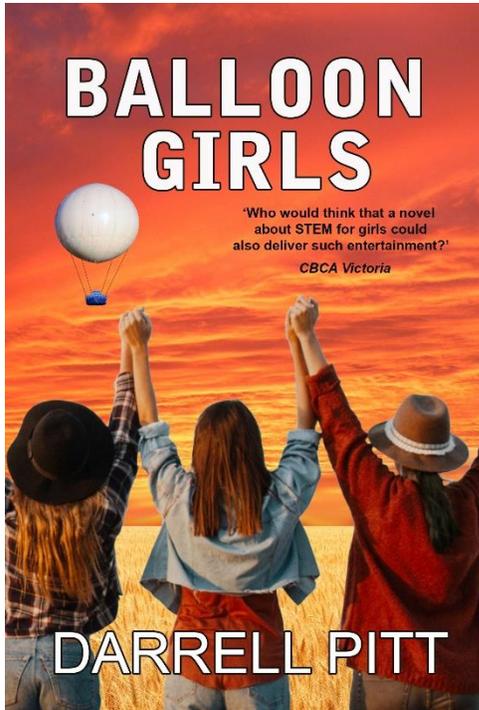


Balloon Girls – Teaching Notes



Times are tough in the small town of Yallaroo where Ally Simpson has lived her whole life. The entire area is in drought and people are going broke or moving away.

So when Ally hears about a competition to win the trip of a lifetime to visit the Smithsonian Museum in the USA, she knows she's got to do everything she can to try and win.

Ally enlists her best friends Harmony and Ping to help. Her plan? To send a video camera to the edge of space, and prove once and for all that the earth is round.

At first, Ally is pretty sure she's got the contest stitched up. But then, as one disaster after another derails her plans, she begins to learn the importance of staying grounded even while she's aiming for the sky...

Series: Standalone novel

Genre: Middle Grade Contemporary / STEM

Theme: Resilience, Female Friendships, Drought/Rural Life, Scientific Inquiry

1. Book Summary & Metadata

- **Target Age:** 9 –14 years
- **The Hook:** In the drought-stricken town of Yallaroo, Ally Simpson is determined to win a trip to the Smithsonian Museum. Her plan? To send a camera to the edge of space using high-altitude balloons to prove once and for all that the Earth is round.

- **Curriculum Links:** English (Contemporary Fiction, Voice), Science (Forces, Earth & Space), HASS (Geography – Impact of Drought on Communities).

2. Pre-Reading Questions

- **The Setting:** The book is set in a town suffering through a long drought. How does weather affect a community's mood and its economy?
- **STEM & Gender:** Why do you think it is important to have stories about girls who love science and engineering? Can you name a famous female scientist?
- **High Ambitions:** Ally wants to reach the "edge of space." What is the difference between a hot air balloon and a high-altitude weather balloon?

3. Discussion Questions (The "Deep Dive")

- **Resilience:** Ally faces "one disaster after another." Identify a specific moment where she wanted to give up. What—or who—convinced her to keep going?
- **Community:** How does the town of Yallaroo come together (or pull apart) during the drought? How does Ally's project give the town something to talk about other than the weather?
- **The "Flat Earth" Debate:** Ally's experiment is designed to prove the Earth is round. Why is scientific evidence more powerful than "internet rumors" or legends?

4. Activities (Pick & Choose)

- **[Science/STEM]** – The Physics of Buoyancy: Using a small balloon, a straw, and some tape, design a "neutral buoyancy" craft that can hover in the middle of the classroom without falling or hitting the ceiling.
- **[English]** – Persuasive Speech: Imagine you are Ally. Write the 300-word "Competition Entry" speech explaining why your experiment deserves to win the trip to the Smithsonian. Focus on the impact of your project.

- **[Geography]** – Drought Journals: Research the impact of drought on Victorian or Australian rural towns. Write a diary entry from the perspective of Ally’s dad or a neighbor, describing how the dry landscape has changed their daily life.

5. Australian Curriculum Alignment (V9.0)

Year Level	Content Description	Code
Year 5/6	Science: Scientific knowledge is used to solve problems and inform personal and community decisions.	AC9S6U04
Year 7	English: Understand how text structures and language features can be used to represent different perspectives.	AC9E7LE01
Year 6	HASS/Geo: The impact of bushfires or floods (and by extension, drought) on Australian communities.	AC9HG6K01