

Fire Stories

Bushfires and Australian Colonial History



Lesson Resource
Year 4



Australian Government
Australian Research Council



AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR THE
HISTORY OF EMOTIONS

■ About Us

THE AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR THE HISTORY OF EMOTIONS (Europe, 1100–1800)

The Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions (CHE) was established in 2011. It recognises the importance of emotion in shaping our mental, physical and social wellbeing, and that the expression, understanding and representation of emotions has changed over time. Through its innovative research, the Centre seeks to build on our understanding of emotions, past and present, and provide insight into contemporary Australian culture.

With a focus on the medieval and early modern periods, the Centre's research examines four key themes: Meanings, Change, Performance, and Shaping the Modern. Through its education and public outreach programs, and affiliations with industry and cultural organisations, the Centre aims to invigorate our culture, and engage the community in the consideration of emotions and their impact on history.

For more information about the Centre's research and public outreach programs, go to www.historyofemotions.org.au

■ About This Lesson Resource

Fire Stories

ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions Curriculum Series

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Curriculum Links

HISTORY

Key Concepts: Perspectives, Empathy

Inquiry and Skills

Evaluating and Reflecting

- Draw simple conclusions based on analysis of information and data (ACHASS1079)

Analysing

- Interpret data and information displayed in different formats, to identify and describe distributions and simple patterns (ACHASS1057)
- Elaboration – comparing information in sources to identify evidence of change
- Examine information to identify different points of view and distinguish facts from opinions (ACHASS1077)
- Elaboration – exploring different stories associated with a past event to discover the experiences, thoughts or feelings of the people at that time

ENGLISH

Literature

Responding to Literature

- Discuss literary experiences with others, sharing responses and expressing a point of view (ACELT1603)

Literacy

Interpreting, Analysing, Evaluating

- Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning to expand content knowledge, integrating and linking ideas and analysing and evaluating texts (ACELY1692)
- Interpret ideas and information in spoken texts and listen for key points in order to carry out tasks and use information to share and extend ideas (ACELY1687)

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

Intercultural Understanding

Empathise with Others

- Imagine and describe the feelings of others in a range of contexts
- Investigate culture and cultural identity
- Identify and describe variability within and across cultural groups

Literacy

Understand How Visual Elements Create Meaning

- Identify the effects of choices in the construction of images

Listen and Respond to Learning Area Texts

- Listen to identify key information in spoken and audio texts, including audio-visual texts, and respond to texts read aloud

Fire Stories

Lesson Description

This lesson introduces students to colonial life through the theme of fire and explores the changing meanings of fire through Australian history. Students will analyse images and texts to gain an understanding of what fire meant to early colonial Australians and how these meanings change. Themes of community, mateship, fear and bravery are discussed.

Duration:

Adapt the lesson content to suit your needs. The content is suitable for two or more lesson periods.

Materials:

- Student booklets
- PowerPoint file
- Student Resource: 'Double Bubble' learning tool

Part A: Introduction

Viewing a fire image (PowerPoint slide 2), lead the students to share briefly their experiences:

Have you ever sat next to an open fire on a camping holiday? Or an open fireplace in a home? Have you ever experienced a bushfire? What other kinds of fire have you experienced?

Introduce the lesson content:

We'll be exploring the meaning of fire for people at different times in history, thinking especially about people who moved to Australia 150 years ago from Great Britain. They moved here as part of the British colonisation and settlement of Australia. What would it have been like for them to come to a place that was very, very different from their home and everything they were used to? What experiences of fire did they have at home in Great Britain? How did they respond to bushfires in Australia?

In trying to answer these questions we'll look at 'sources of evidence'. A primary source of evidence is something from the time or situation we're studying – it is a direct reflection from which we can learn how people thought, acted and experienced situations.

Can you give some examples of primary sources?

e.g., Photos

Clothes and furniture

Paintings

Books and newspapers

Letters and diaries

Interviews

We are going to be using a variety of these primary sources to look at the theme of fire.



Part B: Teacher-Guided Learning

Students refer to booklet 'Fire Stories'. The PowerPoint images echo the booklet.

	GUIDING QUESTIONS/INFORMATION	STUDENT BOOKLET PAGE
3	<p>Extracts from <i>The Cricket on the Hearth: A Fairy Tale of Home</i>, by Charles Dickens (1845)</p> <p>Charles Dickens was a very famous writer in England (1812–1870), as J. K. Rowling is famous today; many, many people bought his books. Here are extracts from one of his stories called <i>The Cricket on the Hearth: A Fairy Tale of Home</i> (a 'hearth' is the floor in front of a fireplace).</p> <p>Ask students to identify the year in which the story was published. (1845)</p> <p>Read the extracts.</p> <p>Discussion: How do the characters feel about the fire (e.g., happy, fortunate, delighted, grateful, warm, cosy, cheery)? Are there any other words you might associate with fire in this story (e.g., being at home; having friends over; sharing happy times)? Do you think the people in the story are very, very rich or very, very poor, or just able to live comfortably well?</p> <p>For the people in Charles Dickens' story, living in England in 1845, the fire creates a lovely warmth to come home to after travelling through the very cold weather outside. The man, John, trudges through the frosty snow, finally arriving at home, welcomed by the warm fire. After dinner friends come over for a game of cards; they're all happy and snug around the fire. The warm fire is part of their comfortable style of life as honest working people.</p>	1
4–6	<p>Depictions of Fire from Nineteenth-Century Britain</p> <p>The pictures on p. 2 of the Student Booklet depict fires in paintings and prints from Great Britain in the 1800s, around the same time that Dickens was writing his books.</p>	2
4	<p>Image 1</p> <p>Discussion: What can you see in this painting? Where can you see the fire? What kind of person is shown in this painting (male or female? Young or old? Rich or poor?). What is this person doing? What feelings do you think this person has, sitting by the fire? (e.g., happy, relaxed, warm, satisfied, contented, sleepy, pleased).</p> <p>John Crocker Bulteel was a wealthy and important gentleman. This portrait shows him with his dogs, and it looks like he has just eaten dinner. His clothes tell us that he had been hunting on horseback before he came home. He is on his own in the painting but at the time it was made he was a married man, with at least one child. He also had many servants. This painting shows that he is a powerful, important man: he is master of his dogs and he has a room with a warm fire to use all by himself.</p>	

Part B: Teacher-Guided Learning

5	<p>Image 2: Hugh Cameron, <i>The Light of the Fireside</i>, 1867</p> <p>Discussion: What can you see in this painting? Where can you see the fire? What kind of person is shown in this painting (male or female? Young or old? Rich or poor?). What is this person doing? What feelings do you think this person has, sitting by the fire? (e.g., happy, relaxed, warm, satisfied, contented, sleepy, pleased).</p> <p>Further questions: Why is a little girl using bellows to blow air on the fire? (e.g., to make it burn brighter, to boil the kettle faster).</p> <p>Hugh Cameron was a Scottish painter, who made many paintings of children, especially working children and children from poor families. It is possible that the little girl in the painting here is a servant in a wealthy house, or has been given a chore to do by her family. It is interesting that she seems to be in charge of the fire, even though she is very young.</p>	2
6	<p>Image 3: <i>Fire in London</i></p> <p>Discussion: What can you see in this painting? Where can you see the fire? What kind of person/people are shown in this painting (male or female? Young or old? Rich or poor?). What are they doing? What feelings do you think they may have about the fire shown here?</p> <p>This picture of a fire at the Albion corn mill in London in 1791 was created by well-known London artists Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Charles Pugin. A print of it was made by a man named John Bluck, and it appeared as an illustration in a book that featured scenes of city life called the <i>Microcosm of London</i>. While fire was often comforting in cold Great Britain, as we have seen in images 1 and 2, sometimes out-of-control fires occurred with disastrous results. People knew how dangerous fire could be and town laws often required households to keep buckets of water by the door to put out fires. Although we can see some firefighters trying to put out the fire in this picture, professional fire brigades weren't common until the nineteenth century (during the lifetime of Charles Dickens).</p>	
7	<p>Image 4: <i>The Forge</i></p> <p>Discussion: What can you see in this painting? Where can you see the fire? What kind of person/people are shown in this painting (male or female? Young or old? Rich or poor?). What are they doing? What feelings do you they have about the fire shown here?</p> <p>James Sharples was an English artist and engraver. Before he was an artist he was a blacksmith and he worked in iron foundries, like the one in this engraving, from the time he was 10. In nineteenth-century Great Britain, fire was used as a source of power for melting metal to make tools, guns and machinery. Metal was smelted and worked in a forge by skilled male workers. The fire in a forge had to be extremely hot to melt metals like iron. Sometimes there were accidents and fire was understood as dangerous, but it was also seen as something that could be controlled and put to use for the benefit of people.</p>	
	<p>Summary: For people in Great Britain in the 1800s, fire could produce many feelings, from comfort and pleasure to anxiety and fear. These feelings depended on the situation of the fire and also on the situation of the people experiencing it. One common theme that emerges from the pictures is that fire was something to be controlled.</p>	

Part B: Teacher-Guided Learning

<p>8–10</p>	<p>Magazine article ‘Black Thursday, Victoria, 1851’, by William Howitt</p> <p>Ask students to identify the date of the event ‘Black Thursday’. (1851)</p> <p>In 1851, Melbourne was only 16 years old but growing very fast. In the surrounding grasslands, European settlers were taking control of the countryside to graze their sheep. Something happened in 1851 in the Port Phillip district (as the state of Victoria was then called).</p> <p>What was this event, which was called ‘Black Thursday’? (a huge bushfire)</p> <p>Read the newspaper extract.</p> <p>(When reading words which might be difficult for the students, stop and give an explanation, e.g., ‘the population ... were struck with consternation’ means the people were very scared. ‘The whole country was speedily one huge conflagration’ – conflagration means a big fire.)</p> <p>Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of words are used to describe this fire in the Australian bush? Was this an ordinary kind of fire? • How did people respond at first to the fire? How did the people feel when they were in the bushfire running away with their families? • Do you notice the very exciting way that the writer has described the fire? Why do you think the writer has made a very dramatic description of the fire? <p>(The concept of ‘culture shock’ could be discussed with older students. Many aspects of life in a new country are very difficult for newcomers to adjust to. Fire was just one of many phenomena which took on a new meaning for the colonists. Ask older students to list more aspects of life in Australia which might have been confronting and challenging for the new settlers.)</p> <p>This article about the Black Thursday bushfire was published in 1854 – several years after the fires. The writer, William Howitt was an Englishman who visited Australia in 1852 (after the fires) and wrote about life in Australia when he went back to England. Howitt saw some of the devastation caused by the Black Friday bushfires and talked with people who were, there but he was not an eye witness as he was not in Australia in 1851. His description shows us that the fires had an enormous impact on people living in Victoria. Because the article was written for a magazine which sold in Great Britain, the description also suggests that people there liked to read exciting tales about the wildness of Australia.</p>	<p>3</p>
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Part B: Teacher-Guided Learning

<p>11</p>	<p>Painting: <i>Black Thursday</i>, by William Strutt (1864)</p> <p>In 1864, William Strutt painted his impression of Black Thursday, based on his earlier sketches. At the time of the fire he was in working in Melbourne as a magazine illustrator. Smoke and ash from the fire filled the city and reports of the fire's destruction poured in from the countryside. Strutt later returned to England where he completed his painting.</p> <p>(a) Discussion: Ask students to share their feelings when viewing this picture.</p> <p>(b) Soundscape: The National Gallery of Victoria has some diaries and letters of people who were in the Black Thursday fire of 1851. A sound recording has been made based on those sources. Actors play the parts of people running from the fire.</p> <p>Play sound recording: www2.slv.vic.gov.au/collections/treasures/black_thursday/sound_bt.html</p> <p>A script of the recording is available at http://www2.slv.vic.gov.au/collections/treasures/black_thursday/script.html</p> <p>Discussion: Describe the feelings of the people running from the fire. Does the painting show these feelings?</p> <p>Some people thought the painting should be on display in the art gallery in Melbourne. However, they were unable to raise money from the public to buy the painting nor could they persuade the art gallery to buy the painting. Why didn't they want to display the painting?</p> <p>It seems that many people at that time found this painting very frightening. They did not like remembering what a devastating day Black Thursday had been. The painting remained in private collections until 1954 when it was purchased by the Public Library of Victoria.</p>	<p>4</p>
<p>12</p>	<p><i>The Homestead Saved</i>, colour engraving of a painting by James Alfred Turner (1898)</p> <p>Ask students to identify the title and date of the painting.</p> <p>This is almost 50 years after Black Thursday. The children who had experienced Black Thursday had grown up and had been living in Australia for longer than the previous generation. While they had learned how to manage their bush environment so that bushfires did not do so much damage, they had also disrupted the traditional fire practices and livelihoods of Indigenous people.</p> <p>Discussion: How is Turner's painting, <i>The Homestead Saved</i>, different from Strutt's <i>Black Thursday</i>? What words describe how the people in Turner's painting appear to feel about fire? (e.g., relieved, determined, brave, courageous). What sort of people are shown in the painting and what are they doing? (prompt students to think about gender roles).</p> <p>James Alfred Turner painted many scenes of life and families in the Australian bush. He was much admired for painting fires realistically. Some of his popular paintings, like this one, were made into prints so that many people could have a copy.</p> <p>The image suggests that men fought the fires while women and children stayed close to the homestead and livestock that were being protected. This in keeping with the gender roles in the 1890s. The painting is also interesting because the people portrayed here are anxious rather than terrified. The bushfire shown in this painting seems far less intense than the fire depicted by William Strutt. (Note: The 1851 Black Friday fires affected an area of land nearly ten times larger than the East Gippsland fires.)</p> <p>For colonial Australians, bush fires were a challenge in the late 1800s but they had become a familiar experience. Similar to people fighting fires in the cities of Great Britain, colonists in the Australian bush came together to bring fires under control. They also worked together to rebuild after fires had passed. In this way, bush fires helped to strengthen a sense of community among colonists, along with feelings about the importance of being a brave and trusted neighbour and helping each other in difficult and frightening circumstances.</p>	<p>5</p>

Part B: Teacher-Guided Learning

<p>13–15</p>	<p>Newspaper article: ‘Noojee Fire Heroine “Only Did Her Job”’. <i>The Herald</i>, 28 June 1940</p> <p>This article is about the brave actions of a woman during Black Friday in 1939. What was Black Friday? (Another bushfire – Friday 13th January 1939. Bushfires are often named this way in Australia.)</p> <p>The article tells of a postmistress called Mrs Gladys Sanderson. As well as being in charge of the post office in the Victorian town of Noojee she was the telephone switchboard operator. Back in the 1930s people in Noojee still used a manual phone service. If people wanted to telephone someone they couldn’t just call them directly from their phone; they had to call the operator first who would connect them to their friend. If there was no operator at the switchboard no phone calls could go through. On this day, Black Friday 1939, Mrs Gladys Sanderson was operating the telephone switchboard when the fire was coming but she stayed working at the switchboard as long as she could.</p> <p>Read ‘Noojee Fire Heroine “Only Did Her Job”’.</p> <p>Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why might it be important for someone like Mrs Sanderson to stay at her job and connect phone calls when there was a fire coming? Why did the policeman need to make phone calls on the day of the fire? • How does the article depict Gladys Sanderson on the day of the fire? (e.g., determined, a good friend, a good neighbour, loyal, brave-inspite-of-fear). How did people at the time of the fire and afterwards feel about her actions? • Can you tell from the article how Mrs Sanderson felt on the day of the fire? Can you tell how she felt about receiving an award? • What did she mean when she said ‘It was only my duty to stay at the Post Office’? What words are used to describe how she told her story to the newspaper? (i.e., ‘diffidently and with reluctance’). Why might Mrs Sanderson have hesitated to tell her story to the newspaper? <p>Gladys Sanderson stayed at her desk in her office, even when the fire was coming right down the street, to help people call their friends and family until the last possible minute.</p> <p>The article shows that Mrs Sanderson thought it was important to help other people, even though she was in danger from the fire herself. Helping other people was an important value, or a ‘duty’, in 1930s and 1940s Australia (as well as Great Britain and other countries). In the 1930s, Australia was in the grip of the Great Depression, when large numbers of people were unemployed and very poor. In the Depression, many people relied on neighbours and their local communities to have enough food to eat. In 1940, When Mrs Sanderson received her award, Australia had been fighting in World War II for nine months. The war meant that many men, and some women, saw it as their patriotic duty to join the army and the nursing corps to fight in the war. The article shows how bushfires could be viewed as similar to war and economic depression – times when the duty to help other people was seen as a very important value for Australians.</p>	<p>6</p>
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16	<p>YouTube clip: 'Victorian Bushfires – the Heroes' (2009), Black Saturday, Victoria, 7 February 2009</p> <p>NB. Teachers will need to use discretion with this clip as it may contain frightening or distressing images for younger children.</p> <p>The Black Saturday bushfires were a series of bushfires that were burning across the Australian state of Victoria on and around Saturday 7 February 2009, and were Australia's all-time worst bushfire disaster. The fires occurred during extreme bushfire weather conditions and resulted in Australia's highest ever loss of life from a bushfire: 173 people died and 414 were injured. This YouTube video was made by a member of the public to say 'thank you' to volunteer firefighters for their efforts fighting the February 2009 bushfires in Victoria.</p> <p>Play the YouTube clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pQCyOF6szw</p> <p>Discussion: What is a hero? Is this clip suggesting that firefighters are heroes? (clue: the title)</p> <p>Describe how the firefighters appear in this video (e.g., brave, determined, exhausted, courageous, heroic, strong, skillful, bonding together, committed)</p> <p>The chorus of the song 'I am Australian' accompanies the video clip. Do you think the creator of this video is suggesting that battling bushfires can be linked to feelings of patriotism (love for Australia)? Is fighting bushfires part of Australian identity?</p>	7
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Part C: Summary Discussion



John Larkins, *Burnt out cars on a road in the aftermath of Black Friday, Noojee, Victoria, 1939.* Courtesy of National Library Australia <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-141695440>.

Revise the ways in which the sources show different emotions in relation to fire for:

- (a) people living in Great Britain, mid-nineteenth century.
- (b) colonists in Australia, mid-nineteenth century.
- (c) colonists of the late nineteenth century and Australians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

Fire had different meanings in different situations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the 1800s in Great Britain, fire could be comforting, luxurious, useful or dangerous. Fire was normally viewed as a powerful force to be contained. In Australian bushfires, the element of danger is paramount, but historical sources show that Europeans' reactions to bushfires varied. Visitors to Australia in the mid-1800s portrayed the 1851 bushfires as beyond human control and therefore terrifying. As time went on, depictions of bushfires highlighted the bravery and community spirit of people fighting fires, linking these qualities to ideas about being Australian.

Part D: Double Bubble Concept Map

(See Student Resource: Double Bubble Concept Map, p. 14)

In pairs students complete the 'Double Bubble' learning tool, comparing and contrasting how historical sources present emotions about fire over time. Use the black circles for the names of two sources to be compared.

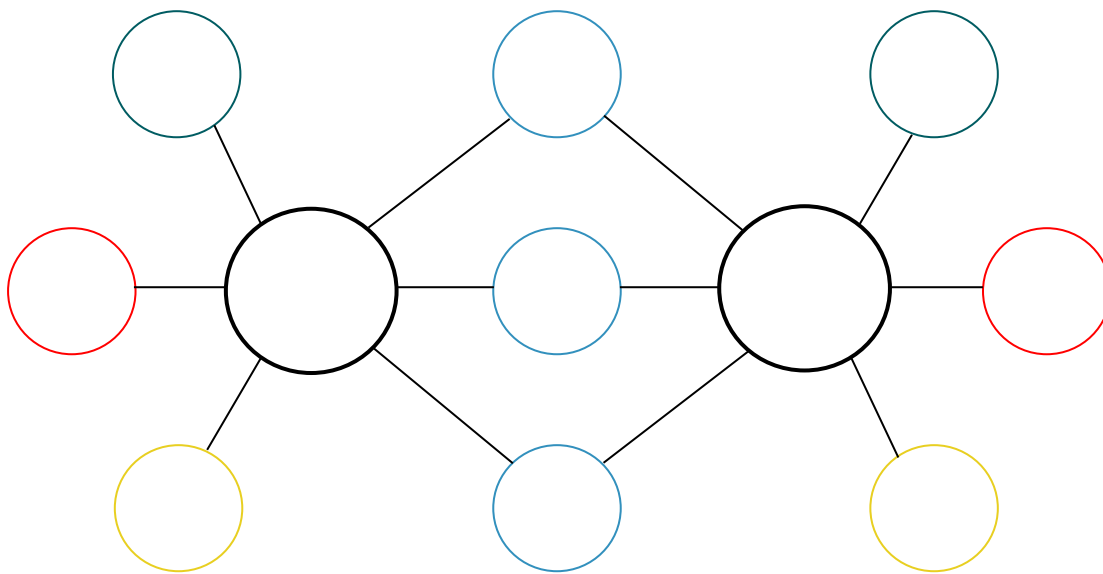


Image Credits:

Title page: James Alfred Turner, *The Homestead Saved*, 1898. Oil on canvas. Public domain.

p. 2: *Bush Fire at Captain Creek Central Queensland Australia*, 2010. Photo. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons (CC 3.0).

p. 5: Camp fire. © Adobe Stock.

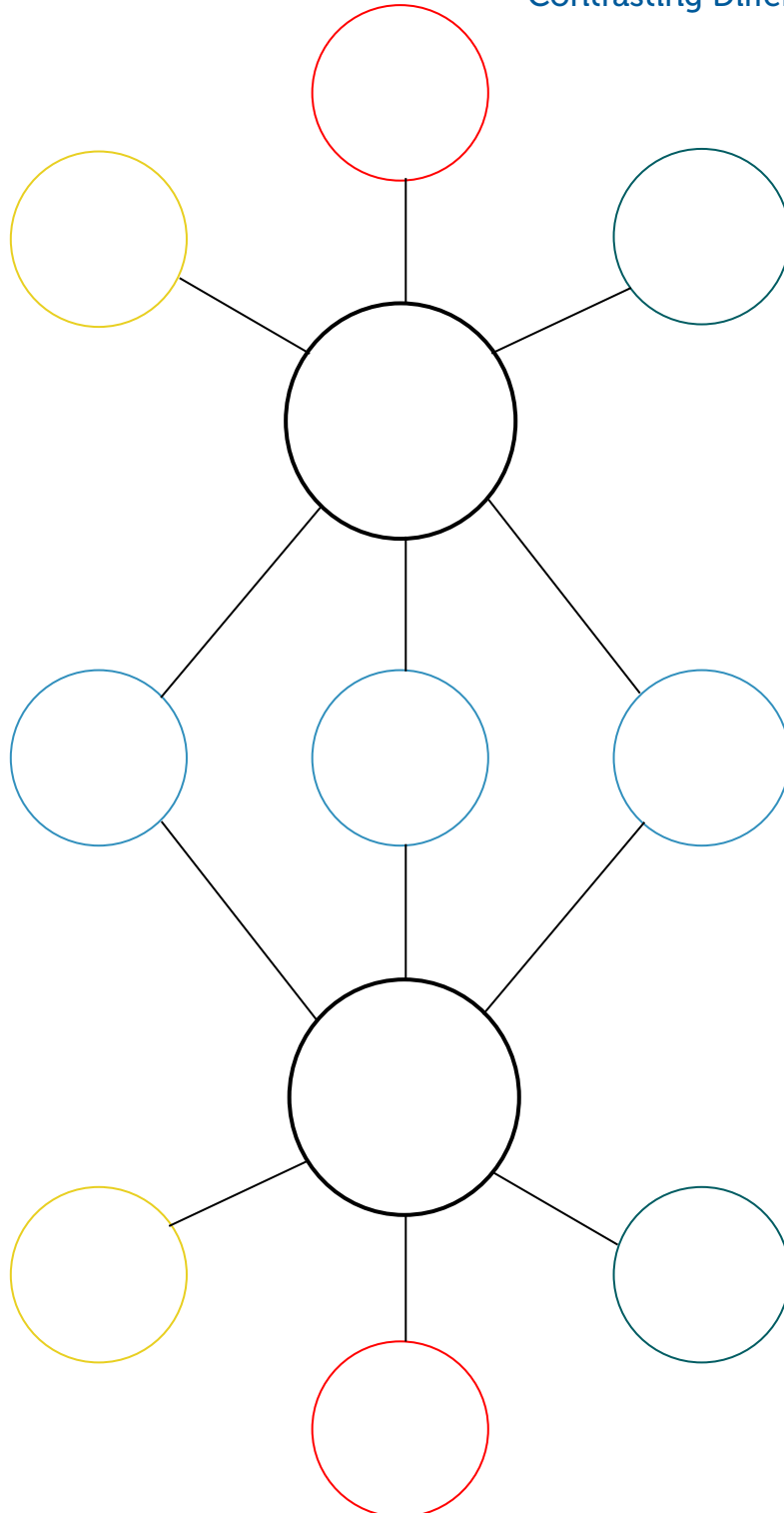
p. 12: John Larkins, *Burnt out cars on a road in the aftermath of Black Friday, Noojee, Victoria, 1939*. Courtesy of National Library Australia <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-141695440>.

p. 13: *Dr Tommy George*, featured in *Fire and the Story of Burning Country*, a pictorial by Peter McConchie, text by Cape York Elders and Community Leaders (NSW: Cyclops Press, 2013), p. 45. Used with permission.

Student Resource: Double Bubble Concept Map

Name:

Double Bubble Concept Map for
Comparing Similarities and
Contrasting Differences





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