

Fat Tyres: A Guide to Mountain Biking *By Iain Campbell*

Introduction

Readers go on a real ride to discover all about mountain biking. Interesting facts about the gear, tricks, tracks, history, and safety all make for engaging reading.

Reason for reading

You could use this book with your students:

- to introduce them to mountain biking, possibly as part of a wider unit on sports
- to consider the dangers of certain sports and the safety precautions that mitigate those dangers
- to explore the lively, conversational writing style.

Setting the scene

Draw on your students' prior knowledge. If necessary, introduce concepts or vocabulary to help them access the story. Also communicate the reason for reading.

- Brainstorm ideas about mountain biking. "Do any of you ride mountain bikes? What gear do you use to ride off-road? Where are some good local tracks or competitions? Do you know where and when mountain biking began?" Alternatively, you could elicit prior knowledge through a postbox or "think, pair, share" activity. Write key vocabulary on the board.
- Print Template A, the KWLH chart, from the back of this document. Alternatively, create a KWLH chart on the board. Have the students fill in the first two columns with what they know and want to know about mountain biking. After reading, they can fill in the final two columns (what they learned and how they learned it).
- Introduce any vocabulary that your students may need to access the text. Refer to Worksheet 2 for a list of potentially unfamiliar words. You could carry out this activity before or after reading. (See "Taking a closer look – Exploring language".)
- Have your students quickly skim the text, especially the contents page, headings, and index, to get an idea of what information it covers. "If you wanted to find out about the history of mountain biking, where would you look? What about different tracks around the world?"

Getting stuck in

Choose the prompts that you feel your students need. Remind them to note any unfamiliar words and check for clues to the meanings in the text or images. The meanings of words in bold text are in the glossary at the back of the book.

- End page 3 – "What specifically do you think is dangerous about mountain biking?"
- End page 5 – "What are some differences between mountain bikes and ordinary bikes? For riding around town, would you use a hardtail or full-suspension bike?"
- End page 7 – "Of the 'must have' gear, what item do you think is most important and why?"
- End page 9 – "Which items in the 'nice to have' gear would you most want to have and why? Is there anything here that you think bikers should always have with them? Why or why not?"

- End page 13 – “Can you do any of these tricks? If so, how long did it take to learn them? If not, would you like to try them? Why or why not? What point does the writer make about beginning to learn bunny hops and drop-offs?”
- End page 15 – “What were two names for early mountain bikes?”
- End page 19 – “Which (if any) of these tracks and competitions appeal to you and why? Why do you think some people like putting themselves in dangerous situations? What safety features are mentioned on these pages? What other safety rules would you need to follow?” Compare the speed that Christian Taillefer reached (212 kilometres) with the speed limit for cars on the open road.
- End page 21 – “Are there any rules here that you hadn’t thought of?”

Taking a closer look

Choose suggestions that suit your students and reason for reading.

Exploring ideas and opinions

- Ask for your students’ opinions of the text and encourage them to justify those opinions. “If you don’t already mountain bike, do you think you’d like to give it a go? Why or why not?”
- Have the students complete Worksheet 1 (the three-level thinking guide) and discuss their responses in pairs, in small groups, or as a class.
- As a class, summarise the dangers and associated safety features of mountain biking that the text mentions. Then discuss the dangers in more detail – and why people do the sport despite them. You could refer to the comment on page 3: “Mountain biking gets your adrenaline pumping like nothing else!” Do the students agree with this statement? “What other sports can you think of that have similar dangers? Do you think it’s okay that people do such dangerous sports? Why or why not?”
- Have the students complete the KWLH chart with things they’ve learned about mountain biking.

Exploring structure

- Explore how the text is structured, noticing the use of headings that identify the focus of each section. You could carry out a “treasure hunt” activity in which the students use features like the contents page and headings to scan for answers to questions you give them.

Exploring language

- Cut out the words and definitions from Worksheet 2 and muddle them up. Hand them out to individual students and have them find their correct “partner”.
- As an alternative to the above, divide the class into two groups and have them complete Worksheet 3a and Worksheet 3b respectively. This activity involves the students in creating the definitions, which they then use to test the other group.
- Your students could work in small groups to cluster vocabulary (from the worksheet, their earlier brainstorming, and/or the text) into sets of their choice, for example, bike parts, types of bike, tricks – or even nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. They could also practise using the words in sentences.

- Explore some of the lively, conversational language in the story, for example, “Mountain biking gets your adrenaline pumping like nothing else” (page 3), “A good helmet can keep your head in one piece if you go flying” (page 6), “the road is little more than a dusty ledge clinging to the mountainside” (page 18), and “killer climbs and hair-raising downhills” (page 19). Discuss what effect this style has. Draw out the idea that it makes the text exciting and helps to engage the reader.

Moving beyond the text

Choose activities that suit your students and reason for reading.

Writing

- Write a description of a sport you do, using lively language like that used in the text. You could include a list of dangers and associated safety rules.
- Create a poster or pamphlet that advertises an upcoming mountain-biking competition.

Research

- Research more about mountain biking. You could choose to focus on its history, tricks, famous riders, or other aspects of the sport.

WORKSHEET 1

Fat Tyres – Three-level thinking guide

- Level 1 – Reading on the lines (interpreting what the text says on a literal level)
- Level 2 – Reading between the lines (inferring, or interpreting what the text might mean)
- Level 3 – Reading beyond the lines (evaluating ideas by relating them to other knowledge)

Students write “agree” or “disagree” beside each statement and then discuss their responses in pairs, in groups, or as a class. The value of this activity lies in the discussion it generates as students justify their views. The activity is not intended as a test for comprehension.

LEVEL 1	Agree/disagree
Mountain biking is sometimes a dangerous sport.	
All mountain bikes have suspension systems on both wheels.	
A hardtail is a solid bike seat.	
Giblets are the “must have” things for your bike.	
A good helmet, biking gloves, and a repair kit are essential whenever you go mountain biking.	
You must wear bike shoes with cleats before you can bunny hop.	
An endo is when you fall off your bike.	
Riding over a steep bank is called a drop-off.	
The first mountain bikes were built in the 1960s.	
Clunkers are old, useless mountain bikes.	
The longest cross-country race takes place in California.	
The “World’s Most Dangerous Road” is in Bolivia.	

Sheet 1 of 2

LEVEL 2	Agree/disagree
Only full-suspension mountain bikes can be used to do tricks.	
You need lights on your bike and helmet when riding at night.	
Mastering tricks will help you stay on your bike.	
Professional mountain bikers are paid to ride their bikes.	
Mountain bikers in California established a sport that is now popular worldwide.	
People have been riding mountain bikes for hundreds of years.	
The Karapoti Trail is one of the steepest mountain bike races in the world.	
Riding a mountain bike without safety gear is irresponsible.	
Expert mountain bikers enjoy collecting bits of bacon.	
You should always mountain bike with a friend.	
You need to be fit to go mountain biking.	
LEVEL 3	Agree/disagree
Anyone can ride a mountain bike.	
Mountain biking is an excellent team sport.	
You can travel the world on a mountain bike.	
Mountain bikers are mature, intelligent people.	
Mountain biking should be taught at school.	

Sheet 2 of 2

Worksheet designed by Barbara Freeman, Wellington, New Zealand, 2007

WORKSHEET 2

Fat Tyres – Match the meaning

Cut out the words and definitions, muddle them up, and have your students match them.

Word	Definition
adrenaline	a chemical in your body that makes your heart beat faster
frame	the body (or main part) of a mountain bike
tread	the part of the tyre that grips the road or other surface
gears	a system of controls that makes pedalling easier or harder
suspension system	shock absorbers, or springs that absorb the impact when going over bumps
hardtail	a mountain bike with front suspension only
cleats	hard-soled shoes that clip to the bike's pedals
obstacle	something that is in the way
bunny hop	when you jump both wheels off the ground at the same time
drop-off	when you ride a bike over a very steep edge

Note that some words above may have other meanings in other contexts.

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WORKSHEET 3a – GROUP A

Fat Tyres – Vocab swap

- Divide the class into two groups and give half Worksheet 3a and half Worksheet 3b.
- In the second column, each group writes definitions for the words in the first column. Where a word has more than one meaning, they may need to check the page listed.
- They then fold the first column out of sight and swap sheets with the other group.
- That group guesses the original word and writes it in the third column. They can go to the page listed if they need help. For an extra challenge, they can guess without referring to the page.
- You could make this a fun competition and give points for every correct word.

Word	Definition (Group A)	Word (Group B)
adrenaline (p. 3)	(p. 3)	
tread (p. 4)	(p. 4)	
suspension system (p. 4)	(p. 4)	
cleats (p. 6)	(p. 6)	
bunny hop (p. 10)	(p. 10)	

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WORKSHEET 3b – GROUP B

Fat Tyres – Vocab swap

- Divide the class into two groups and give half Worksheet 3a and half Worksheet 3b.
- In the second column, each group writes definitions for the words in the first column. Where a word has more than one meaning, they may need to check the page listed.
- They then fold the first column out of sight and swap sheets with the other group.
- That group guesses the original word and writes it in the third column. They can go to the page listed if they need help. For an extra challenge, they can guess without referring to the page.
- You could make this a fun competition and give points for every correct word.

Word	Definition (Group B)	Word (Group B)
frame (p. 4)	(p. 4)	
gears (p. 4)	(p. 4)	
hardtail (p. 4)	(p. 4)	
obstacle (p. 10)	(p. 10)	
drop-off (p. 12)	(p. 12)	

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