

# Plants Growing in the Ashes of Australia's Fires

(January 2020)

Ravaging brushfires have been sweeping through parts of Australia since September. In that time, roughly half a billion animals and a vast number of trees and plants have been killed. More than 15.6 million acres have burned so far. What's worse is that at least 140 fires are still burning. To give you an idea of the devastation, a football field is just 1.32 acres.

Despite the magnitude of the fires and the destruction they have left in their wake, there are small signs of hope. In some recently burned areas, life is slowly returning. Local photographer Murray Lowe went to investigate how fire had affected Dharug National Park in a place called Kulnura on Central Coast, New South Wales.

As Murray walked carefully through the ash left over from the fire that tore through the area in late December, he suddenly noticed something quite fascinating: patches of green grass coming up through the dust and pink-colored leaves sprouting from tree trunks. Murray snapped shots of the lovely sights and saved them on social media. He wished to give hope to the people of Australia. As a result, the uplifting snapshots were shared thousands of times.

This recovery might seem quick, but a lot of these plants have experienced fires for tens of millions of years. That's why they've evolved the ability to recover rapidly after being burned. Some plants do this by resprouting. This means their buds are insulated deep beneath thick bark, so they're protected from heat. A lot of shrub and grass buds are protected by soil, so they're speedy sprouters, too. Some plant species come back from the brink because their seeds are heat resistant. Plus, nutrients released from ash make the time following a fire perfect for small seedlings to start growing. However, seedlings need good soil and also water to begin growing, and Australia hasn't experienced much rain at all lately.

The severity of Australia's fires, combined with the current deep drought, is causing many plants to die. Even with the quick sprouters, it takes fire-devasted wooded areas many years to fully regrow. Only time will tell whether rain will come soon or how long it will take before Australia's green areas become what they once were. Until then, we have Murray's photographs to plant hope in our hearts.

## Teacher Resources – Vocabulary

*Potential Words for Further Study:* These words not only help with comprehension of the passage, they also appear more frequently in a wide spectrum of reading, especially in academic text. Therefore, further study of the meaning of these words may be beneficial. The words in this list can be incorporated into subsequent lessons.

### **Wilson Reading System Vocabulary Level: AB**

**evolve (v)** to develop by gradual changes; unfold

**recover (v)** a return to health, consciousness, etc.

**release (v)** to let go or let loose

*Words for Quick Discussion:* Consider discussing these words as they are encountered to help students comprehend the passage. A quick discussion in student-friendly language while reading the text is best.

### **Wilson Reading System Vocabulary Level: B**

**brink (n)** the edge, esp. at the top of a steep place; verge

**devastate (v)** to lay waste; make desolate; ravage; destroy

**drought (n)** a prolonged period of dry weather; lack of rain

**seedling (n)** a plant grown from a seed, rather than from a cutting, etc.

**Definition Source:** Collins English Dictionary. Retrieved from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english>

**Text Easability:****Text Easability Scores**

If you would like to measure the text easability scores of this passage, please follow the directions below.

1. Visit the Coh-Metrix Text Easability Assessor website at <http://tea.cohmetrix.com/>. If you do not already have a login and password, create one. It is free and easy to sign up for access to the website.
2. Once you have created an account and sign in, you will be taken to a page with an empty, white text box. Copy and paste the text from this passage into the empty, white text box. Make sure you are only copying and pasting the body of the passage. Do not include the title, date, or any of the resources present in the passage.
3. When you have pasted the passage into the text box, click on the red button beneath the text box that says "Analyze." There will be a short delay and after a few seconds, you will see a bar graph appear to the right of the screen.
4. The bar graph will give you the percentages for several text characteristics including: narrativity, syntactic simplicity, word concreteness, referential cohesion, and deep cohesion.
5. Below the bar graph, the Flesch Kincaid Grade Level is also included for your benefit.
6. Lastly, a paragraph is provided that explains the meaning of the measurements of the text characteristics for your particular passage.
7. Once you have completed measuring your passage, you can click on the "Clear" button below the text box and measure another passage, if you wish.

**Text Passage Archive on Wilson Academy®/Intensive Learning Community:**

This text passage is archived under *World*.