of 'truth'. How can we prove if something is true? How can we guarantee that something is a fact? Can you recall something that you first thought to be true that ended up being untrue?
2. Explore the scientific method with students: observation, hypothesis, questions, experiment, analysis, results and conclusion. Go through each step with students and ask why each is important.
3. What is a conspiracy? Get students to research one conspiracy theory that ended up being true and one that remains a conspiracy.

WHILE READING

1. In the opening chapter, we are introduced to the character of Mrs Blunt. How would you describe Mrs Blunt? Use adjectives and quotes from the book to describe her personality.
2. We quickly learn that Ally is an avid lover of science. Choose one of Ally's favourite scientists to research: Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Alexander Bell, Stephen Hawking, Amelia Earhart or Katherine Johnson.
3. 'They'd had plenty of ideas, but lots of arguments too.' (p. 19) When beginning their science project, the Balloon Girls struggle to make progress due to their conflicting ideas. What do you think is most important when working in a group project? What



tips would you give to others to ensure a successful outcome for all?

- The Balloon Girls face many challenges as they launch their balloons. How does the town of Yallaroo support the Balloon Girls'?
- 'You're incorrigible.' (p. 56) Mrs. Blunt remarks to Mr Drake after their date. What does 'incorrigible' mean?
- Research one of the monsters that is referred to in the text. Why do you think they are known as a monster? Are they really a monster or simply misunderstood?
- As the book progresses, we learn that the town of Yallaroo is haunted by the local legend, Hickey Saw. Do you believe the myth of Hickey Saw? Why or why not?
- 'They copy straight off the internet.' (p. 88) The Tommetti triplets choose to compile their history report with information they have taken from the internet. What is plagiarism? How is plagiarism like stealing? Why is it important to reference all sources that you use?
- One of the driving forces to make a success of their science project is a trip to the Smithsonian Institute. What is the Smithsonian Institute?

AFTER READING

CHARACTERS

- 'Harmony didn't live up to her name.' (p. 3) How can the names of characters sometimes hint towards their true personalities? Consider how the character names 'Harmony', 'Mrs Blunt' and 'Mr Drake' are used to subtly characterise their personalities. To inform your ideas, you will need to consider the definition of their name but also the tone that their name creates.
- Select three characters from the book to illustrate. You will need to find evidence from the book to ensure that you have represented them accurately in your pictures.
- Which character from the book do you most connect with? Why are you drawn to this person? Which characters do you dislike and why?

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

- On page 10, the author uses imagery to create mood and tone in the story. What is imagery? Find an example of imagery on page 10 before searching other sections of the book to find additional examples.
- Why does the very setting of Yallaroo initially prove to be an obstacle in itself to overcome?
- How is the plot of the novel similar to the scientific process? Compare the scientific process to a traditional narrative arc.

THEMES

Determination and Resilience

- 'We all need to dream big.' (p. 113) Why is important to have something to strive for? Do you have dreams or ambitions that you would one day like to achieve?
- 'Mrs Blunt had once called Yallaroo a dirty little town, but she'd been wrong. Yallaroo was its people.' (p. 162) How does the town of Yallaroo support Ally and her dad? As well as being resilient, why is it also important to seek support?
- 'Sometimes you have to be a little crazy to achieve your goals.' (p. 189) What do you think is meant by this quote? What crazy thing do Ally and her Dad do to ensure that the Balloon Girls complete their project?

Truth

- 'You can't just use information from a single book, or source on the internet. You need to gather data from a variety of resources.' (p. 46) How important is it to use multiple sources of evidence to draw a conclusion or to prove that something is true? Why is having one piece of evidence simply not enough?
- The Tommetti triplets admit in their history report that they copied their information from the internet (p. 93) Can information from the internet be false or untrue? When researching online, how can you determine if the information can be trusted?
- 'What's your evidence for this?.' (p. 106) Why is important to support your views with evidence and facts?

Science

- 'The important thing is to prove it to yourself.' (p. 25) Even though the Balloon Girls are unsuccessful in the science competition, Ally's dad stresses to her that above all, the most important thing is the science. Why is science important? Why might science be important in your own life? Why is science so important for the world?
- The Tommetti triplets are convinced that lizard people are real because they found photographs of them online. Are photographs enough to prove that something is real?
- Even when the evidence seems to point to one conclusion, why is it important to still question the evidence? How does the evidence used to arrest Mr Drake for the house fire end up being inaccurate?

Conspiracies

- 'When people don't understand something, they often make up their own explanation for it. Or, sometimes, they flat out deny that it's even real.' (p. 25) Why do people often lean towards fiction rather than fact?
- Why do Ally and her friends assume that Mr Drake is a vampire? Do we need to be wary of our minds



jumping to conclusions rather than seeking the truth?

3. What is the relationship between science and conspiracies? Do they share more similarities than differences?

RESPONDING

1. 'Everything already seems to have been discovered.' (p. 24) Why is it important to re-establish previously held facts or truths? Choose one established fact or truth and re-establish that truth by conducting an experiment.
1. Create a vocabulary bank of all the scientific terms from the novel. Record definitions of each of the new words that you find.
1. 'Hicky Saw wasn't real. He wasn't searching Yallaroo for people whose arms and legs he could sever. That was just a story.' (p. 59) How does the legend of Hicky Saw show that lies and mistruths can spread fear? Why is it important to check your facts before you pass on information? Create a checklist that details how you can best support your opinions.