

# The Firebug of Balrog County by David Oppegaard

In David Oppegaard's compelling story, dark times have fallen on remote Balrog County, and Mack Druneswald. He's a high school senior with a love of clandestine arson, and is doing his best to deal. While his family is haunted by his mother's recent death, Mack spends his nights roaming the countryside, looking for something new to burn. When he encounters Katrina, a college girl with her own baggage, Mack sets out on a path of pyromania the likes of which sleepy Balrog County has never seen before.

Genre: grief, loss, life

Themes: rebellion, friendship, illness and death, pyromania

Age: 12-13

Activities:

1. **Symbol analysis:** Fire is a central symbol in the book, and can be interpreted in many different ways. Ask students to consider the use of fire as a symbol in the novel. What does fire represent? How does Mack's relationship with fire change over the course of the book? What does the book suggest about the power and danger of fire?
2. **Become the author:** Get students write their own short story or scene that imagines what happens to Mack or Katrina after the end of the book. Encourage them to use the same tone and style as the author to create a believable continuation of the story.
3. **Setting comparison:** The book is set in a small town in Minnesota, and depicts both the charms and challenges of living in a close-knit community. Ask students to compare and contrast the portrayal of Balrog County with where they live. Do students' experiences match or contrast with Mack's?
4. **In the character's shoes:** Have students imagine that they are Mack and write a series of journal entries that explore his thoughts and feelings throughout the book. Focus on key moments in the story (e.g. his interactions with Katrina, his arson activities) and use the first-person point of view to create a personal and reflective tone.
5. **Storyboard it:** Get students to create a 'book trailer' to advertise the novel! They can storyboard their key scenes with captions for the voice over/speech.

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- **Kite Spirit** by Sita Brahmachari
- **No Fixed Address** by Susan Nielson
- **Eye of the Crow** by Shane Peacock

