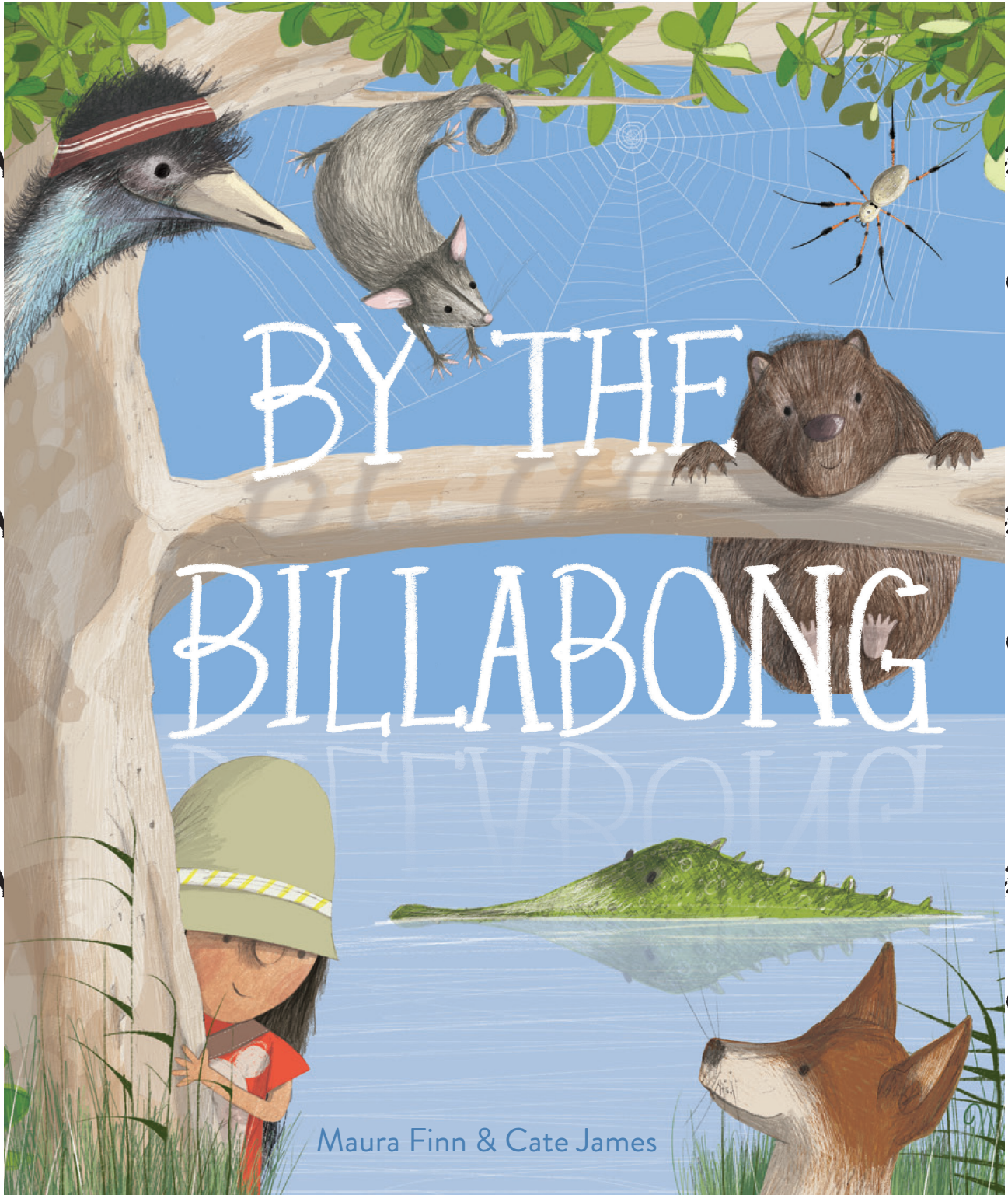


TEACHERS NOTES



Maura Finn & Cate James

THEMES

- Exploration and observation
- Australiana
- Independence
- Storytelling techniques

SUITABLE FOR

Age 2-7: Pre-school to Grade 1



DESCRIPTION

*A wisdom of wombats,
A passel of possums,
A cluster of spiders knitting socks . . .*

Who else might you meet on a trip to the billabong? From an exciting new picture-book partnership comes this delightful romp through a much-loved Australian landscape. *But wait – is that a croc?!*

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. Previous clients include Walker Books, Hachette, Penguin and Barrington Stoke. In 2015 she had her first book published as author/illustrator. She also loves designing for advertising.



THEMES

Exploration and observation

The main character in *By the Billabong* sets off on an adventure to the billabong. Along the way, they encounter all kinds of creatures! The character observes them in their natural habitats, and although the animals might be getting up to some pretty strange antics, the character doesn't interfere. *By the Billabong* encourages readers to observe the natural world around them without needing to disturb any of its inhabitants.



Australiana

By the Billabong celebrates Australian animals and landscapes. It is full of iconic images and the text has a distinctly Australian voice. It introduces young readers to the unique and special elements of the Australian natural world, while containing the same broadly appealing joy and whimsy of books like *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*.

Independence

The main character heads off on their excursion all alone, but at no point does the reader feel that the character is bored or lonely. By depicting the joy to be found in time spent alone, *By the Billabong* inspires readers to self-entertain and engage with the wider world on their own. It encourages independence, freedom and self-reliance through joy and play.

Storytelling techniques

By the Billabong uses a variety of interesting storytelling techniques to keep the reader engaged, establish a fast pace and encourage literacy development. Cumulative narrative, repetition and well-structured rhyme and rhythm make this a book that kids will want to read again and again, and will also allow them to learn along the way. Another interesting technique is the use of an unnamed and un-gendered main character. This allows for a wide range of children to feel like they can identify with the protagonist, and therefore feel more connected to the story.



DISCUSSION POINTS

- Before you begin reading, look at the cover of the book. Read out the title, the names of the author and illustrator, and the blurb. What do you think the book will be about? What might you see in the illustrations? Do you think you will like the book? After you've read the book, discuss if your first impressions were right or wrong.
- *By the Billabong* is filled with lots of Australian animals. Which of them is your favourite?
- The author uses funny words to refer to groups of animals, like 'a passel of possums' or 'a bask of crocodiles'. These are called collective nouns. Write up a list of collective nouns, and ask students to guess which animal each refers to.
- Do you like going on adventures? Where is the last place you really explored, and what did you see there?
- The character in this book spends a lot of time watching what the animals are doing, and only engages when they follow them home. How do you think you should behave around animals you meet out in the wild?
- *By the Billabong* is set in Australia. Does it look familiar to the part of Australia you live in? Have you ever been to a billabong? What is a billabong? How is a billabong different to a lake?
- The character in *By the Billabong* goes off to explore all on their own. Do you like doing things on your own? Do you get bored? Do you feel lonely? Do you get scared? How do you entertain yourself when there is no-one else around?
- Do you prefer reading books that rhyme, or books that don't rhyme? Why?
- Read the book again, this time encouraging the kids to chime in on the repetitive sections. Are these easy to remember? Fun to say?
- How does the story make you feel? Are there bits of the story that make you feel excited, or nervous? Are there funny bits? What do you think makes you feel this way in these parts?



ACTIVITIES



Activity One:

Go outside and have a look around the yard or playground. What kind of animals can you see? What are they doing? Observe them quietly, then use your imagination to come up with a description of something they could do. Make sure it involves repeating sounds, just like it does in *By the Billabong*. Instead of ‘a passel of possums drinking tea’, you might see a bug blowing bubbles or a dog doing a dance. Don’t forget to illustrate your idea!

Activity Two:

While you’re outside, collect some nature for yourself! Twigs, leaves, bark, flowers – anything that has fallen to the ground. Use these, as well as any other craft materials, to re-create your favourite place to explore outdoors.

Activity Three:

Re-create the emus’ ballet class! What kind of dance do you think emus like to do? What kind of music would they listen to? How would having a really long neck change the way you move? Are they elegant and graceful, or a little bit goofy? Come up with an emu dance and perform it for the whole class. Don’t forget your colourful headband!

