

My New Zealand Story: Cyclone Bola

Author: Kath Beattie

Synopsis

Amy's parents have always been extremely adventurous and when a friend offers them the opportunity to sail a yacht from Queensland via Vanuatu back to New Zealand, they jump at the chance. Amy is not happy. Her parents intend to pull her out of school in Auckland and send her to live with her great aunty and uncle in Gisborne. Amy can't imagine anything worse than leaving her friends. However, when she arrives at her aunty and uncle's vineyard, she finds that she enjoys country life. Amy quickly adapts to the routines of living in the country and enjoys completing her daily chores and feeding the animals. She attends the local school and makes new friends.

Amy begins to worry about her parents when reports of a deadly cyclone sweeping through the Pacific filter through. Amy is unable to contact her parents and has no idea where they are or if they are safe. What Amy doesn't know is that it is not only her parents who are in danger. The cyclone is changing course and soon Gisborne is in its path. Amy's world and her aunt and uncle's livelihood are under threat. With its raging winds and ferocious rain, Bola changes the lives of the people of Gisborne forever.

Text Type

Cyclone Bola is the latest novel in the hugely popular My New Zealand Story series. Set in Gisborne in 1988, the novel tells the story of Amy, a young Auckland girl, who moves to Gisborne to live with her aunt and uncle. While Amy is living in Gisborne a deadly cyclone called Bola devastates much of Gisborne and other areas of the east coast of New Zealand. Through Amy's eyes the reader learns about surviving a disaster, and the monstrous after-effects of a natural disaster like a cyclone. Property is damaged, people lose their lives, infrastructure collapses and communication becomes difficult. Throughout the chaos, however, the human spirit prevails. Neighbours and friends rally to help each other out.

Cyclone Bola is a fascinating account of a significant event in New Zealand history. While many characters in the novel are fictional, most of events described are factual. The novel contains a historical note and some interesting photographs. It has broad appeal for both boys and girls and is a fast-paced read that is highly engaging.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: pp. 5–10, pp. 11–81 and pp. 82–157.

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of characters and events. Have them make predictions and inferences. Wherever possible, encourage

students to link Amy's experiences to their own lives and broader understanding. Students should also be encouraged to identify themes and explain how they are developed in the novel.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- What is a cyclone? What effects do you think a cyclone might have?
- When and where is the story set?
- Who is the main character in the story? Why has she moved from Auckland?
- Have you ever heard of Cyclone Bola? If so, what do you know about it?
- This novel is written in diary form. What do you expect from a book written in this style?

Students read pp. 158–159 and study the photographs at the end of the story.

- What three facts about the effects of Cyclone Bola shock you the most and why?
- Why was communication so difficult in New Zealand in 1988?
- What changes have been made to rural property addresses since this disaster?
- Describe your thoughts and feelings as you look at the photographs.

Teacher reads pp. 5–10 aloud. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension pp. 5–10

- Why does Amy consider Friday 12th February the worst day of her life?
- How does Amy feel about her mother's suggestion that she stay with Aunty June and Uncle Jim? Where do Aunty June and Uncle Jim live? How does Aunty June persuade Amy that her stay with them will be fun?
- How does the Principal at Amy's school react when her parents tell her that Amy will be going to Gisborne for six weeks? Who will set her work?
- How does Amy feel the night before she is due to fly out?

Discussion

- What is interesting or unusual about Amy's parents?

- Why do you think people often react negatively to the idea of going somewhere or doing something that is unfamiliar to them?
- What do we learn about Amy and her life in this part of the book?

Students read pp. 11–81 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension pp. 11–81

- Why is Amy worried about her parents?
- What parts of Gisborne does Amy see from the plane and during the car ride?
- Who does Aunty June think that Amy looks like? Why does Amy consider this a compliment?
- What is an automatic banging machine and why is it used?
- In whose class is Amy given a desk?
- How does Mr Heperi know Mrs Henderson?
- What interesting information does Amy write about Gisborne in her letter to Mrs Henderson?
- What is botrytis? What sort does Uncle Jim have?
- What chores does Amy have to complete before breakfast?
- What is a refractometer?
- Who are Bonnie and Jackie?
- Why is the soil in Gisborne so fertile?
- How does Amy feel when she learns that the cyclone is heading towards Vanuatu?
- What does Mr Heperi suggest that Amy do an assignment on for Mrs Henderson?
- What information does Amy find out about Cyclone Bola?
- What destruction does Bola cause in Vanuatu? How does Amy feel about not being able to contact her parents?
- What is a Leap Year and why do they exist?
- Why don't Amy's parents need to have 'proper' jobs?
- Why do Amy and her aunt visit the police station? Who promises to help them?

- What does Amy find interesting about how grapes are pollinated? What is unusual about avocados?
- What news does Uncle Jim bring Amy on March 2nd? Why isn't this very useful?
- Where does Cyclone Bola move to on March 4th? What is it downgraded to? What competition does it affect?
- Whom does Amy go to the beach with? Why does her visit to the beach take her mind off her parents?
- What is a 'ham'? Why do Aunty June and Uncle Jim decide to visit one? What has happened to Harry the Ham man?
- Why does Uncle Jim put the grape pickers off? What does he want the Brix reading to be before he has them picked?
- Why isn't Uncle Jim worried about Cyclone Bola coming to Gisborne?
- What is Civil Defence? What warning do they place on the radio?
- Who is Richard Steele?
- How much rain falls on March 6th?
- Why does Uncle Jim advise Aunty June that she and Amy should head home from school as soon as possible? What happens to them on their way home? Why does Amy describe the drive home as a 'terrible nightmare'?
- Why is Uncle Jim so concerned that the floodgate has activated? Why is it lucky that their house is on a knoll?
- Why does Aunty June tell Amy to look in the back of the phone book?
- What emergency supplies do Amy and her aunty and uncle gather together?
- Why is it critical to have fresh water in a disaster? Why don't Amy and her aunt and uncle have to worry about this?
- Why do Amy's aunt and uncle disconnect all of the electrical appliances?
- How does Aunty June know that they got home just in time?
- What is a State of Emergency?
- Why does Jim have a tear in his eye when he looks out the window?
- How did the people in Tolaga Bay drown?
- Why are the army called in?

Discussion

- What new and interesting experiences does Amy have when she first arrives on the farm?
- How is rural life different to city life?
- Why is it so important to have 'an inquiring mind'?
- What does Amy enjoy about life on the vineyard?
- Nature is powerful and unpredictable. How does Cyclone Bola devastate Gisborne and the surrounding areas?
- Have you ever been involved in a similar situation to Amy's? If so, what emergency supplies did your family gather together? What was the most important item that you had with you? How did you and your family survive?

Students read pp. 82–157 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension pp. 82–157

- What does Amy see when she looks out the window on the 8th of March?
- What does Amy discover when she sees that the shed door has blown open? How does her uncle react to the news? Why does Amy think he is so grumpy?
- Why does Jim think that the helicopter pilots should get the highest award possible?
- How does Jim feel about being isolated from everyone and everything?
- Why is Amy glad that she is with her uncle and aunty rather than her own parents?
- What other regions are affected by the cyclone?
- Why do Amy, June and Jim call themselves 'the wanderers'?
- What does Jim do to try and save the grapes? Why does Amy think that he's 'fighting a losing battle'?
- What sorts of organisations are helping the evacuees?
- How does Jim know that Bola is moving south?
- Why are Jim and June so shocked when they hear about the bridges being washed away?
- Who surprises Jim, June and Amy with a visit? How did he get there? What news does he report?
- Why are normal aspects of life 'put on hold' during the disaster?

- Why is Amy so excited on the morning of March 10th?
- What causes the awful smell?
- What does Jim report back to June and Amy after his visit into town? Why is he proud of Robert?
- How many grapes does Jim think can be salvaged? Who helps to organise getting them picked? How does Amy help June prepare for the workers?
- How many volunteers turn up to help pick the grapes? How does the sludge make the job difficult? Where do Amy, June and Jim go after their grapes are picked? Why does June feel humble at the end of the day?
- Why does Jim need to dig up the ground around the roots of the vines? Who arrives to help?
- Why is it important for the stock and station agents to go with the helicopter pilots to deliver goods to the back country folk?
- What are the most interesting stories shared when Amy gets back to school?
- Why is Aunty June so worried about Amy's infected knee?
- What does Amy see from the top of Kaiti hill? How does this make her feel?
- Why is it important to talk about experiences like Cyclone Bola?
- Where do Bonnie and Jackie think they saw Stray? Where does Amy actually find him? What condition is he in?
- Why does Amy feel so angry at her parents? Is her anger justified? Why/why not?
- Why does it take Amy so long to get the message from her parents?
- Where does Amy's mum call her from? Why does Amy find it difficult to talk to her?
- How does Amy feel about having to leave Gisborne so quickly? How does she convince her parents to let her stay a little longer? Why do you think it is important for Amy to get 'closure'?

Discussion

- Amy refers to Jim and June as being 'strong and sensible'? Do you agree with her? Why/why not? What other attributes and qualities do they possess? How do you think the loss of the grapes will affect them?
- In what ways are Amy and her aunt and uncle luckier than some people affected by the disaster?
- What are some of the long-term effects of the cyclone on the people and the economy?

- What does Aunty June mean when she says that ‘we probably take Mother Nature too much for granted’? Do you agree with her? Why/why not?
- In what ways does the disaster bring out the best of people?
- Identify an important theme in the story and explain how this is developed by the author.

Activities

Research – Conduct a research assignment about Cyclone Bola. Formulate 3 open-ended focussing questions to guide your research. Use a range of written, oral and visual sources to gather your information. Present your information on a poster.

Newspaper Article – Write a newspaper article about the devastating effects of Cyclone Bola on Gisborne. Use the inverted pyramid style of writing where all of the most important information (the what, where, who, when and how) is contained in the first two paragraphs. Add additional information as the article progresses and include quotes from people involved.

Review – Write a book review suitable for publication in a school newspaper. Include a brief summary of *Cyclone Bola*. Explain the importance of the story being written in diary form and the significance of the historical event the story is about. Include information about the main themes and ideas presented in the story and give your personal opinion about the book.

Chart – Complete a chart that shows the things that Amy’s aunt and uncle have in the 1980’s with the things that your family has today.

Plot – Complete a flow chart that shows all of the important events in the story in the order in which they occur.

Character – Write a paragraph about how Amy’s character develops and changes throughout the course of the book.

Static Image – Design a Civil Defence brochure informing people what to do in the event of a cyclone or flood.

Static Image – Design a static image that illustrates an important theme or idea from the novel. Use verbal and visual features to convey your idea. Include a written commentary that explains the theme that your static image depicts and the reasons why you chose to display your ideas the way you have.

Issue – Identify an important issue that is raised in this story. Explain the issue and give your opinion about it.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd