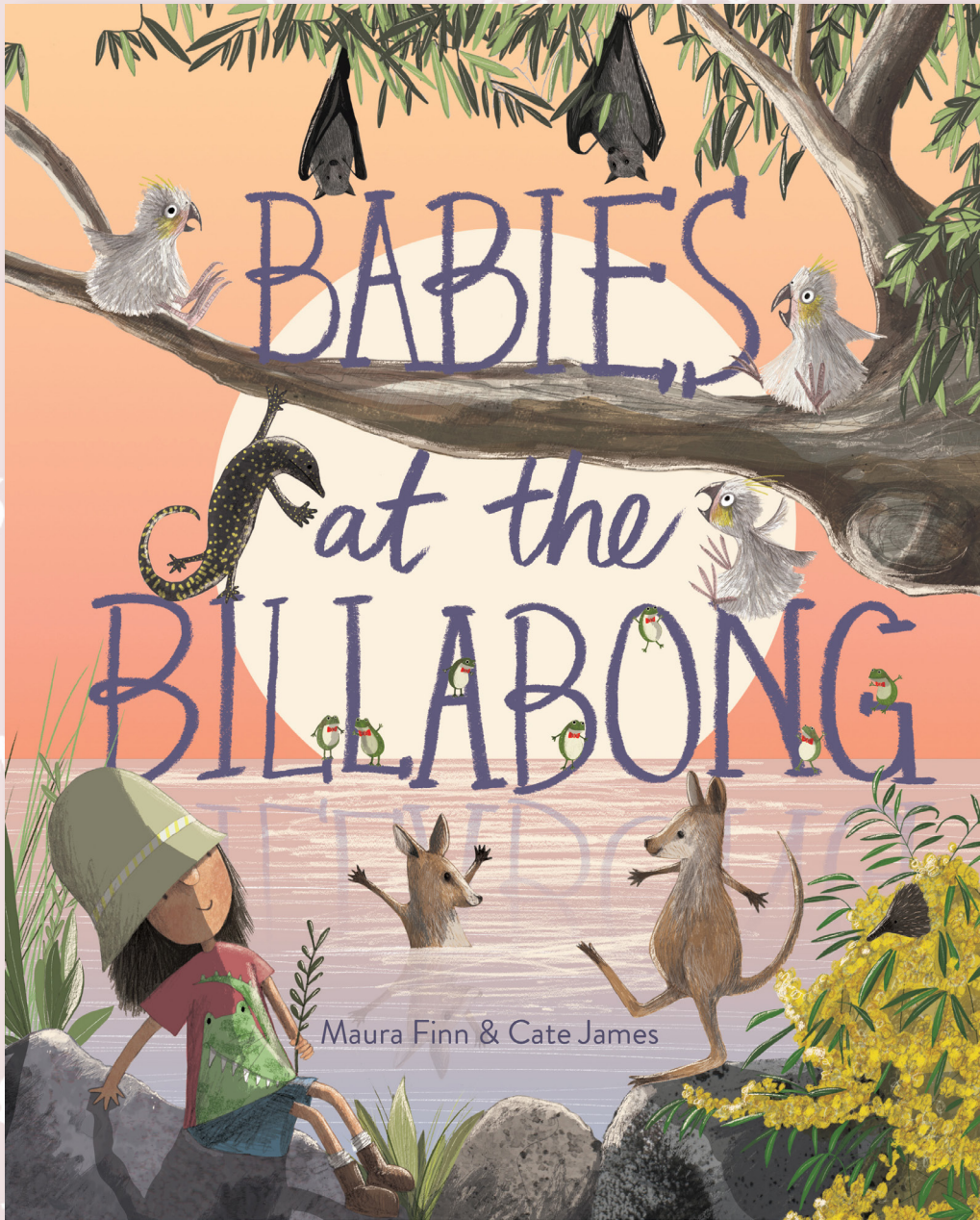


# Teachers' Notes & Activities



Written by  
Maura Finn  
Illustrated by  
Cate James

Suitable for  
Ages 3+

Themes  
Exploration & Observation  
Celebrating Australia  
Independence



## Contents of this pack

- Overview of *Babies at the Billabong*
- Questions to ask before we begin reading
- Key themes
- While we are reading: discussion in key curriculum areas
- Final reflections
- Two activities

## Description

Echidna puggles drumming,  
Cockatoo chicks eating cake,  
Green tree froglets tap dancing ...  
What else might you see on a trip to the billabong?



From the fabulous picture-book partnership behind *By the Billabong* comes this energetic and playful afternoon adventure in the Australian landscape.

But wait – what happens when it gets dark?!

## About the author

Born and bred in New Zealand, Maura Finn now lives in Melbourne with her husband and two young daughters. In her early writing days, she ran a rather lucrative playground business, swapping tailor-made poems for lunchbox leftovers. Now, many years later, she has rediscovered the joy and value of picture books through sharing them with her own children, and is delighted to think that her stories may contribute to other children's love of reading.

## About the illustrator

Cate James is an illustrator, artist and author based in the beautiful Northern Beaches of Sydney, Australia. She moved here from Edinburgh, Scotland in 2015 and loves the sunshine. She has been working as a full-time freelance illustrator since 2010, and has a background in printmaking. Cate works mostly in children's publishing on picture books and illustrated texts.

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## Questions to ask before we begin reading

- Have a look at the front cover; what do you think this book will be about?
- Why do you think this book is called *Babies at the Billabong*? Can you see any babies?
- Do you know the names of the animals on the cover?
- Do you know what a billabong is? Does the cover give you any clues?

## Key themes

### Exploration and Observation

The main character in *Babies at the Billabong* sets off on an adventure to the billabong. Along the way, they encounter all kinds of creatures! The animals might be getting up to some pretty strange antics, but the character stands back, watches, and doesn't interfere. This is a great example of encouraging young readers to observe the natural world around them without needing to disturb any of its inhabitants.

### Celebrating Australia

This book celebrates the unique natural landscape and animals of Australia. Young readers are likely to encounter animals and plants that they know the names of or have come across before, such as kangaroos and gum trees, as well as animals and plants that they might not know of, such as goannas and lilly pillies. The main character's curiosity provides many discussion points for talking about our natural world and learning about our plant and animal life.



### Independence

This book sends a positive message about enjoying time spent alone. We do not see our main character interacting with other people in this book. This is not to say that their parents are not nearby! But the focus is solely on the main character and their excursion. They are free to observe and explore their natural world, and their immersion in their adventure reflects that they are not bored or lonely. The character's reaction to the noise made by the animals, and their decision to keep adventuring, is also a sign of their independence and self-reliance. This can encourage conversations about spending time playing alone, as well as discussion about safety and taking care when parents are not watching.





## Questions to ask while we are reading

### Comprehension/Knowledge and understanding of the world

- Flip through the book and look at the colour of the sky. How does it change from the beginning to the end? What does this mean?
- Why would seeing the flying fox pups remind the main character that it is nearly dark?
- The character in this book spends time watching what the animals are doing rather than approaching the animals. Why do you think the character does this?
- How do you think you should behave around animals you meet out in the wild?
- Do you think goanna hatchlings are really building treehouses? Do froglets really tap-dance? Why/why not? What do you think they could be doing in real life instead?
- There are lots of plants in this book! Are there any that you've never heard of before now?
- This book is set in Australia. Does it look familiar to the part of Australia you live in?
- Have you ever been to a billabong? Do you know why a billabong is different to a lake?
- In *Babies at the Billabong*, we don't see any pets like dogs or cats, or wild animals like foxes. These are animals you might have come across before, but they are not native to Australia. We call them 'introduced species'. Do you know what the difference is between introduced species and native species?

### Social and emotional development

- The main character is having an adventure all on their own. Where do you think the main character's parents are?
- Does the character seem like they are having a good time on their own? Why/why not?
- Do you like doing things on your own? How do you entertain yourself when there is no one else around? Do you get bored? Do you feel lonely?
- You might have noticed that the main character doesn't have a name in this book. Why do you think that might be? Would you have preferred to know their name? Why/why not?

### Literacy

- **Rhyme:** Rhyme is very important in this book. Can you find rhyming words on each page?
- **Cumulative tales:** Teachers, this book introduces a cumulative pattern to describe all of the sights that the main character has seen. You could play a memory game with the



cumulative tale in this book, or introduce a new cumulative tale in a classroom activity

- **Adjectives:** There is a lot of noise in this book! It is also full of onomatopoeia, which is when a word sounds like the noise it describes, like 'crash' and 'boom'. Can you find other words like this?
- **Nouns:** Teachers, this book introduces nouns for baby animals: joeys, froglets, hatchlings, chicks, puggles and pups. Continue the discussion by talking about other nouns for baby animals. You could talk about which other baby animals aside from kangaroos are called 'joeys', and how many baby animals are called 'pups'.

### Verbs:

- The animals in this book are busy doing lots of different things, like 'building' and 'drumming'. Can you find all the 'doing' words in this book?
- Pick a page and describe what the main character is doing. Write it in a sentence or say it aloud!

### Numeracy

- How many times do we read the sentence, 'Little joeys sliding with a splish, splash, whee!'?
- The picnic on pages 12 and 13 might make you feel hungry! How many cupcakes are there?
- Page 18 has some very pretty flowers – can you count them all?
- There are so many dancing froglets on page 20! How many are there? Are all of them snuggled up for storytime at the end?
- Flip through the book again: can you spot any animals hiding in bushes or behind trees? What are they, and where are they?
- Page 28 looks like a lot of fun. How many animals join the main character for the story?
- How many animals are inside the tent on the final page? Where might the other animals be?

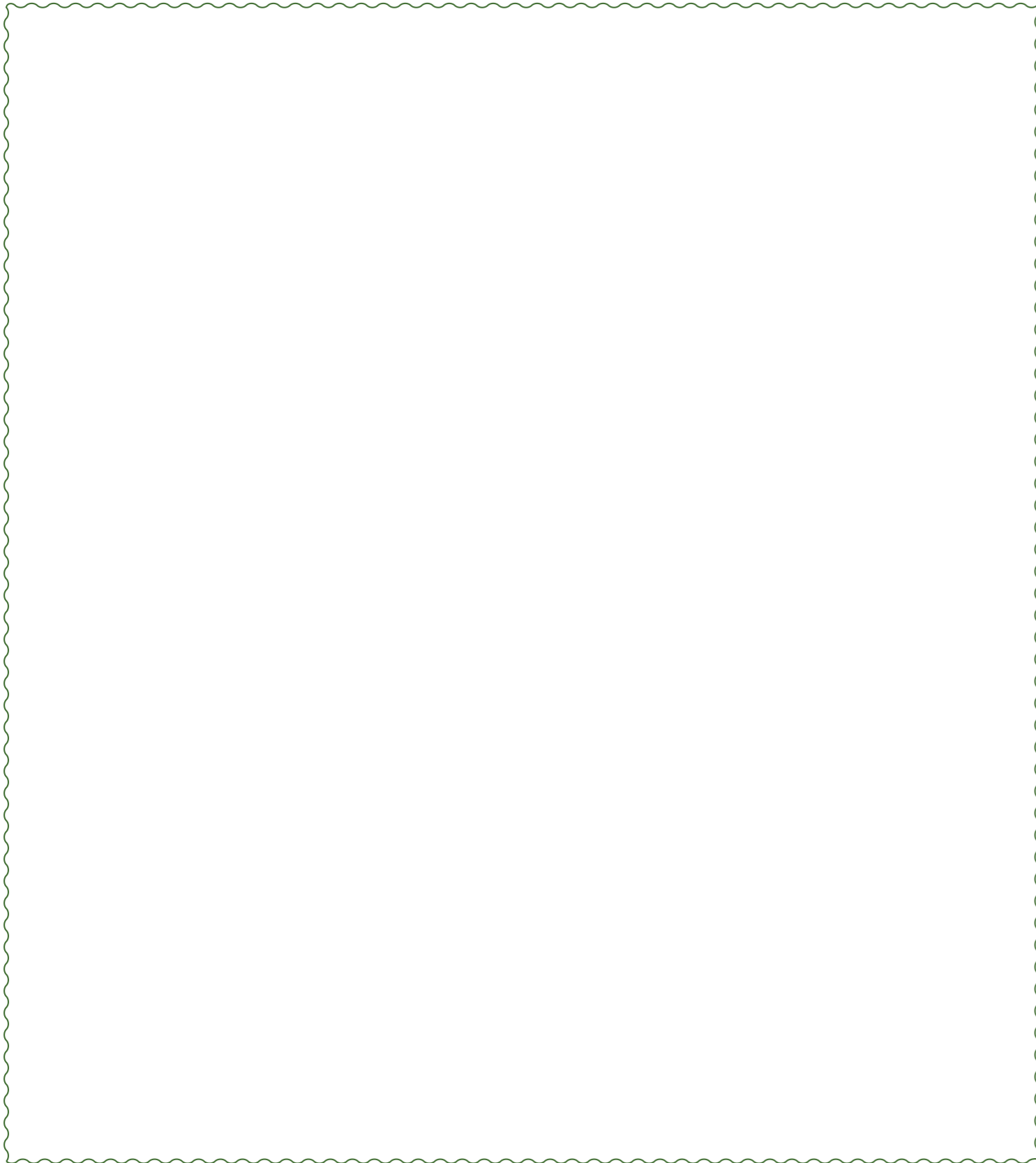
## Final reflections

- Did you enjoy this book? Why/why not?
- Did you like that some sentences were repeated in the book?
- Does this book make you want to go and explore outside?
- Why do you think the character is reading a story to the baby animals at the end?



## Activity One: Your baby at the billabong!

Can you think of another baby Australian animal that could be at the billabong? Perhaps it could be a crocodile hatchling? Or how about a pelican chick? Draw your animal doing something fun, like the baby animals in *Babies at the Billabong*. If you don't want to draw your animal, you could write a short rhyme or story about it instead. Use the space below, or find a new piece of paper!



## Activity Two: Observing nature

Take a piece of paper and a pen/pencil outdoors and find somewhere safe to sit. Spend about 10 minutes where you've chosen to sit and do nothing but watch what is happening around you. Can you spot any animals in this time? Do you hear any animals in the distance? Are there any plants, flowers or trees near to you? Jot the answers to these questions down, along with some descriptions. For example, you could say, 'I saw a dog wagging its tail as it walked along the street', or 'A willow tree was swaying in the wind'. If you don't like to write, perhaps you could have a go at drawing something you see instead? If you don't see any animals or plants that you'd like to write about or draw, perhaps you can reflect on a time you did see some and use those as inspiration instead.

## Activity Two: Match the animal to its baby name

Emu

Pup

Platypus

Imp\*

Tasmanian devil

Chick

Flying fox

Joey

Wombat

Hatchling

Crocodile

Puggle