

Evie and the Bushfire

Becky Westbrook

Jet James, Illustrator

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Evie and the Bushfire is a picture book about understanding and dealing with the Australian Black Summer fires.

Becky Westbrook's comforting picture book, *Evie and the Bushfire*, addresses Australia's devastating recent fires with a touch of magic.

Evie is a spirit girl who wakes up feeling fire in her bones. As birds screech warnings, and farmers and police do their best to take animals and people to safety, Evie shelters in her cave, weeping as fire ravages the land. She tries to comfort people, but most do not feel hope and so cannot see her.

Only Tom can see Evie, and when he, too, starts to lose hope, Evie shows him that what is most important still remains: the courage of those who work together to put out the remaining fires and care for injured animals; the compassion of those who help each other rebuild; and the resilience of the land, as green shoots sprout from the char. Aboriginal elders teach Tom and Evie that fire, used wisely, can be a friend. Tom, with all that he has seen and learned, carries his renewed hope to others.

The story carries a powerful message: that hope and resilience are stronger than even the greatest disaster. It takes a child's-eye view of the wildfires to provide age-appropriate information about them, and it conveys deep respect for nature.

Primitive in style and sensitive in their rendering, the book's illustrations bring the fires to life in earth, smoke, and fire tones. As the story progresses, brilliant reds and greens give signs that rebirth is at hand. A drawing of Evie weeping is moving, and the bright red feather and soaring bird at the story's conclusion are uplifting. Internally, short paragraphs are balanced with illustrations of varying sizes, making for pleasant reading.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (February 26, 2021)

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