

## WOMBAT CAN'T SING

KATIE STEWART

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YEAR LEVEL: K-3

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: Sustainability

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Wombat loves to listen to Fantail sing, especially when Fantail says that her songs make everyone happy. Wombat wants to make others happy, too. But his attempts at singing – even with lots of advice and assistance from friends – fall woefully short. Then Wombat discovers his own unique way to make others just as happy.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katie Stewart is an author and illustrator. Born in the north of England, she came to Australia at the age of nine. She started her working life as an archaeologist and ethnohistorian, went on to teaching and then to being a mother. She later worked in a school library, but her lifelong dream was to be what she is now. She is married to a farmer, has three children and lives north of Northam, where her love of animals means she has a lot of pets and takes lots of nature photos. In her spare time, she tries to play the harp or wanders the countryside with a metal detector amusing the neighbours and occasionally finding an interesting piece of history.

### THEMES

- Australian flora and fauna
- Personal strengths and talents
- Self-esteem and self-discovery
- Friendship

### AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

K-3 English

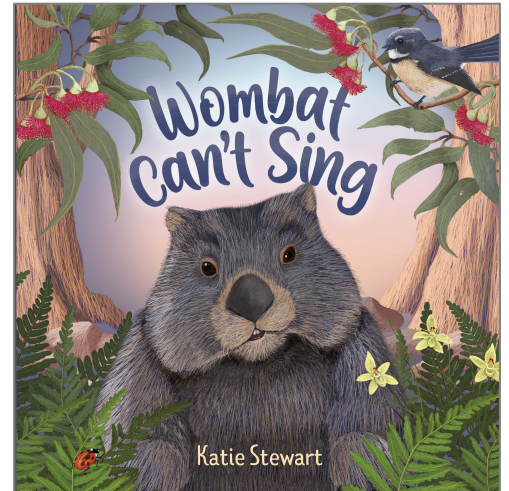
K-3 Biological Sciences

K-3 Visual Art, Music, Dance and Drama

K-3 Health and Physical Education: Mental Health

### USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: [magicowldesign.com](http://magicowldesign.com)
- Author's Facebook: [facebook.com/KatieStewartAuthorIllustrator](https://facebook.com/KatieStewartAuthorIllustrator)
- Author's Instagram: [instagram.com/katiestewartillustrator](https://instagram.com/katiestewartillustrator)
- Author's Twitter: [twitter.com/Skate60](https://twitter.com/Skate60)



## CLASSROOM IDEAS

### Discussion questions

1. Wombat wants to sing – is there a particular skill or talent that you would like to learn? Turn to a partner and share. How might you begin learning it and who could help you?
2. What does the word ‘unique’ mean? What are some of the qualities that make each animal in the story unique? What are some of the qualities that make you unique? (E.g. What are some things you are good at or enjoy?) Brainstorm a list of your personal strengths and talents. How can you share these with your community? (E.g. hold a class talent show!)
3. Wombat feels sad when he compares his singing to the other animals. Why is it important not to compare yourself to others? At the end of the story, Wombat discovers his own special way to make others happy. Create a list of different ways that you could use your strengths to make others happy.
4. Wombat gives Fantail a hug when she is miserable. What makes you feel better when you are sad?
5. Throughout the book Wombat repeatedly says ‘I can’t do that.’ How might repeating negative self-talk influence how someone feels about their abilities? As a class do the following:
  - a. Discuss with a friend one skill you have that you are proud of. How are they different to each other’s?
  - b. Make a list of things you enjoy and/or are good at.

### Biological sciences

1. What animal is the wombat’s closest living relative? (Koala)
2. What is a ‘marsupial’? Create a list of animals that belong to this category.
3. Which species of wombat is critically endangered? What are some of the reasons for this and what can you do to help? (Hint visit: [bushheritage.org.au/species/wombats](http://bushheritage.org.au/species/wombats))
4. How many different species of native flowers can you find illustrated throughout the story? What are their Indigenous and scientific names? Can you spot any of these flowers on a bushwalk in your local area? What other native plants can you find? Take a sketchpad along.
5. Choose your favourite animal from the story and create a **fact sheet, poster, pamphlet or PowerPoint** with the following information: *English name(s), Indigenous name(s), physical characteristics, habitat, diet, life cycle, interesting facts, labelled diagram, conservation status.*
6. As a class, listen to some **audio clips** of frogs, fantails, crickets and Kookaburras on YouTube. Which is your favourite ‘singer’ and why? What other species of animals/insects around the world are famous for their ‘singing’? Why does each of these creatures ‘sing’? (I.e. how does it help them survive?)

### Creative writing

1. Butterfly says ‘*I paint beautiful music with colour on the air.*’ Do butterflies really paint? What is a **metaphor**? Can you create a metaphor to describe another Australian animal or insect?
2. What is **synaesthesia** (i.e. language that includes a mixing of senses)? As a class, create a list of the five senses and discuss the following: Can you paint music? See sound? Taste colours?
3. **Acrostic poem:** Invite students to write an acrostic poem of their name. Each line should describe a personal strength or something that makes them special. Display around the classroom.
4. How many different animals does Wombat meet throughout the story? Can you match the singing advice below to the animal? The first is done for you:

Frog	Rub your wings together.
Butterfly	Throw your head back and laugh.
Fantail	Close your mouth and nose, fill your neck with air.
Cricket	Paint beautiful music with colour on the air as you fly.
Kookaburra	Make a twittering sound.

### Visual Art

1. Create **pop-stick puppets** of the characters using recycled materials and a variety of geometric-coloured cardboard shapes, felt and cellophane. Use them to read along with/act out the story.

2. **Visual literacy:** What style has the illustrator used to draw the animals (e.g. realistic, cartoon, abstract)? What medium/s has she used (e.g. digital, watercolour, pen and ink, coloured pencil, acrylic, pastel)? What do you like best about this illustrator's style? Which illustration is your favourite?
3. **Animal Portrait:** Design your own illustration of an Australian animal (not already included in the book) in the style of Katie Stewart. Below, add a sentence about a special skill this animal might share to make others happy.
4. Create a **sculpture** of your favourite animal from the story using plasticine, clay or recycled materials.
5. **Self-portrait:** Use a mirror to study your reflection and create a self-portrait in a medium of your choice (acrylic paint, watercolour, pencils, sculpture, etc.) Write two sentences below describing something special about being you! To aid in planning, have students fold a sheet of plain A3 card in half. On one side they should illustrate an 'outside me' and on the other an 'inside me'. Drawing the 'outside me' should come fairly easily – the 'inside me' may prove a little trickier – begin by prompting children to brainstorm words that describe their personality. Are they kind, creative, energetic, shy, funny, friendly? What pictures/symbols might they use to represent each of these qualities? What are their favourite colours, foods, hobbies, animals, etc? Hold a class gallery walk.
6. Create a **shoebox diorama** of your favourite scene from the story.
7. Katie Stewart often creates **digital art** – what does this term describe? Visit the following website to try creating a digital artwork of your own: [sumo.app/paint](http://sumo.app/paint)  
What do you like/dislike about creating digital art as opposed to traditional art forms (e.g. less messy)? What skills seem easier? What skills seem more difficult?
8. Access some free **Australian animal colouring sheets** from Katie Stewart's website!  
[katiestewartauthorillustrator.com/free-colour-ins.html](http://katiestewartauthorillustrator.com/free-colour-ins.html)

## Music, Dance and Drama

1. As a class, listen to some audio clips of frogs, fantails and crickets on YouTube and brainstorm a list of adjectives to describe each animal's 'song' (e.g. pitch, tone, tempo, volume, etc.) Can students imitate any of these sounds? Invite students to move around the room pretending to be each of these animals whilst listening and imitating their sounds.
2. Butterfly states that she 'paints beautiful music with colour on the air'. Invite children to use their own bodies to 'paint beautiful music with colour on the air' like butterfly. What kind of music do they imagine while they are dancing? (E.g. Fast? Slow? Loud? Quiet? Which instruments? Are there nature sounds too?) What colours do they imagine as they dance? What does each colour remind them of and how does it make them feel like? As a class, allow students to improvise movement.
  - a. Hold a class discussion: how does movement communicate meaning and ideas without any words? Practise interpreting different performances.
  - b. Compare and contrast – how did each pair imagine different kinds of 'beautiful music'? Does everyone like the same kind of music? What does 'subjective' mean?

## Mental Health

1. What does the term '**self-esteem**' refer to? Turn to the person on your left and tell them something you have noticed that they do well. Turn to the person on your right and tell them something you think that you personally do well. **Paper chains:** Have each student randomly select the name of a class member. They should then write a note to that student on a strip of paper describing something they admire about them. Connect all the strips to make a class paper chain to read and display.
2. Have students keep a **mindfulness journal** where they write on one of the following prompts each week. Following this, invite students to create their own prompts and store in a class jar to select one at random each week for future journal sessions:
  - a. I feel most proud of myself when I ...
  - b. My three best personality traits are ...
  - c. My family admires me for my ...
  - d. One goal I'd like to accomplish this year is ...
  - e. Three unique things about me are ...
  - f. I feel best about myself when I ...
  - g. My biggest success this week was ...