

**Teaching Notes: *Speed King: Burt Munro, the World's Fastest Indian*
By David Hill and Illustrated by Phoebe Morris**

Synopsis:

The moment young Burt Munro saw a motorbike chugging down a quiet Invercargill street, he was hooked. More than fifty years later, he and his ancient Indian motorcycle would amaze the world by setting a land-speed record — one that remains unbroken to this day.

Burt didn't have much money. He wasn't young. But he was determined. And he became a Kiwi legend.

A wonderful true story about a very unlikely New Zealand champion, by the award-winning author and illustrator of *First to the Top* (Puffin, 2015).

The Author:

David Hill is one of NZ's most highly regarded authors for children and young people. His books have been published in eight countries and his short stories and plays for young people have been broadcast here and overseas. David was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2004; he was awarded the Storylines Margaret Mahy Medal in 2005 for his significant contribution to children's literature; and with more than 40 published titles to his name he has won a variety of major national and international awards. Though perhaps best known for his junior fiction novels, David has also written acclaimed picture books, the most recent being *First to the Top* (Puffin, 2015). In March 2016 it was announced as a Storylines Notable Picture Book.

The Illustrator:

Phoebe Morris is a Wellington-based freelance illustrator and designer. Her first picture book was a collaboration with veteran author David Hill published in 2015: the acclaimed picture book/biography of Sir Edmund Hillary, *First to the Top* (Puffin, 2015). In a review for the *NZ Listener*, Ann Packer wrote, 'Wellingtonian Phoebe Morris makes a stunning debut as an illustrator . . . From the arresting cover, through cameos of his younger life to haunting, other-worldly mountainscapes, Morris's style gives the old story a cool new edge'. *Speed King* is Phoebe's second title with David Hill, and she is also the illustrator of the *Frankie Potts* junior fiction series by Juliet Jacka. Find out more about Phoebe at <http://phoebe.design/>

Before Reading:

1. Before reading the book, look at the cover image and title. Discuss what you think the book might be about.
2. Assess students' existing knowledge and impressions by brainstorming and discussing as a class any facts and events known relating to Burt Munro, land-speed racing and world records.
3. What genre do you think this book belongs to? Why do you think this?

Themes:

This exceptional picture book, which tells the story of Kiwi legend Burt Munro, has several themes.

The themes of skill and ingenuity are evident, as Burt Munro, through his inventiveness and resourcefulness, manages to adapt, add to and ultimately build a vehicle that leads him to setting the land-speed world record.

Further themes are those of embracing and using your talents. It is evident that throughout his life, from youth to old age, Burt Munro has a talent for design and racing.

Other themes include passion, determination and obsessions. Burt Munro displays each of these characteristics in his effort and eventual success in setting the world land-speed record.

Comprehension Questions:

1. What clues from Burt Munro's early life might indicate that he was to become a motorbike rider and Kiwi legend (pp. 4-5)?
2. What were some of the machines that Burt Munro built, and was inspired by, in his youth (pp. 4-5)?
3. What was Burt Munro's nickname and why was he given it (p. 9)?
4. Why did competitors of the world speed records wear 'only swimming togs, helmet and shoes' (p. 13)?
5. What animal inspired Burt Munro's design for the shell of his motorbike (pp. 14-15)?
6. Before Burt Munro set the world record, what were some of the obstacles and challenges that he and his family encountered (p. 21)?
7. How did Burt Munro burn his leg (p. 21)? What other injuries did he suffer in his attempts to achieve his world record?
8. What was the fastest speed Burt Munro reached on the ride that broke the world record? (p. 25)?
9. Describe what Burt Munro did after he broke the land-speed record (p. 30).
10. How old was Burt Munro when he rode in a speed trial in Invercargill (p. 30)? What does this tell the reader about his personality and character?

Language and Style:

1. The first two pages of the book feature an illustrated descriptive account of one of Burt Munro's land-speed record attempts. Study the language features used in the recount such as verbs, adjectives, onomatopoeia, simple sentences and direct speech (pp. 2-3). In pairs, discuss and list the language features that you think help make it exciting. Think of an event in your life which you can write a descriptive recount about using similar language features as those used in the book.
2. Question marks, speech marks, ellipses, full stops and commas are all types of punctuation found in the book. Find and list an example of each from the book as well as their grammatical purpose.

3. There are many language features in the book, for example, idioms, personification, alliteration, adjectives and onomatopoeia. Find the definition of each and then match each with one of the examples below, before either finding more examples from the book or thinking of some of your own.
 - a. 'They often fell flat on their faces' (p. 7)
 - b. 'The howl of his engine' (p. 9)
 - c. 'On glittering white flats stretching away to distant blue mountains' (p. 13)
 - d. 'Jaws dropped as it flew past' (p. 25)
 - e. '...and crashed onto its side' (p. 29).
4. Think about the writing style and the genre of the book. Discuss as a class whether you believe the author has successfully managed to blend facts and an exciting story. And if so, find examples from the book.
5. The narrative of the book is in the third person. Why do you think the author chose to do this? Is it effective? Choose a passage about one of the main events of the book. Re-write the passage as a first person narrative, such as a monologue, diary entry or a letter to a loved one by a person featured in the book, for example, Burt Munro. Present your monologue, or read your diary entry or letter aloud, to your class.

Illustrations:

6. The illustrations are by Phoebe Morris. Examine them. Do you like the style? Why or why not? What colours are used? What kinds of lines and textures are used? Design your own illustrations for the cover and/or one page of text.
7. Study the illustrations of Burt Munro's early life (pp. 4-5). How do illustrations let the reader know the geographical locations and the era in which the book is set?
8. In pairs, each choose your favourite illustration from the book. Write a description of the illustration. Then read your written description to your partner and each draw a picture based on your partner's descriptions, for example, the picture of Burt Munro ripping off his goggles (pp. 26-27). How do your drawings compare to the drawings in the book? Consider points such as, is the composition similar and is it as detailed?
9. There is a description of the clothes Burt and his fellow competitors wore when racing (p. 13 & p. 16). Draw an illustration of either Burt in his racing outfit or one of his fellow competitors, based on these descriptions.

Research and Creative Responses:

10. Complete one of the following tasks inspired by the book:
 - a. Many New Zealand place names are mentioned in the book, for example, Invercargill, Oreti Beach and the Canterbury Plains (pp. 5, 7 & 11). In pairs, list all the New Zealand place names found in the book. Next, race each other to see how quickly you can locate them on a map of New Zealand.
 - b. The Bonneville Salt Flats are in America (p. 13). Find America on a map of the world and the Bonneville Salt Flats on a map of America. Research facts about the Bonneville Salt Flats, such as 'Why are they in decline?'. Present your findings to your class in an information report.

- c. Find and research an interesting figure, natural phenomenon, event and/or place mentioned in the book, such as Te Papa Museum (p. 30). Present your findings in the style of an entry in a children's illustrated encyclopaedia.
 - d. When Burt Munro took his family on holiday he towed them in a trailer, and sometimes they fell into a ditch when Burt 'went round a corner too fast' (p. 9). Use this as inspiration for a short non-fiction piece of writing. Write, illustrate, bind and publish your own children's picture book of your account. Read your book aloud to a younger class.
 - e. Look at the illustrated timeline of Burt Munro's life (pp. 32-33). Either create an illustrated timeline of your own life and achievements, or choose one of the events from Burt Munro's timeline to write an article about. Write your article for a social media website or your local newspaper in a current, modern journalistic style. Think about what type of language, sentence and paragraph structure, headings, etc, you would use. Research and note how it differs from the style of journalism from the era when your chosen event took place. List the main stylistic differences.
 - f. Research images from current Bonneville Salt Flat land speed vehicles. Design your own vehicle and racing outfit. Write a description of the choices you have made, alongside labelled diagrams. Next, design a marketing campaign to get sponsors to help raise money so you can attend the Bonneville Salt Flat speed races. Your campaign could include elements such as pamphlets, radio jingles, posters, slogans, etc. Remember to use persuasive and descriptive language.
11. In the book, several measurements are included, such as the top speed of Burt's Indian motorbike and the course on the salt flats (pp. 6 & 18). In groups, convert these measurements to kilometres per hour. Find the measurements of five other world records relating to speed and/or distances and compare with the measurements mentioned in the book, such as the world speed record on water.
 12. Choose your favourite moment from the book and create your own illustration or artistic interpretation of it, for example, a diorama, painting, model, poem, cartoon strip, movie storyboard, video, etc. Write a brief artist's statement to accompany your interpretation.
 13. The book is based on real people. Find a photograph of Burt Munro and compare this image with the illustrations from the book. Then choose a photograph of another Kiwi legend, notable person, or of yourself, to create an illustration.
 14. After reading the book, choose and discuss your favourite page/pages or moment in the book. List five reasons for your choice.
 15. In pairs, list what you feel are the main points of the book. Compare with your classmates. Do you agree or disagree with their choices? Why or why not? Next, write a short plot summary based on your choices.
 16. Find another book illustrated by Phoebe Morris, such as *First to the Top* (Puffin, 2015). Compare and contrast the illustrations. Are there many similarities or differences?
 17. A movie has been made about Burt Munro (p. 30-31). Watch this movie and/or create a movie poster to advertise it.

18. Review the book for your favourite magazine or website. What did you like about the book? Why? What did you dislike about the book? Why? Give it a rating, such as stars or a number out of ten. Consider the following questions when writing your review:
- a. How did the story make you feel as it unfolded?
 - b. What ideas in the book awakened your interest?
 - c. What did you dislike, or find boring?
 - d. Do you think this is a significant book?
 - e. Why is this book important for today's readers?