Podcast**:** Imagine This

Episode Title: What is a cool fire?

Duration: 13’ 18”

[ABC Kids podcast sting – This is an ABC podcast]

*[Curious classical music starts]*

**Nij:** Hello, my name is Nij and today on Imagine This, we’re talking about something you probably see every day. It helps us cook our food…

**Kid 1:** A frying pan?

**Nij:** … and keeps us warm

**Kid 2:** The sun? A blanket?

**Nij:** You never want to touch it

**Kid 1:** An oven … Heater

**Nij:** … but it’s fun to blow out on a birthday cake!

**Kid 2:** Candles! ... Fire! … Fire

**Nij:** Yes, it’s fire

**Kid 1:** I think it’s made from different gases and the heat around it … and it can burn anything … and it goes shoowoo red fire

**Nij:** Today’s question is about fire…

**Kid 2:** Hi, I’m Rory and I want to know, what is a cool fire?

**Nij:** Fire is really hot, so what’s a cool fire?

**Kid 1:** Dry ice? … I think cool fires are smaller fires

**Nij:** I think we better talk to an expert

**Kid 2:** What’s a fire expert?

**Nij:** Victor Steffensen! He’s an Indigenous fire practitioner – that means he look after the land in Australia using fire.

**Kid 1:** Wow … Cool!

**Nij:** He can teach us about cool fires and how they work

*[Music ends with a flourish as the sounds of the bush cut through – birds are chirping, cicadas are singing, there’s a light breeze and a crackling campfire]*

**Nij:** Hey Victor

**Kid 2:** Hello! … Hi

**Victor:** Hey, hello everyone. I’m so glad you came all the way out here in the bush to find me

**Nij:** Where are we?

**Victor:** Today we are on Tagalaka Country, it’s now being taken care of by the people who live here and call it home. You can tell when people look after the Country with fire the right way

**Kid 1:** How?

**Victor:** You can see the trees are big and healthy with green leafy canopies stretching out to make lots of cool shade. There’s lots of fresh grasses, herbs, and flowers growing everywhere after the cool fires have passed

**Kid 2:** The bush is so beautiful … I can hear all the trees and animals, the birds, and the crackling of the campfire … The cicadas are really loud

**Nij:** Yeah, it’s so noisy

**Victor:** It’s noisy when everything is happy and healthy!

**Nij:** Victor, can you tell us about cool fires and how they work out here on Country?

**Victor:** Of course, I can. Come and sit over here around the campfire

*[Campfire pops and crackles]*

**Kid 1:** Don’t go very near … So, you don’t burn any of your clothes … Be careful!

**Victor:** That’s right, and out here, on Country, you must never put fire on the land without an Aboriginal Elder or ranger there to do it for you.

**Kid 2:** What about a fire when you’re camping?

**Nij:** Yeah, I love campfires

**Kid 1:** We sit around and burn marshmallows

**Victor:** *(laughing)* Campfires are okay, but even then, that’s still a job for grownups, right?

Kid 2: Yes … Yep … Definitely

**Nij:** I do know a little about the physics of fire.

**Kid 1:** What’s that?

**Nij:** Well, that every fire needs three things: air, heat, and fuel – which can be anything that burns…

**Victor:** That’s right, this wood here is fuel for this campfire. And at home it can be the gas for the fire on a stove.

*[Gentle acoustic guitar and slide guitar starts]*

The campfire is very special for keeping warm on cold nights, or for cooking food, preparing medicines, and making tools. But there is another very important use of fire that Aboriginal people have mastered over thousands of years, and that’s looking after the Country with cool fires. Making sure the land is kept clean and healthy for all the plants and animals that live there. Would you like to learn more about this special knowledge?

**NIJ/Kid 2:** Yeah!

*[Music ends]*

**Victor:** Okay, let’s imagine we’re birds then, and I can teach you more about fire from way up there in the sky

**Kid 1:** Yeah, cool!

**Victor:** I’m going to turn into a wedge tailed eagle.

*[Magical sparkle and the call of an eagle]*

**Nij:** Ooh, I’m gonna be a hawk

*[Magical sparkle and the call of a hawk]*

**Victor:** You can turn into any bird that you want, so long as you can fly high in the sky with me.

**Kid 2:** No chickens or penguins ... Yeah, no chickens

**Nij: A**nd no emus!

Kid 1: I’m gonna be a honey eater …. I’m gonna be a sea eagle

*[Two sparkles and the sounds of a honey eater and sea eagle over the crackling of the campfire]*

**Nij:** Everyone got your wings ready?

**Victor:** Slow down, Nij

**Kid 2:** You should put out the fire with some water …Nij, you can’t leave it on fire

**Nij:** Sorry, I got too excited

*[Sizzle of campfire being extinguished.]*

**Victor:** Okay my feathered friends, are you ready to fly?

**Nij:** Yeah, look at my wings!

**Kid 1:** I have big feathers

*[Sound of birdcall and flapping wings]*

**Victor:** Ok. Let’s go!

*[The sound of a flock of birds taking flight, light breeze, and sound of birdcalls]*

**Kid 2:** I can fly!

*[Light airy music starts over wings soaring]*

**Kid 1:** Oh my goodness, we’re flying … We’re so high up!

**Nij:** The trees look like broccoli from up here

**Victor and Kid 2:** *Laughing*

**Nij:** How do you look after the land with fire? Isn’t that what a bushfire is?

**Victor:**Bushfires are different to the cool fires Aboriginal people use to look after the land. Bushfires are hot destructive fires that get out of control during dryer seasons and cause lots of damage to the plants and animals.

**Kid 1:** Why do they happen?

**Victor:** When Country hasn’t been looked after properly. The land is left to build up all that fuel Nij was talking about. That means all the sticks and leaves, and weeds start piling up.

**Kid 2:** Too much fuel

**Victor:** It creates a big mess and that’s when bushfires can happen.

**Kid 1:** They can wipe out animals’ homes or wipe out their food, so they don’t have enough food to survive.

**Victor:**That’s why we are trying to teach people how to look after the land like Aboriginal people have done for so long.

**Nij:** Look over there, I can see white smoke!

*[Music ends with a gust of wind and the sound of a distant fire burning]*

**Victor:** Good spotting Nij, that’s the Aboriginal rangers burning in the gum tree Country. The white smoke means that the fire is a good fire, nice and low and not burning the trees.

**Kid 2:** What’s burning? … I think the cool fires only burn leaves and sticks

**Victor:** The white smoke comes from burning the grass

**Kid 1:** Cos it helps them have a trim off and grow again

**Victor:** Yes, that’s right, and it helps the trees produce more flowers and seeds. Those rangers are burning the Country the right way

*[Gentle acoustic music starts]*

**Kid 2:** What about the animals?

**Victor:** The animals are okay. They know all about the cool fires and how important they are to look after the Country. When they smell the white smoke, they know it’s time to get out of the way to safety. Can you see the kangaroos hopping away to those green places?

**Kid 1:** Oh!

*[Kangaroos hopping]*

**Kid 2:** Wow!

**Victor:** Let’s fly down a little closer to the trees

*[Wings flapping]*

**Kid 1:** What is that? Is that fire? … I can see the fire, it’s not very big … It’s moving so slowly

**Victor:** If you look carefully enough you can see snakes and lizards hiding under logs and scurrying underground

**Nij:** Wow, these hawk eyes are amazing. I can even see all the insects are jumping into the trees*[Insects chirping and flying around]*

**Kid 2:** They’re climbing up a branch … The bugs are marching … So, they don’t get hurt

**Victor:** Even a spider could run away. Many of the insects will climb high up into the trees to safety. And the bigger animals too.

**Kid 1:** I can see koalas! … And a goanna!

**Victor:** Look at all those thousands of lives saved from burning Country the right way.

**Kid 2:** Wow, that’s pretty cool

**Victor:** Now, let’s fly up higher. Look at the shape the fire is taking now

**Kid 1:** It’s like a circle

**Victor:** Burning in the shape of a circle allows the animals to escape the fire in every direction possible

**Nij:** Ah so cool fire burns in a very slow and gentle circle, low to the ground. It doesn’t burn the trees, just the grass

**Victor:** That’s right. It’s all about looking after the plants and animals and burning the Country with great care

*[Music ends as birds dive, calling and swooping past]*

**Nij:** Woah! What was that?

*[Another close swoop]*

**Nij:** Birds are swooping!

**Kid 2:** Catching grasshoppers

**Victor:** Look out everyone and let them through. They know that the cool fires are a good place to find a tasty treat. Hey, why don’t you swoop down and try one too, you’re a bird now so it should taste pretty good.

*[Birds land and chewing and swallowing squishy insects]*

**Kid 1:** Juicy and crunchy

**Nij:** Ew!

**Kid 2:** Gross … I’m not eating bugs! *(laughing)*

**Victor:** *(laughing)* maybe we will leave them for the real birds to eat

**Nij:** How do you know when the Country needs fire?

*[Gentle marimba music starts]*

**Victor:** We fire experts know when and where to burn by listening to the Country. The trees tell us *where* to burn and where not to burn. We also read the soils to tell us what plants will grow back. And the grasses tell us exactly *when* to burn.

**Kid 1:** When? … How?

**Victor:** There is all different timing for different types of Country. If the Country is full of dry grass and weeds, then we also burn to make the Country clean and healthy again.

**Nij:** Woah! That’s a lot of things to think about

**Victor:**Yep – that’s why it is so important to burn Country the right way, and we can do that by listening to Aboriginal Elders and rangers

**Kid 2:** What happens after the fire?

**Nij:** Do you have to put it out?

**Kid 1:** Get some water, if you have a creek there, and put it out … Or with a fire truck?

**Victor:** See that Country down there? Where it’s all green near the river?

**Kid 2:** Yeah … I can see I think water and some rocks

**Victor:** Let’s fly down there and I’ll show you.

*[Wings swooping and landing on solid ground. Sound of running creek, clicking frogs and insects]*

**Victor:** This is what I like to call no fire Country

*[Funky blues music starts]*

**Kid 1:** Why? … How come?

**Victor:** We don’t burn these places as the trees and plants here don’t like fires. Country like this likes to stay wet and green when the other fire Country is ready for a cool burn. Let’s watch the fire coming this way and you will see that it will go out when it reaches the green Country.

*[The sound of the cool fire gets closer then suddenly sizzles and goes out]*

**NIJ and Kid 2:** Woah!

**Victor:** It works every time

**Nij:** So, you never need firefighters?

**Victor:** If we burn Country that is close to houses and farms, we’ll bring a fire truck with us, just to be extra safe

**Nij:** What happens after a cool burn?

**Victor:** The grass and plants grow back in no time creating a lush green Country again. There’ll be plenty of food for the animals to return to

**Kid 1:** That sounds like a good thing

**Nij:** Wow

**Victor:** It’s all about burning to create a healthier Country

*[Music ends with sounds of the creek and insects still chirping and clicking]*

**Nij:** It sounds like a big job

**Victor:** It’s a job that needs to go on forever, so we can live on this land for thousands of years more

**Nij:** Victor, this is so different to any fire I’ve seen. I only ever use fire to cook or when I go camping.

**Kid 2:** and on birthday cakes!

**Victor:** *Laughing*

**Nij:** Yeah! And on birthday cakes

**Victor:** That’s true for a lot of people. That’s why Aboriginal people all over Australia are trying to teach everyone how to look after the Country with fire the right way. It is so important for all of us.

**Nij:** Thanks for teaching us today, Victor.

**Victor:** No worries, but always remember, while it’s good to learn and understand as much as you can, you can never, ever light a fire on Country without an Elder or a fire expert

**Kid 1:** Thank you, Victor … Bye … Cya

**Victor:** Cya later!

*[The sound of the creek and insects fades out as a gentle acoustic guitar starts strumming]*

**Nij:** Fire is what happens when air, heat, and fuel mix together to make a flame.

*[A match strikes alight]*

Fire can be hot and bright white, like a candle on a birthday cake…

*[Breath blows out a candle]*

… or low and red like burning embers.

*[Fire crackles gently]*

Fire has been used by people in all kinds of ways for thousands and thousands of years. To cook food and to keep warm…

*[Stew bubbling]*

… to make things, and even power machines.

*[Engines rumble]*

In Australia, fire has been used by Aboriginal fire experts to look after Country

**Kid 2:** With cool fires!

**Nij:** Cool fires burn very slowly

**Kid 1:** Slow enough for bugs to get away

**Nij:** and very gently

**Kid 2:** Low and slow!

**Nij:** To burn the dry grasses and make the land clean and ready for new, green, growth.

**Kid 1:** for all the animals to eat

**Nij:** Using cool fires to burn dry grass also protects the land from big and dangerous bushfires. This is a very special science that only Indigenous fire experts and park rangers can practice

**Kid 2:** You can never start a fire … Never ever!

**Nij:** But we can listen and learn from the First Peoples of this continent to help care for Country**.**

*[Music ends]*

**Nij:** Imagine This is an ABC Kids listen podcast hosted by me, Dr Niraj Lal. A big thanks to Indigenous fire practitioner Victor Steffensen and to all the kids who helped make the podcast. Today’s episode was written and produced by Soumia Bella, and was made on Gadubanud, Yirrganydji and Gadigal lands. Our engineer is Que Nguyen and senior producer is Emma Gibbs. For more great podcasts to play, music to move, and stories & soundtracks to sleep, download the ABC Kids listen App, free from your app store.