**Teachers Notes**

**Age Group**: Grade 3 - 6

**Educator information**: The Mountain Cattlemen’s Association of Victoria started when a farmer, in 1834, crossed the Snowy Mountains in search of fresh grass for his cattle. Since then, families across Victoria have taken their cattle to the High Country each year for summer grazing, returning to the ‘low country’ before the first snow fall.

The practice of High Country grazing was immortalized by the poem The Man From Snowy River, by Banjo Paterson, and then later by the movie of the same name. It was the movie, first released in 1982, that catapulted Mountain Cattlemen into the public eye.

One of the traditions of the Mountain Cattlemen – knowledge said to have been passed to them from Indigenous Australians – was to drop lit matches into the bush as the cattle were mustered for home before winter each year. This practice would later come to be called ‘cool burning’ and combined with the grazing of cattle was largely attributed to keeping the High County clear of dense undergrowth - meaning a reduced risk of intense bushfire.

First, cattlemen were banned from conducting these cool burns and later there were battles with the State Government to keep grazing licenses in the High Country. Many of these licenses were outlawed when the National Park was created, and cattle were no longer allowed into the High County.

There have been many public fights with the State Government, and only a handful of original Cattlemen remain with active leases. Despite this, the Mountain Cattlemen’s Association of Victoria continues to grow as members of the public look to them for an alternative view on National Park and State Forest Management.

Now, the MCAV advocates and advises on a range of issues including feral animal control, weed management, retention of user-rights, bushfire management and much more.

There is much documentation on the MCAV website on the benefits of alpine grazing, along with some pieces that do not support the practice. Feel free to use this literature for older students to draw their own conclusions and create persuasive text pieces.

**Basis of the book**: the story is a true one, based on the combined experience of our Mountain Cattlemen during the 19/20 bushfires when more than 17 million hectares were burnt. During that time Mountain Cattlemen needed to quickly bring their cattle home from summer grazing, many losing stock in the process. Many were unable to feed their cattle after the fires, with roads blocked and access only available via helicopter.

The story looks at the history of the Mountain Cattlemen, but also the impacts of the bushfire. The loss of cattle, the depression that followed for many, and the circle of life continuing with the next season. It is told from the perspective of a seventh-generation narrator, a young girl who lives on the family farm with her parents and grandparents. Included in this pack is a selection of questions posed at the end of the book to encourage discussion and gives more insight into the books content.

**The competition**: We want students to name our story because we want it to be a story that all ages feel like they have a connection to. This is a book about someone familiar – a family, a farmer, cousins in the city and everyone in between. Whether you submit one title suggestion per child, one per class or one per school is up to you. The top 5 entries will then be presented to the general public for a vote. Email your entries to **book@mcav.com.au.**

**The prize**: The winning class/student class will each receive a copy of the book (all schools that participate will also be given a copy for the class library). President of the MCAV, Bruce McCormack, will visit the school to present to the winner and will read the story aloud. In addition, we would love the winning school to provide either a photo, illustration or spiel (or combination of all three) about the impact students feel the bushfire had on Victorians. This will be included in the publication, helping students take ‘ownership’ of the project.

**Lesson ideas:**

**Show children the cover of the book (provided). Additional pages provided on the website to download.**

**Some suggested points to talk about PRIOR to the lesson to ignite student’s imagination:**

* What do you think is happening in the picture?
* How do you think a bushfire might start?
* What do you think this book might be about?
* What do you think the book is called?

**Post activity questions:**

* Does your family have any traditions that started a long time ago?
* Do you know who Indigenous Australians (sometimes called the First People) are?
* In this story, the family all live on one property. Do you live near your family? Why?
* Sometimes, people are sad for a long time. In this story the grandpa is sad. Why do you think this might be the case?
* What could you do to help someone who is sad?
* Why do you think we have bushfires in Australia?
* During the book, Pa talks about there being too much fuel on the ground and that is why the bushfire started. What do you think he means by this?
* How do you think the Cattlemen help look after nature?
* Who helps to fight bushfires?
* If a bushfire was near you, what would you do?

**Activities:**

* Encourage students to talk together about any experiences they have with fire
* Help students create a Fire Safe Action Plan for their school
* Focus on regrowth: give each student a pot, some soil and a small packet of seeds. Invite them to plant their seeds and watch the new life
* Discuss how students can look after the bush e.g. only walking on the path, taking home all rubbish
* Research our First Nations method of Fire Management. Distinguish between safe and unsafe fire use.
* Ask students to describe a landscape before, and after, a bushfire.
* Invite your local CFA member to visit with students and explain what to do in the event of a fire
* If appropriate, allow students to light a small fire outside. Encourage them to feel the heat. Cook damper or marshmallows.
* Encourage students to research the 19/20 bushfires and the impact it had on local communities
* Encourage students to research alpine grazing – the arguments for and against – and present a persuasive piece of text on their findings.
* Encourage your students to do their own version of our book cover, including a title.
* Ask your students to interview local farming families and see how a bushfire would impact them

More to explore:

Visit the Mountain Cattlemen’s website for further resources and suggestions. [www.mcav.com.au](http://www.mcav.com.au). We have put lots of information on the Childrens Book Page, but you will find lots more under the Education and Resources tab.

You will find:

* Student friendly videos of bushfire, including narration by a child.
* Banjo Paterson’s poem and video, the Man from Snowy River, based on Mountain Cattlemen.
* Short history of the Mountain Cattlemen’s Association of Victoria
* Extra pages of the book