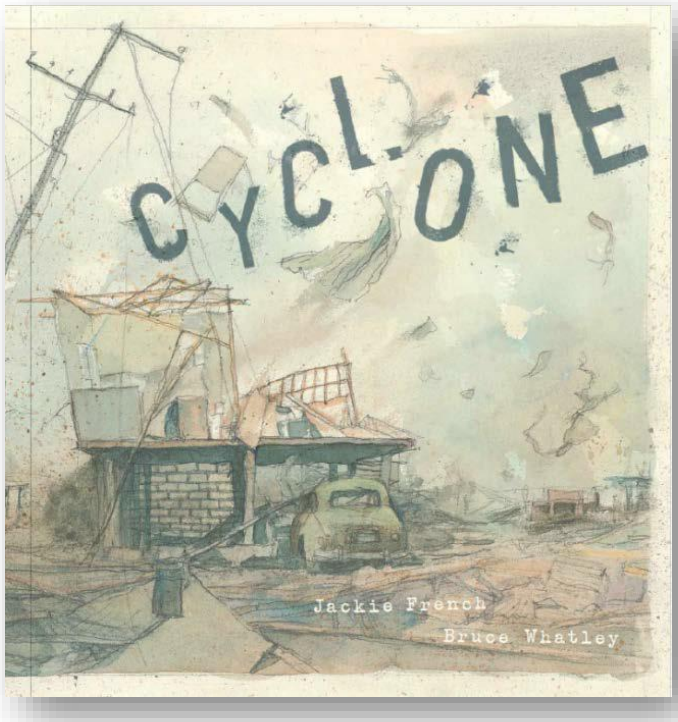
Cyclone

Author
Jackie French
Illustrator
Bruce Whatley



Pile the presents by the tree
Though clouds spiral out at sea.
Wind snarls, skies weep grey
But Santa's sleigh is on its way!

Christmas Eve, 1974, is marked indelibly into the Australian psyche, as the night tropical Cyclone Tracy devastated the city of Darwin. Now, nearly 45 years later, Jackie French's lyrical rhyming text tells the story of a cyclone's ferocity—and a city's indomitable spirit. Bruce Whatley's sumptuous illustrations bring to life the powerful force of the storm to a whole new generation of readers.

TEACHER NOTES

- As a class, discuss Cyclone Tracy and consider the following questions:
    - What category of cyclone was it?

- When did it make landfall?
- Was Darwin unprepared for the effects of the cyclone? In what ways?
- What damage was done to Darwin, and what was the main cause of it?
- What were the immediate aftereffects of the cyclone?
- How did the nation react in the aftermath of the cyclone?
- What challenges did survivors of the cyclone face in the following months?
- How did the city adapt to withstand future cyclones?

- What are cyclones? How do they form? How do they move? How are they categorised? How are they named? How do meteorologists track cyclones? What early warning systems currently exist to help people withstand cyclones?
- How do Bruce Whatley's illustrations represent the strength and scope of Cyclone Tracy? Look at the way the illustration drip off the page. What effect does this have on you as you read through *Cyclone*? Why do you think the colour palette is quite muted (HINT: read the note from the illustrator on the final page of the book)?
- Look at the font used to spell out the title, *Cyclone*. The letters resemble the cinderblocks of the house in the story. How has the title been positioned to visually represent Cyclone Tracy? How can typography be used to emphasise an illustration?
- Consider the font used for the text in *Cyclone*. How would you characterise this font? How does it help to enhance the historical documentary feel of the story?
- Look at some of the photographs from the aftermath of Cyclone Tracy. There are many collections online, for example: http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/photos-e6frer9f-1111120656640 What is your immediate impression of the experience of Cyclone Tracy when you look at these photographs? Can you see how they have been referenced in Bruce Whatley's illustrations?

- Although *Cyclone* is specifically about Cyclone Tracy, it can be broadly applied to many other disasters caused by wild weather. In small groups, research some of other well-known weather disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, Cyclone Pam and Cyclone Nargis. (NOTE: Teachers should supervise this activity as students are likely to encounter distressing information or images during their research).

- How would you say our experience of natural disasters has changed between 1974 and now? Consider that in 1974, the only access the survivors of Cyclone Tracy had with the rest of the nation was via telephone and telegraph. News reporting was in its early stages, and news networks were limited by technology. How has that changed today? Consider the role that social media, mobile phone and emergency support networks play in our experience of and reaction to natural disasters.

- 'Our new home sits low, secure/ Wind can scream, our walls endure.' What makes a good cyclone-proof building? Which materials are best to use, and which should be avoided? Compare the two homes in *Cyclone*, before and after the storm. Why do you think the first home was so badly damaged? How is the design of the second home more suited to withstand another cyclone?

- As the world begins to feel the major effects of climate change, one of the major challenges we face are extreme weather events such as cyclones. In 2012, 93% of the 905 natural disasters that occurred worldwide were weather-related disasters. As a class, discuss climate change. What is it? What has caused it? What are some of the major effects it has had and is continuing to have on our planet? What can be done to address it?