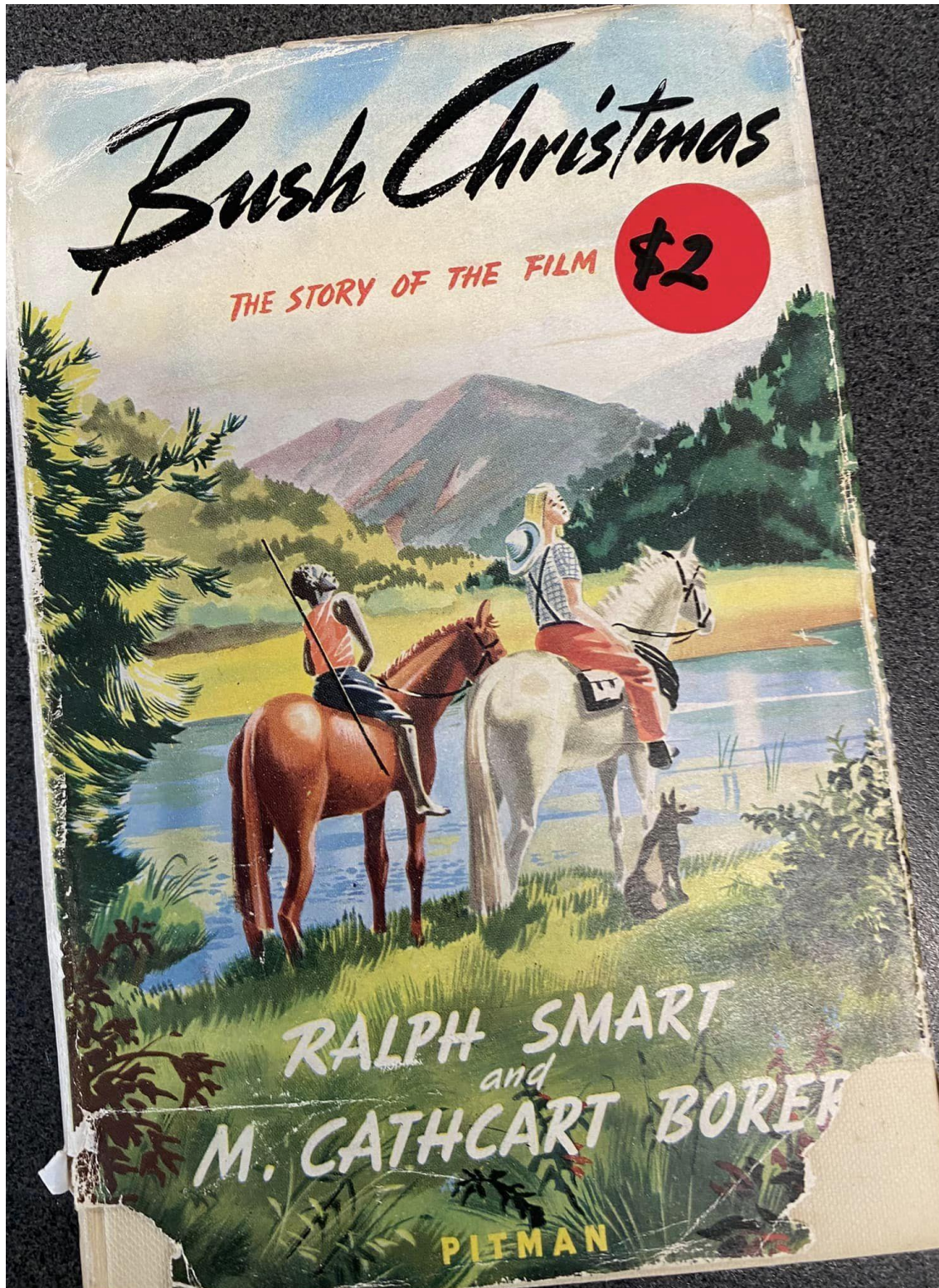


Bush Christmas



Literature activities developed for Bush Christmas by T. Shaw

About the story

Bush Christmas was first conceived as a movie script but a novelisation was written by an experienced children's book author and script writer Mary C. Borer in 1947. The movie was very successful and was a popular book (being reprinted into the 1950s-60s and a feature of Australian television at Christmas time into the 1970s

In the Australian countryside, five children are best friends, including a set of siblings, an English war evacuee, and Aboriginal Neza. They boast to three strangers, Long Bill (Chips Rafferty), Jim, Sly and about the mare belonging to the father of one of them. The next day the mare has gone. Suspecting the three men of stealing it, the children set off to recover it.

They discover the horse thieves and harass them by stealing their food and shoes. They get trapped by the thieves in an old ghost town but are rescued in time.

Origins of the movie

Children's Entertainment Films had been set up by Mary Field for the Rank Organisation to make films to be screened to children in cinema clubs throughout England on Saturday mornings.

In August 1945, it was announced that Ralph Smart would write and direct *Bush Christmas* for exhibition in the cinema clubs. Smart was an Englishman who had worked in Australia during the war. He wanted to make a children's film but had been unable to find a suitable story so decided to write one himself. He wrote the script, so it had maximum action and minimum dialogue.

It was to be the first in a series of children's films set in the 'Empire'.



The film was financed by the Rank Organisation. It starred Chips Rafferty who was regarded as an Australian movie star.

Bush Christmas was originally planned as a serial, but it was then decided to turn it into a feature.

The film was entirely shot on location in March 1946 in the Blue Mountains.

The movie was novelised by experienced children's books writer Mary Cathcart Borer in 1947 and reprinted every year after that into the 1960s.

Postproduction was completed in Sydney by June 1946. Smart left Australia in October, promising to be back in a few months to make more movies; he took four scenarios with him.

Reviews were positive. Rank was so happy with the movie that instead of just playing it in cinema clubs they released it as a feature film in its own right.

The film was very popular in Britain and Australia and was seen in 41 countries. By February 1948 the film had screened on American television.

When Smart returned to Australia in January 1947 he announced plans for £150,000 worth of children's films in Australia, including a feature set on a Northern Territory outback station, a serial, and a series of documentary films. These films did not eventuate. The movie would become a popular film on local television into the 1970s and a remake was made in 1983.

Ralph Smart

Smart found work in Britain with Anthony Asquith and later alongside the film director Michael Powell, whom he assisted with 'quota quickies': low-budget B-pictures to meet a legal commitment to the British film industry under the Cinematograph Films Act 1927.

During the Second World War, Smart joined the Royal Australian Air Force in 1942 and served until 1945. Afterward he worked for the Rank Organisation and Ealing Studios, returning to Australia to direct several films beginning with *The Overlanders*. Back again in Britain, he became an influential figure in ITC television, producing, directing or writing a number of television series and films. (film details:

<https://www.austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/C437970?mainTabTemplate=workFileDetails>)

In 2000 he was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for "services to the development of the Australian film industry". He retired to Australia, and died on 12 February 2001, in Bowen, Queensland.

Mary Irene Cathcart Borer

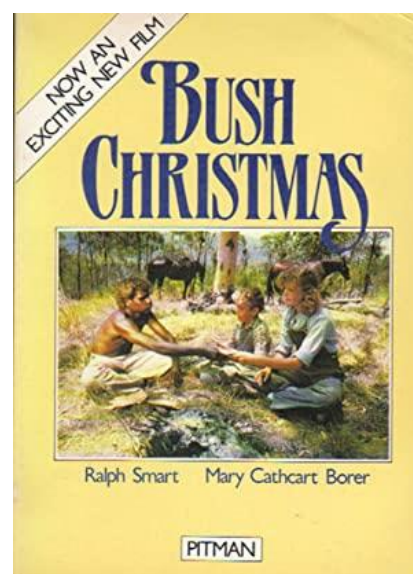
Born in London in 1906, Mary Irene Cathcart Borer - known by her married name, Molly Myers, although she used the names Mary Cathcart Borer and M. Cathcart Borer for her writing - received her BSc from London University and worked a variety of jobs before the Second World War, when she became involved in scriptwriting for the British film industry. She worked for a time as the story editor and scriptwriter for the Rank Children's Film Foundation, going on to freelance work writing scripts and plays for television, theatre, radio and films. She died in 1994, in Hertfordshire.



Activities

The book used for this unit (front cover on the cover of this unit) is the 1953 Sir Isaac Pitman and Son's edition. (Found in a second-hand bookstore) There were a lot of editions printed so they're not that rare. It is not a long book and can be read as a serial in a school week. This unit usually takes 7 school days to complete around Christmas time. It was also reprinted (I hope with some changes in its depiction of Neza and his father) in conjunction with the remake in 1983. That edition might be cheaper and easier to find. (AusLit site:

<https://www.austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/C437970>



The book contains black and white stills from the movie which I use in this unit.

Notes

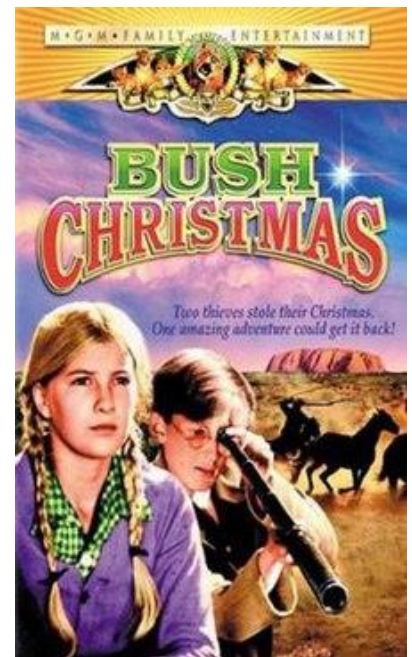
This book portrays aboriginal characters, Neza and his father 'Old Jack' in a racist, at best patronising manner. When I have read the book to students I 'edit' the text to make it more palatable. For example, instead of having Neza say- "Their feet plenty sore now" I would read "Their feet will be very sore now".

You might prefer to read the original text and discuss the ignorant and bigoted views the authors held about aborigines (although the authors do

acknowledge that Neza and Old Jack are portrayed as being authorities regarding bushcraft and the children would have been irretrievably lost if not for Neza and Old Jack's knowledge and skills). This is tempered by some of the racist dialogue such as Old Jack calling Mr Thompson 'boss' and the horse thieves asserting that money corrupts aborigines. (This was an era when aboriginal stockmen were still being paid in 'provisions' rather than the money they earned.)

The Holiday Begins (Chapter 1)

- Create a profile of the character of the book. Add to your profiles as we read the book and find out more about them.
- We are told that 'Mara Mara' means Sleepy Valley in the local Aboriginal language. Investigate other place names and their meaning in local aboriginal languages.
- Complete a police report about the horse theft
- Who is 'Thunderbolt'? Investigate this historical character or another bushranger.
- Michael was evacuated to Australia during the war. What would this experience have been like for Michael? Investigate the evacuation policy that sent children to Commonwealth countries during the war. Why were children evacuated? How many were evacuated to Australia? What was lifelike for these children (many had terrible experiences)
- The children appear to lead an ideal life (riding their ponies to school and being allowed to go, unsupervised on a three-day camping trip.) Would you enjoy this lifestyle?



On The Trail (Chapter 2)

- Investigate different animal tracks. See if you can find any in the playground. See if you can recreate some and if classmates can guess what they are. Make a plaster cast of tracks or footprints.
- Helen seamlessly assumes the role of mother and cook in the story. Ask children if in their experience that's what happens in their family.
- Create a poster project on a bellbird or another native Australian bird

- Neza has fun with a woomera and a boomerang. Investigate traditional aboriginal tools and weapons.
- Re-write some of Neza's dialogue from the story so that it doesn't sound 'stilted'.

Christmas Day (Chapter 3)

- What might be for Christmas lunch in the Thompson house (1940s) How might it differ /compare to your Christmas lunch
- Write about the strangest Christmas day you've ever had.
- Create a poster advertising for people to join the search party for the missing children. If you were joining them, what would you need to know?
- Write a glossary of some slang used in the book (tucker- food)
- What is the most unusual thing you have eaten?
- Create a table showing the missing horses and their owners.
- Draw a comic of Michael's precarious adventure over the edge of the cliff.

The Thieves in Sight (Chapter 4)

- Neza howls like a dingo to fool the horse thieves. Find out about dingoes by creating a fact file or a poster project about them.
- Illustrate and describe horse riding equipment mentioned in this chapter such as hobbles and bridle. (Include in your glossary- 'swag', pannikin, stockman and 'dilly-bags' and any other unfamiliar terms from the novel.)

The End of the Trail (Chapter 5)

- The horse thieves think aboriginals are harassing them. Why do they think that. What do the children do to make them think that?
- Draw a picture (or plan) of the ghost town. Consider making a diorama or model of Mt Solitary.
- Create a wanted poster for the three horse thieves.
- Complete the wordsearch, crossword and cloze activity.
- Complete the story map (Colour, add images or captions and add to the map)
- Write an account of the capture of the horse thieves as a newspaper front page.

Bush Christmas

NSW Police Report

Type of crime:

.....

Address/location of crime:

.....

Name of victim:.....

Name of main witnesses:

.....

Description of the

crime:.....

.....

.....

Unusual aspects of the crime:

.....

List of evidence:

.....

.....

.....

Officer in charge:

Signature:Date:

--	--	--

Suspects, victims or Crime scene photographs

WANTED

Bush Christmas Cloze

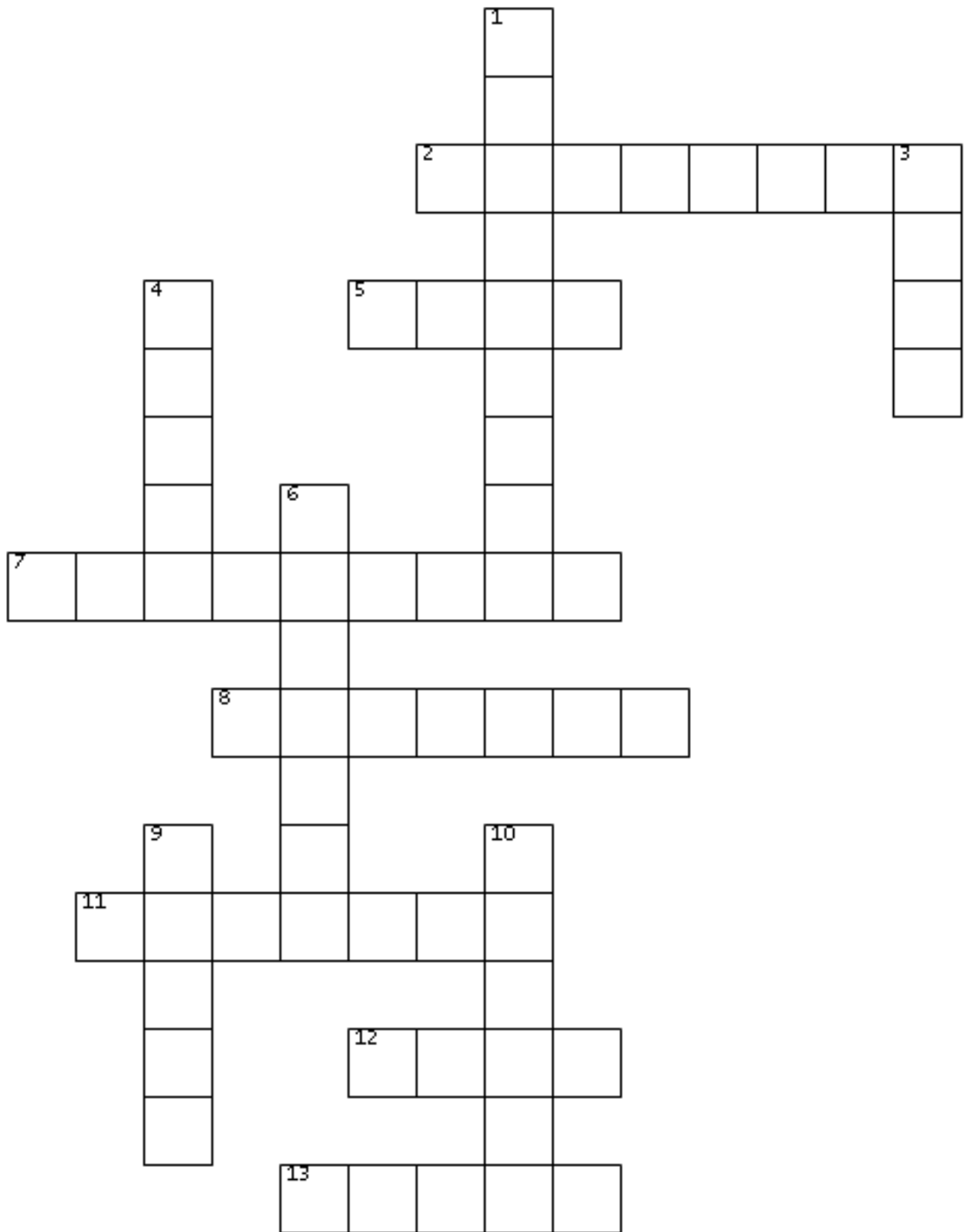
Set near a small Australian rural town, the story begins with the Thompson children--Helen, 1....., and Snow--riding their horses home from school with Michael, their 2..... friend, and Neza, the son of the family's Aboriginal 3..... Following a path that they have been forbidden to take, the children meet two 4..... who give them money and make them promise to keep 5..... about their presence. While talking to the men, the Thompson children innocently mention Lucy, their prize 6....., and her foal, not knowing that the two men, Long Bill and Jim, are horse 7.....

When the horses go missing the next day, the children realise who stole them and that they were 8..... for this happening. Resolving to get Lucy and her foal back, the children tell their parents that they are going 9..... but instead head off with Michael and Neza to track down the villains (who by now have been joined by another man named 10.....). They eventually recover the horses and steal the men's boots and blankets, while Neza spears their 11..... bag. Although the children's escape is thwarted when the villains trap them in an old 12..... town, Mr Thompson and the local police turn up just in 13..... and arrest the thieves. The children then return home for a much-anticipated 14..... dinner.

Choose from these words or insert words you think make sense

Camping, responsible, Christmas, ghost, time, Blue, water, John, English, thieves, mare, strangers, quiet, stockman

Bush Christmas



ACROSS

- 2. Old Jack worked for Mr Thompson as a
- 5. The children found tracks at Bell Crossing
- 7. The name of the mountain range
- 8. The children followed the three horse.....
- 11. The children levered the over the edge of the rock.
- 12. Mr Thompson's prize horse
- 13. Mt Solitary was atown

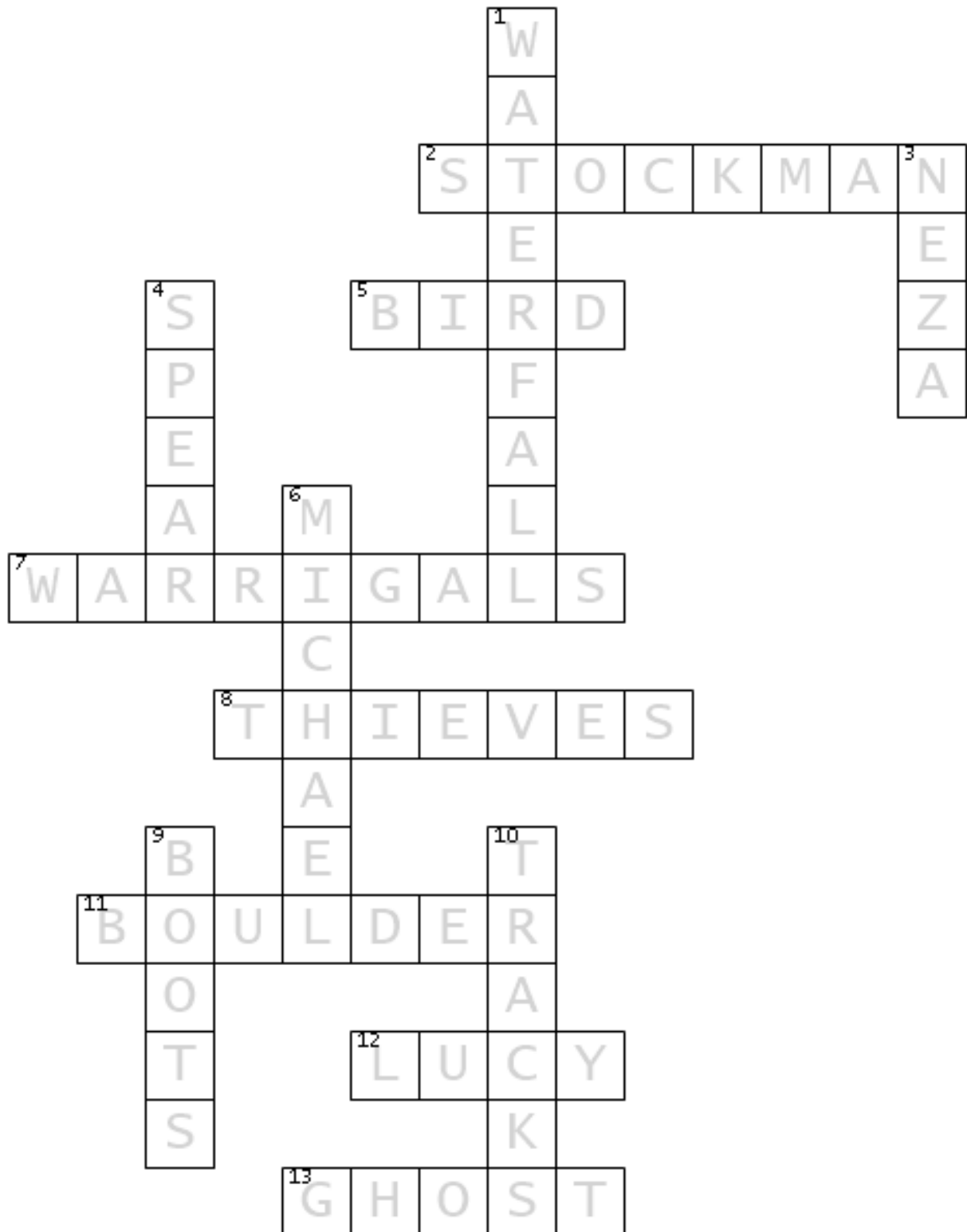
DOWN

- 1. The creek came to an abrupt end at a
- 3. Aboriginal boy who accompanies the Thompson children and Michael on their adventure
- 4. Neza threw a at the water bag.
- 6. An English evacuee.
- 9. The children stole the thieves..... to hobble them.
- 10. Neza was able to follow into the bush

Use the clues to fill in the words above. Words can go across or down.
Letters are shared when the words intersect.13 of 13 words placed.



Crossword answers



Bush Christmas

Word find

S L A G I R R A W X A E
G Y G N Z X L R L C R F
V C C B E E N L A A T C
I Q F U A Z A I M E M Y
B F H H L F A E D X P G
G E C D R B O O T S N S
K I L E **S T O C K M A N**
M E T L T H I E V E S L
L A E E B S K C A R T A
W F A R P I S F V K J O
T R E L C R R O T P Z F
R E D L U O B D T A F Y

bellbird

boots

boulder

creek

foal

Lucy

mare

Michael

Neza

spear

stockman

thieves

tracks

Warrigals

waterfall

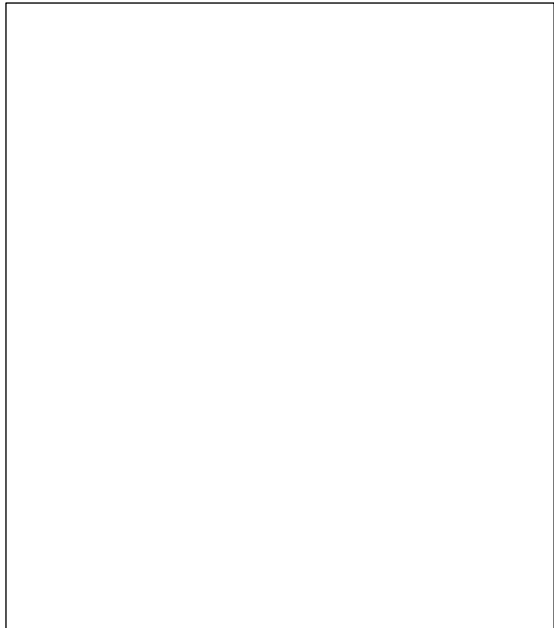


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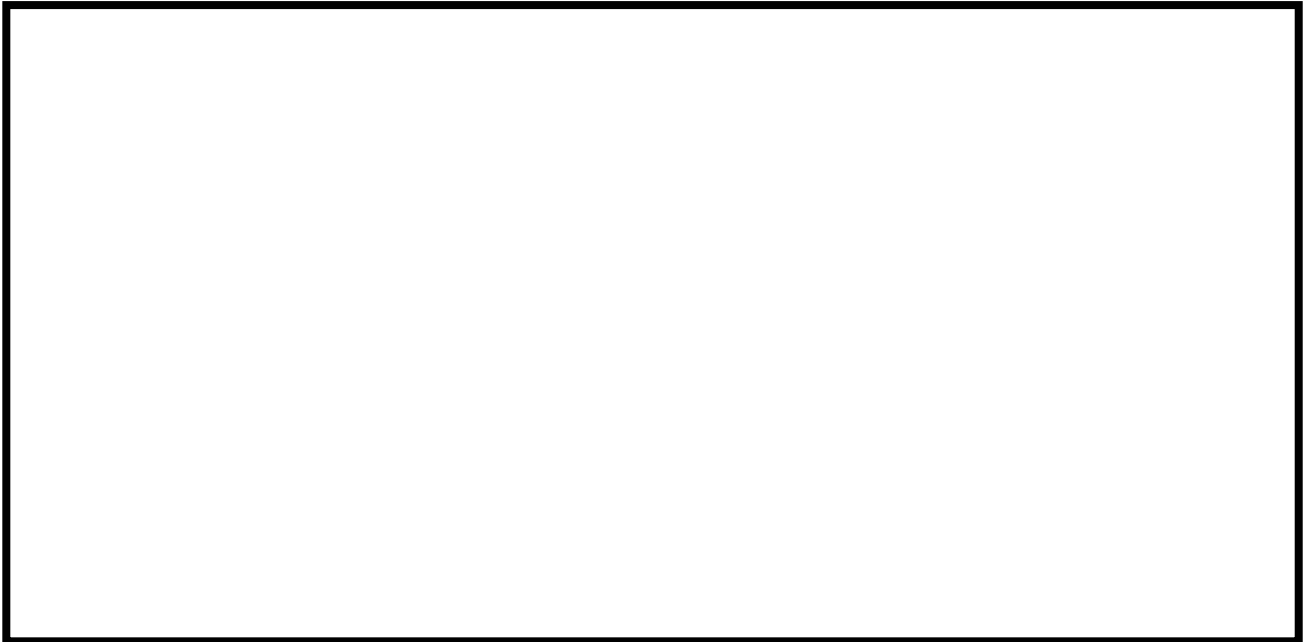
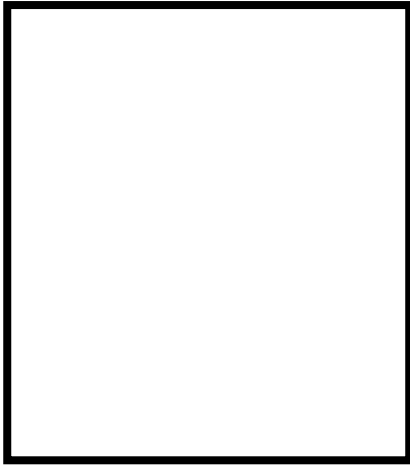
MARA MARA TIMES

December 26th, 1947,

3 pennies

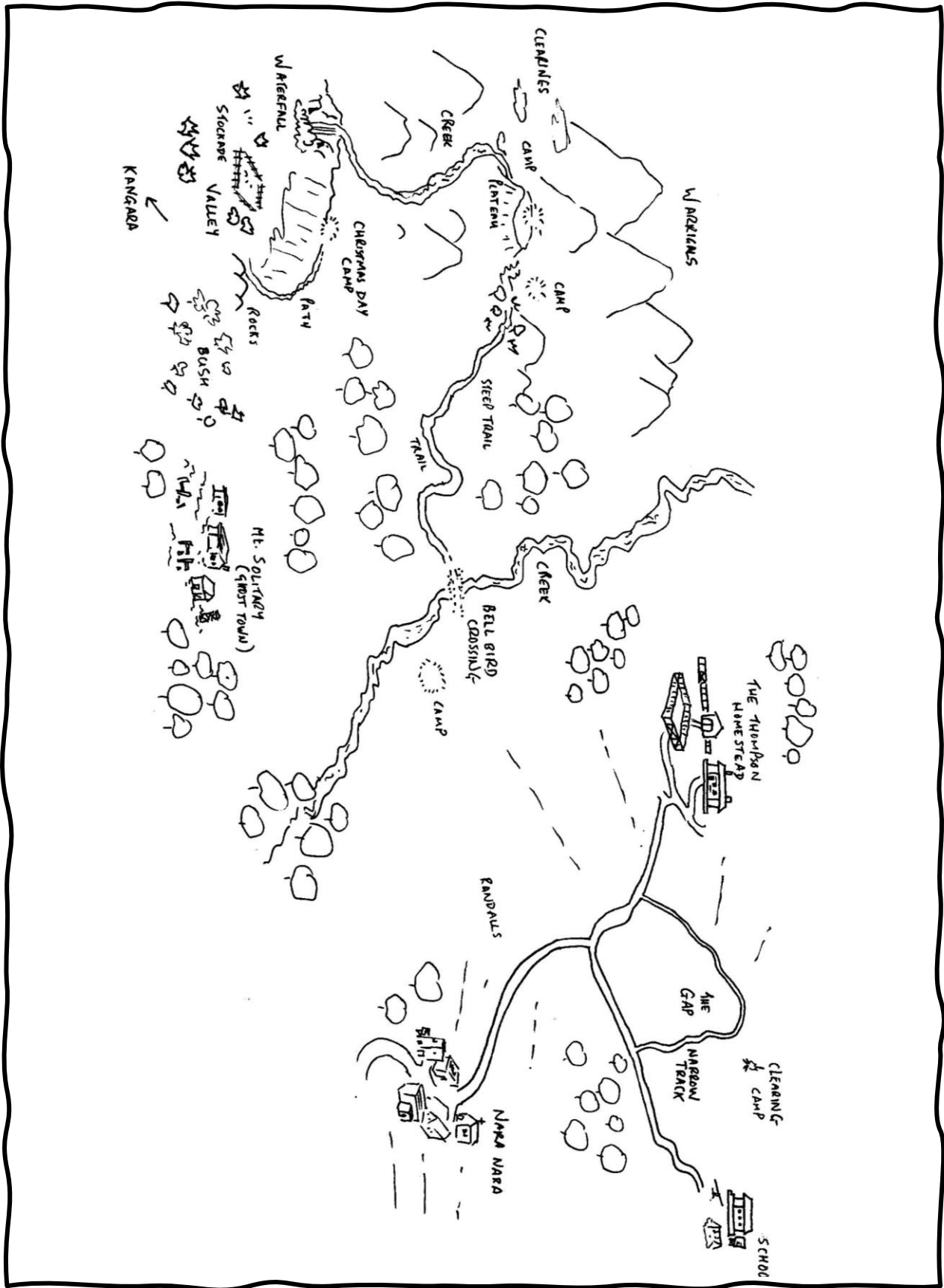


Bush Christmas comic



Bush Christmas

(Enlarge to A3)





The 3 thieves flattened themselves against the cliff face and the boulder rolled past them. The children crouched down waiting and listening.



School is over for the year and the children ride home. John wants to follow a track to the Gap and encounter two strangers.

A spear flew suddenly shot out of the bush, flew over their heads and buried itself in the waterbag.

Michael adjusted his telescope and peered down into the valley to spy on the thieves.

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Images from the movie

