

Teacher's Notes



THE APOCALYPSE AND OTHER MILD INCONVENIENCES

Written by Alex Dyson

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Middle-grade readers (ages 9–13, grades 4–6)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English, Civics and citizenship
- General capabilities:
 - Ethical Understanding
 - Critical and Creative Thinking
 - Personal and Social Capability

THEMES

- Climate change
- The future
- Friendship
- Hope
- Activism
- Politics and leadership

SYNOPSIS

Xavier wants to be a stand-up comedian. But does he have what it takes to stand up?

Xavier Gency, 12, knows the world is pretty much doomed, but that doesn't stop him cracking jokes about it wherever he goes. In his country town, where politicians are bulldozing trees to 'prevent' bushfires. At home, even though his dad's sense of humour is just like native wildlife – extinct. And at his new boarding school, where he's stuck with Charlotte, his headstrong do-gooder neighbour.

But when Xavier hears some devastating news about his family's farmhouse, he knows he's got a serious decision to make. Should he sit back and poke fun, like he's always done? Or should he take action, even if that means sneaking off campus, having run-ins with the law, and – even worse – teaming up with Charlotte?

Set in the not-too-distant future, this middle-grade cli-fi tackles serious issues in an eye-wateringly hilarious way.

Perfect for fans of Nat Amooore and Matt Stanton, it's a fun, thrilling story that shows hope is worth holding out for.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After graduating from the University of Melbourne with a Creative Writing degree, **Alex Dyson** became a co-host of the national triple j breakfast show when he was just twenty-one years old. In his seven years there he woke up with approximately one million listeners every morning, and has interviewed everyone from Arnold Schwarzenegger to Julia Gillard, as well as almost every up-and-coming musician the country has to offer. Since leaving radio, he has DJ-ed at clubs and music festivals around Australia, hosted MTV Unplugged, opened a bar, run for parliament, and has now dusted off his writing degree to become an author of books for children.

THEMES

The book uses humour to discuss some heavy themes without becoming hopeless or overwhelming. The phrase 'stand up' is used in two ways – to refer to stand-up comedy and Xavier's dream of becoming a comedian, and to refer to standing up for what you believe in.

The author uses humour to empower his characters rather than to poke fun at them (you might discuss the idea of 'punching up' with your students). For example, consider the first time Xavier meets Ted'ki. Both boys have a lot to be sad about – as a climate refugee, Ted'ki has lost his home and community; Xavier is on the cusp of losing his home and has endured years of increasingly severe bushfires in his hometown. But rather than giving into sadness, Xavier turns it into a joke as a way to connect with Ted'ki. This humour enables them to find a connection with each other and also speak more freely about difficult feelings and experiences. In many ways, humour is what empowers the characters in the book to take action.

Consider the end of the story – discuss the way that both kinds of stand up come together in Charlotte and Xavier's class speech.

WRITING STYLE

In addition to humour, the author uses irony to explore some of the deep inequalities in a future plagued by climate disaster. Xavier reflects on this early in the narrative when his nan is ranting about the inconvenience of climate refugees, despite benefitting from the system that has caused them.

(p49)

'And then there are all these protesters out blocking the streets every second day,' she exclaims. 'Sure, you want to save the planet, good luck to you, but some of us have to get to work. Do they have to be so selfish?'

I look around to see if anyone else has noticed how ironic that is.

Explain the meaning of irony to the class. Discuss its meaning in the context of this scene and invite students to provide other examples of irony from the text.



COMPREHENSION

- Why did Xavier create Hope? What does she represent to him?
- How does Xavier feel about going to boarding school? What are some of the pros and cons of going?
- When is the book set? What are the first clues that it takes place in the future?
- What are the first things that Xavier notices about the city? How is it different to Wendouree?
- When Xavier arrives at St Anthony's, he sees a sign that reads 'Your future is assured'. What kind of future is presented to the students at St Anthony's? How is this different to the future presented to climate refugees, or to kids growing up outside the city? What power do the kids in each place have to change their circumstances?
- What does Xavier's nan believe about climate refugees? After Xavier meets Ted'ki, what does he learn that makes him see them differently? What are some of the things that we can do to combat myths and false information about climate change and climate refugees?
- What are your first impressions of Charlotte? What do you know about her that gives you these impressions? Does anything happen to change your mind?
- Charlotte tells Xavier that people's feelings aren't relevant when it comes to doing the right thing (p92). Do you agree? Why/why not?
- When Xavier thinks about saving the farmhouse, he thinks: 'If it's going to be mine one day, I've got to take care of it now' (p111). What else could this statement apply to?
- What makes Xavier speak his mind to the prime minister? What effect do you think his words will have on the people who hear him?
- What have Xavier and Charlotte learned from each other? How did the ending of the novel make you feel about the future?

WRITING EXERCISE

- What are some of the things we can do as individuals to prevent some of the outcomes imagined in the novel? What do we need our governments and leaders to do? Write a letter to a politician explaining what you need them to do now to avoid the future shown in the book. How will you persuade them to take action? (Think about how you can use emotion and logic to create a compelling argument).

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Draw a family tree going back at least three generations. Under each person's name, write a short description of their life and where they lived. Use this to map out significant



differences between their life and yours. What choices do you think they made that have shaped your presence?

- Find a picture of Wendouree as it is now. Now draw it as it's described in the novel. What has changed? What has been lost?
- What are your own feelings about the future? Write a letter sharing your feelings and hopes for the future. Address it to yourself and put it somewhere safe to come back to and reflect on a few years from now.
- What do you think makes a good leader? Draw a portrait of someone you think is a good leader. Alongside your portrait, write a short profile that outlines who they are, their contributions to society, and the qualities that you believe make them a good leader.
- What land management techniques can we learn from First Nations people? Look at some of the resources provided, and create a poster that illustrates one technique we could use to look after the environment.

RELATED READING

How to be Prime Minister and Survive Year Five
By Carla Fitzgerald

The Power of Positive Pranking
By Nat Amooore

The Paperbark Tree Committee
By Karys McEwen

How to Spell Catastrophe
By Fiona Wood

The Apprentice Witnesser
By Bren MacDibble

The following resources are recommended by Alex Dyson to learn more about First Nations culture

Fire Country
by Victor Steffenson

Country Needs People (website)
<https://www.countryneedspeople.org.au/>

Seed Mob (website)
<https://www.seedmob.org.au/>

Deadly Science (series)
By Corey Tutt

