

# 14 | Light my Fire

Why had those stupid teachers decided to have a school camp when winter was just starting?

They were camping out in tents this time. No nice buildings to disappear into when the weather wasn't so good, like they had last year. When they got back from their walk, it was turning cold.

Sarah, Marek and Tom were struggling to light their fire. They had plenty of wood, with quite a bit of newspaper under it, but it wouldn't light. The paper just burnt out.

"Stupid fire!" Tom spat. "Why won't it go?"

"I don't know" wailed Sarah. "I've never lit a camp fire before." None of them had. They looked enviously at a couple of groups nearby, who were huddled round their fires, which seemed to be burning much better. "Tessa!" Sarah yelled. "Come over here! We need your help."

When Tessa arrived, Marek demanded "What's wrong with our fire? Why won't it go like yours?"

"Just look at it," Tessa laughed. "You've used such big pieces of wood. It'll never go like that! You need to collect some kindling."

"What's that?" Tom asked.

"Bits of wood like twigs – we got ours from under that big tree over there. That's what you need to put on the paper, and when it starts to burn, you put on bits that are a bit bigger, then bigger still, and when it's going properly you use bigger stuff." Under Tessa's expert guidance, they soon had a nice warm fire.

"I never knew that stuff about little wood before big wood," Sarah commented, once she was warmer. "Look at that big piece I put on just now – it caught fire really quickly, but it wouldn't go at all before you came over, Tessa."

"Well, that's because the fire's a lot hotter now. Wood burns much quicker when it's hotter."

"And when it's smaller," Marek observed. "That's something new I've learnt, but why?"

"I reckon I know," chipped in Tom. "The flames can wrap around the wood more when it's small."

"What difference would that make?" Sarah asked. "I don't understand. So the wood burns faster if it's small, or if it gets hotter. Why? And is there any other way we could have got it to burn faster?" But the subject got dropped, because Mrs Sharkey had just arrived to hand out the food to cook, and they had to try to figure out how they were going to do that too – Tessa had disappeared back to her own group, and none of them had ever cooked on an open fire before.