

# HER PLACE WOMEN'S MUSEUM

EDUCATION/SECONDARY

# PAT BIGHAM

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**Class grouping:** whole class, pairs, individuals

**Time:** 60–90 minutes

**Purpose:** The purpose of these three 30-minute activities is to introduce students to the context of Pat Bigham's work prior to visiting the Her Place exhibition, where they will be able to explore Pat's contributions to her community in more depth. In this three-part lesson, students will contemplate the notion of 'unconscious bias', explore the role of the Country Fire Authority (CFA), research the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires, and respond creatively to a quote from Pat Bigham about her work.

**Important Note:** Activity 2 of this lesson plan requires students to investigate the Ash Wednesday fires, including finding an image to represent the event. Activity 3 requires students to write an imaginative response from the point of view of a CFA firefighter. Please ensure that all students in the class are comfortable with these tasks before proceeding.

**Activities:** **Unconscious bias? Firefighters**  
**CFA brainstorm and Ash Wednesday research**  
**Creative response: 'Dogs are good listeners.'**

**Preparation and Materials:**

- Books and pens/pencils
- Student access to the internet
- Teacher access to the internet (optional: Surgeon's Dilemma)
- 1 x prompt page for Activity 3 for each student (or a digital copy provided to your class)

## Activity 1

*Whole class*

### **Drawing activity and class discussion**

This activity is intended to help students explore the notion of 'unconscious bias' in relation to their perceptions of firefighters (refer to Figure 1).

**Step 1.** Ask students to draw a picture of a 'firefighter' in their books, labelling it with all of the qualities they think are important to the role.

**Step 2.** Ask students to hold up their drawings and share them with the class. Ask the class the following questions:

How many of the students drew a male firefighter?

Why do they think this was their 'default' position?

Did anyone draw a woman? Why/why not?

What sorts of characteristics did students identify as being important to a firefighter and how many of these are traditionally associated with men?

Is this association accurate? Why/why not?

Read the definition of unconscious bias and ask students to reflect on whether they have discovered any unconscious bias in themselves. What might be the implications of this bias?

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## **Unconscious biases**

**are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form without being conscious they are doing so. Unconscious bias is far more prevalent than conscious prejudice and can be incompatible with one's conscious values.**

## **The Surgeon's Dilemma**

**If you have time, you may want to run this quick scenario past your students to demonstrate just how 'unconscious' our bias can be.**

**<https://tinyurl.com/SurgeonsDilemma>**

## Activity 2

*Task in pairs*

### **CFA and Ash Wednesday**

Pat Bigham began her career with the CFA in the 1980s. The devastating Ash Wednesday fires of 1983 were an important turning point in her professional journey.

**Step 1.** Ask students if they have heard of the CFA. What do they know about the organisation? Write contributions up on the board.

**Step 2.** Read students the CFA Fact Sheet and then explain that this lesson is based on Pat Bigham, a CFA firefighter of over 35 years experience who was awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal in 2008 for outstanding service to her community, brigade and the CFA.

**Step 3.** Ask each pair of students to answer the following questions about Ash Wednesday:

- How many fires broke out on Ash Wednesday?
- In which parts of Australia did the fires occur and where did they start?
- How did the fires that caused Ash Wednesday start?
- What was the toll of Ash Wednesday in terms of life, property and land?
- Find an image that you think sums up the devastation of Ash Wednesday. Write a short sentence explaining why you chose that particular image.

**Step 4.** Ask each group to provide the answer to one of the questions above. Then ask students to volunteer to share their chosen image with the class. If there are more groups than questions, you may want to ask the groups who didn't answer a question to share their images first. Discuss the images that the students have chosen.

## Activity 3

### Individual task

#### Creative writing response

**Step 1.** Provide students with the prompt below, or post it to your class page.

**Step 2.** Ask students to write 2–5 paragraphs (depending on timing, year level and ranges of literacy) in response to the quote. Remind students that focusing on the use of descriptive language and the use of devices such as metaphor and simile will enrich their written response.

**Step 3.** If time permits and your class is willing, ask a couple of students to share their work.

**Step 4.** If you have completed all three activities in this lesson plan, ask students to summarise what they have learned about unconscious bias, the CFA and Ash Wednesday, and to reflect upon the experiences of firefighters in Australia.

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#### Creative Response

### Her Place Education: Pat Bigham

*Pat Bigham is not afraid of fire. She's not afraid of heat so searing it snatches the breath from your lungs. She's not afraid of darkness in the middle of the day from smoke so thick you can't see your hand in front of you. And she's not afraid of running into the teeth of a firestorm when everyone else is running away. 'There's nothing in a training manual that can help you prepare for what you see, smell and experience when you're out in the fire,' says Pat. 'You might have flames roaring 40 or 50 metres above your head, or thundering straight at your face. With a fire, you are dealing with loss – loss of life, loss of property.'*

-- The Australian Women's Weekly, 22 Dec 2016

Pat Bigham has said that when she comes home after a fire she writes in her diary or talks to her dogs to process what she has seen. Create a 2–5-paragraph diary entry or a conversation between Pat and her dogs, trying to imagine what she may have seen and experienced that day.



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