

Teachers' Notes by Julie Miller

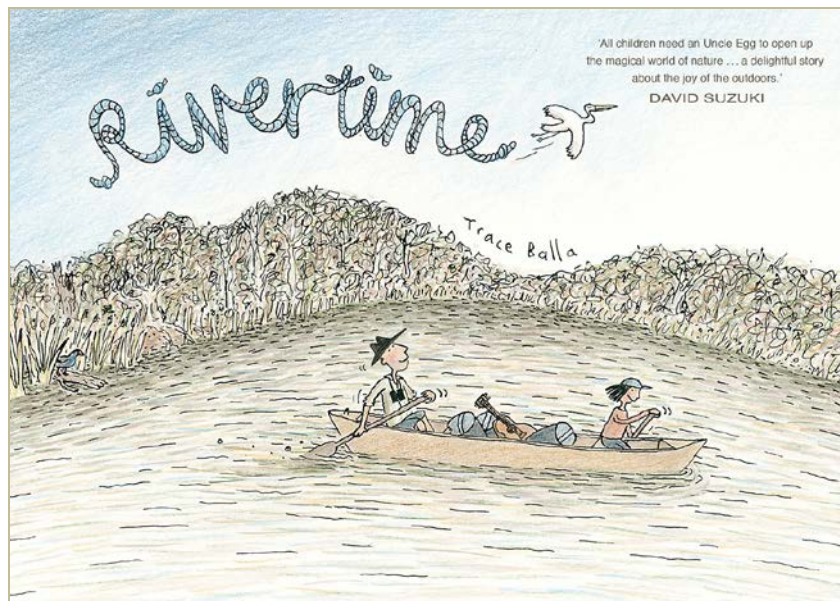
Rivertime

by
Trace Balla

ISBN 9781743316337

Recommended for ages 8-12 yrs

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INTRODUCTION

After a lumpy bumpy night, I'm grumpy. But the birds and Uncle Egg are chirpy, and he gets busy packing the canoe for the big trip ahead....

The day has finally arrived and ten year old Clancy is joining Uncle Egg for a ten day canoe trip on the Glenelg river- a new experience for a city boy away from his comfy home.

Structured as a journey of discovery, the book imaginatively draws us into life upon the river, as Clancy learns to slow down to "Rivertime" and observe the rich and expansive range of bird and animal life along the river. As his river trip progresses, his familiar world is transformed through connection with nature, learning new skills and knowledge along the way, while having lots of fun, too.

This picture book is based on the author's experience of a canoe trip on the Glenelg in 2012. The hand-drawn expressive illustrations are based on sketches from the trip. The author comments, "The River's natural beauty and remoteness from the modern world really affected me. This story is based on that journey".

THEMES

There are several key ideas or themes which flow through this book:

- Friendship
- Personal growth
- Connecting with nature & country
- Aboriginal history
- River ecosystems

Use quotes from the book to explore these themes. For example:

I want to thank the river, too. It's like it's taught me that I'm really part of everything; how to slow right down, to really look, to listen, and to just breathe. (p.75)

These themes could be considered in conjunction with the following school curriculum areas.

CURRICULUM TOPICS

- Study of History, Society and Environment
- English language and literacy
- Visual Literacy
- Mathematics
- Learning Technologies

The notes and activities that follow are aimed to support the new Australian Curriculum.

In addition, the book supports the cross-curriculum priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and Sustainability. (See shaded sections.)

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/Cross-Curriculum-Priorities> .

While the activities have been written for lower primary, each of the activities can be easily adapted for both younger and older students. Online resources listed in these notes provide extensive teaching support, including downloadable activities and worksheets.

STORY SUMMARY

Clancy is ten and a half, and has reached the age where Uncle Egg believes he is ready for a canoe adventure on the Glenelg River. At first Clancy's arms are tired from paddling, and he misses his home, toys and watching telly. As the journey along the river continues his arms feel stronger for paddling, he meets local aboriginal people and begins to enjoy the incredible range of native bird and animals that make the river their home. With the keen bird watcher Uncle Egg he begins to enjoy the slow pace of "Rivertime", observing the birds and wildlife of the river environment. When a speedboat passes Clancy's canoe, he "feels sad for the creatures of the river". His canoe adventure along the river had given him an appreciation of life along the river for the native birds and animals that live there.

STUDY OF HISTORY SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

Activity: Before reading use geographical tools, for example a globe, wall map or digital application such as Google Earth, to locate the Glenelg River in Victoria. The Glenelg River is a link between many different types of environment. It starts in the mountainous Grampians and ends at the sea near Nelson. It goes through rich Red Gum country and the poorer sandy soils that are home to the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. For many creatures it is a corridor that allows free travel to different areas.

Activity: Read with your class "About the river" from the website <http://www.glenelgriver.org.au/about-the-river/> to discover what environmental threats the river is facing.

Activity: After reading, make an excursion to a river, creek or wetland near to your school. Make sketches in order to create a river map like the map at the end of the story of Clancy's canoe trip. Identify the main points of interest (bends, bridges, trees and animals) of the area on your map. Take time to just sit and watch and listen. Quietly record everything that interests you.

Discussion point: On the river journey, Clancy shares a campfire with some local Gunitjmara people. They remark that their people have lived here for 50,000 years and there have been “a lot of changes lately.” Discuss with students what changes they think have happened, and how that has affected the Gunitjmara people.

Activity: Aboriginal Creation or dreamtime stories often explain how the country, animals and people came to be as they are. They tell us when things were made, why they were made and how they were made. Read with your class the dreamtime stories featuring birds found in the downloadable Teaching Resource at <http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/Beaks-Feet-and-Feathers> and discuss with your class the moral or correct behaviour these stories are reinforcing. Many other resources are available at this site, including a downloadable Bird Observation Recording Sheet.

Activity: From Uncle Egg, Clancy learns to use binoculars and discover bird life around him. To assist students to develop skills with binoculars in searching, finding, observing and identifying birds in the school, follow Activity 1.5 from the Beaks-Feet-and-Feathers Teaching Resource:

- Introduce students to the features and functions of binoculars (tip: keep your eyes focused on the object and bring the binoculars to your eyes).
- Use an open area to observe a student standing, walking and running.
- Place laminated pictures of birds and animals around the school. Students must identify them from a distance using binoculars. (The pictures can be made by the students during classwork on local birds and animals or derived from the internet or school library books.)
- Create a joint or independently written procedure on how to search for birds using a pair of binoculars.

Activity: Create a mini bird identification book, based on students' work on the chart of bird characteristics in BLM 2 at the end of these notes.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Discussion point: Allow students to respond on a personal level to the story. Ask open-ended questions such as the following:

- What is your response to the book?
- What does it make you think and feel about Clancy's journey on the river?
- What have you learnt?
- What do you think was the author's intentions when making this book?

Introduce the term **information narrative** and discuss the purpose. *Rivertime* conveys factual information as well as being an entertaining narrative. Facts are the basis of the story, but the action and dialogue are the product of the writer's experience and imagination.

Activity: Ask what the author needed to know to write and illustrate the story. Read the author's note at the end of the book to help answer this question. She also reveals that a lot of the events in the story that happen to Clancy and Uncle Egg are based on real life experiences *she* had. This raises the issue of 'fictionalised' narratives.

Talk about which elements might be factual and which fictionalised within the narrative. For example, names of the birds and animals are factual; Clancy trying to climb from the river is fictionalised. They could record this information on a T chart. [See Backline Master one]. Students can refer to the T-charts to check and add extra information.

Discussion point: Discuss the various narrative devices used in this book to convey the feelings of Clancy as he begins his canoe trip, during the trip and at the end of the journey. Did his feelings change a lot? How do you know?

Discussion point: Humour is present both in the text and illustrations. Often in stressful situations people will use humour as a way of coping. The author Trace Balla uses humour to tell Clancy's river experiences, such as all the different ways to climb out of the river—"*The Lug and Tug*", "*Dreaded Sludge Dash*," "*The Jetty Barney*". Which incidents did your students find funny, and why?

Discussion point: Structure in this book follows that of the traditional journey tale. Invite students to tell their own journey story, discussing characters, describing location and incidents. Note that the visual representation of the trip down the river resembles a narrative plot line.

Discussion point: The story is told in first person from Clancy's point of view. How would the story have been different if told from Uncle Egg's point of view?

Discussion point: The first person memoir is a form of writing that requires the author to tell his or her story in his/her own words. Examine the use of language that tells the reader how the narrator is feeling:

- “Bit tiring on my arms.”
- “I love knowing where the water I’m drinking is from.”
- “I sing all the way back to camp.....”

Activity: There are many examples of onomatopoeia in the descriptive words of the different birdcalls, sounding like the sound they represent. For example:

- Oliver Whistler—“wee weeo”
- White-eared honeyeater—“tch chew chew”
- Magpie—“waaa”
- Kookaburra “koo kook a ka”

There are many more, can you find them? (Complete Blackline Master 2.)

Activity: Older readers may like to explore other books about Australian birds:

Mudlark – Michael Stephens. This is the story of a young boy who lives in the world of his imagination. He is given the opportunity to take the class pet home for the weekend, a mudlark.

Danny’s Egg – Colin Thiele. This narrative begins with a young boy encountering a large goanna that is in the process of eating a nest of emu eggs.

Brahiminy – Colin Thiele. This is the story of a family who move to Arnhem Land to take up residence at a remote ranger station. The family take in a baby brahiminy kite that has fallen, or has been pushed from its nest and is close to death.

Storm Boy – Colin Thiele. A classic, moving story about a boy and a pelican that form a close bond after the boy saves the life of the pelican.

Magpie Island – Colin Thiele. The story of a white backed magpie that inadvertently finds itself stuck on an island, too far from shore to return.

Exploring other genres: Australian poetry is rich in description of the natural landscape.

Rivertime could be the launching pad for a poetry study. For example:

And the bush hath friends to meet him, and their kindly voices greet him
In the murmur of the breezes and the river on its bars,
And he sees the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended,
And at night the wond’rous glory of the everlasting stars.

‘Clancy of The Overflow’ by Banjo Patterson. 1889. (NB: inspiration for the hero’s name.)

VISUAL LITERACY

Encourage students to observe how the illustrations often add to or illuminate meaning, complementing and enriching the text. Line, colour, style and layout are techniques used which make up the “grammar” of the illustrations.

Discussion point: Line—The illustrations are simply drawn and almost cartoon like, suggesting that they are a child’s less serious view of the world. Both the illustrations and lettering provide a mood of energy and fun, and effectively capture the expressions and actions of the characters with humour and sensitivity.

Look closely at the illustrations: why has the author included so many birds and their calls in the illustrations? What information does it give you about the river environment?

Discussion point: Colour—The illustrations are in soft pencil and sepia ink and highlight the olives, blues and browns of the Australian bush. The colour of the illustrations provides the mood of the story, and echoes the simplicity of life on the river. Why do you think the author chose these colours? Brainstorm how the double spread of the night sky (pp 52-53) depicts the mood and space different to other pages?

Discussion point: Construction of characters—the body position of the characters and gestures to show emotion extends the text by adding further details to support the story. For example, the relaxed figures of Clancy and Uncle Egg in the canoe (p.39), and the different body positions shown as Clancy tries to climb out of the water onto the wharf. Ask questions such as, ‘how are the characters acting?’, ‘What do the pictures show us about the personalities of Uncle Egg and Clancy?’

Design encompasses every aspect of a picture book’s construction, and includes the shape of the book, the front and back covers, the endpapers, a dedication page, a title page, single and double page spreads, an author’s note and acknowledgements page. All these components give meaning to the story.

Activity: Compare the language, layout, illustrations and structure of the book to factual texts. Would you classify *Rivertime* as a narrative or information text?

Activity: Read the dedication at the start of the story, and the author’s note at the end of the story. What does it tell you about the author? Has it changed your understanding of the book?

Note the choices involved in presenting the story in frames, like a comic strip. This makes this a graphic narrative. Why are some frames square and others rectangular? Note on page 16 that a series of small frames with hardly any dialogue gives the impression of action, whereas

page 18 uses more text, as it's difficult to illustrate a head wind! What is the effect of the lone circular frame on page 23?

Activity: Storyboard a graphic rendering of a short, simple text that describes an action or event. Use frame size, position on the page, size of text and voice bubbles to tell the story, including set up, complication and resolution. Like Clancy getting out of the river, it could be a true funny or embarrassing event, fictionalised to make it more humorous.

MATHEMATICS

Students will find many objects, animals and people to count in this book.

Question: How many birds can you count in the front end papers?

Question: how many plants and native animals can you count in the back end papers?

Activity: Clancy tells us on page 3 that he likes numbers. Can you measure your height, breath rate, pulse, weight and age like Clancy? Record your answers drawing yourself like Clancy.

Project: Older students can undertake Activity 3.3 from the Beaks-Feet-and-Feathers Teaching Resource and conduct an environmental and waste management audit of their school. This involves calculating area, ratio, volume and weight and comparing and categorising scores. (Addresses the **Sustainability curriculum priority**.)

ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

The photo of the author on the back endpaper shows her sketching while in a canoe. Devote some class time to quiet observation and sketching/recording of thoughts.

Activity: Create a nature table in class. Students contribute items they find at home or on the way to school. (Discussion about what plants can and cannot be picked and how to keep insects alive in boxes etc will be necessary.) The table can reflect the change of seasons and provide subjects for sketching.

Clancy learns a number of skills on the trip. Rope skills and knots can be learnt from animated diagrams easily available from an Internet search on 'how to tie knots'.

Activity: Provide students with two different colours of cord to practise knot tying. The class can create a display board of labelled knots for the school. Search Google Images on 'knot board': students can see many examples to help them decide on a design. Some boards are real works of art!

Similarly, YouTube and other Internet sources can supply many examples of how to make string and rope from natural materials. This could introduce the **Aboriginal and Torres**

Strait Islander curriculum priority, based on pages 25-29 when Clancy and Uncle Egg meet Malley and Jarrah and later camp with Aunty Betty and Uncle Eddie. Aunty Betty shows Clancy how to make string. For a unit of work on Aboriginal fibre technology, see:

http://www.nma.gov.au/engage-learn/schools/classroom-resources/units_of_work/what_is_this/string_bag

Most Botanic Gardens in Australia offer educational trails and activities based around Aboriginal use of plants.

LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

This book provides an excellent starting point for additional research and investigation into Australian rivers, birdlife and bird watching.

The Birds in Backyards website has the top 30 urban birds. It also includes recordings of birdcalls for identification.

[**http://australianmuseum.net.au/Birds-in-Backyards-top-30-urban-birds**](http://australianmuseum.net.au/Birds-in-Backyards-top-30-urban-birds)

Waterwatch Victoria has developed a range of resources to support teachers and students.

[**http://www.vic.waterwatch.org.au/education-resources/293/**](http://www.vic.waterwatch.org.au/education-resources/293/)

Birds in Schools is an environmental program that schools can join.

[**http://birdlife.org.au/education-publications/education/birds-in-schools**](http://birdlife.org.au/education-publications/education/birds-in-schools)

For information on the evolution of birds, and Australian birds.

[**http://australianmuseum.net.au/Birds**](http://australianmuseum.net.au/Birds)

Answering the Call is a whole school approach to sustainability, K – 6 Environmental Education Resource. It uses a range of tools on the *Birds in Backyards* website to support student learning.

[**http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/Answering-Call**](http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/Answering-Call)

Beaks, Feet and Feathers contains worksheets suitable for Early Stage 1 to Stage 3 students.

[**http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/Beaks-Feet-and-Feathers**](http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/Beaks-Feet-and-Feathers)

ABOUT THE WRITERS

TRACE BALLA

Trained in animation and art therapy, Trace's work history includes freelance illustration and animation and teaching art to all sorts of people from all ages, abilities and walks of life. She has taught sketching, book-making, animation, doll-making, design, "craft for the soul"...in community centres, TAFE, Council of Adult Education, and private groups. She loves to visit

schools and to inspire others and also to spend time alone working on her creative pursuits. Trace has exhibited art and screened films nationally and internationally and illustrated books for others as well as her own self published books.

About her writing process, Trace says:

I like to keep a pen and paper by my bed and in my bag, so if an idea comes I am ready! This especially seems to happen as soon as I wake up. I have animated lots of short independent films. For my last one, "The Earlybird", about commuting on a bike, I made the original storyboard on the back of an envelope sitting in the car in traffic (which thankfully I very rarely do) watching the bikes go whizzing by!

When I worked on "Rivertime" I had so many ideas I wrote them on coloured sticky notes and then stuck them all over the wall, moving them around till they seemed to fit. It was like a jigsaw and suited my way of thinking. Then after that, I could start to make more of a storyline from all the ideas. A few bits of magic seemed to happen then with the story starting to tell itself, which was really exciting. For example, I wanted to include galaxia fish as they are a threatened species in the area as well as I really loved the name. When I was researching I found out they had this amazing ability to climb waterfalls, so I couldn't resist adding it to the story. It was like a bit of gold! The rope making which became really important in the story wasn't even really in my mind as so pivotal when I started out writing; it just found its way into being almost a main character.

I don't really consider myself a writer, more an illustrator, or sketcher and story catcher. So getting to the stage of creating the book where it's more about storyboarding and then drawing and colouring feels more in my comfort zone. I did a lot of sketches on the Glenelg River, just in my journal, with a uniball waterproof pen and watercolor pencils (and an aquabrush that I sometimes use). These initial sketches have been really useful material for making the final images. I love colour: the Australian bush is so beautiful to me, and I want the book to capture some of that colour. I used sepia ink with a nib pen and a sepia ink wash and then coloured pencils for the book. I like using simple tools that are quite immediate.

JULIE MILLER

Julie Miller is a writer and teacher who has taught in state and private schools for over twenty years, and has written units of work for NSW Distance Education and other publications. She has previously written teacher notes for other Allen & Unwin publications, including *The Coat* and *The Fair Dinkum war*.

Rivertime T-Chart

Put parts of the story that are true under 'Factual Information'.

Put parts of the story that the author has invented under 'Fictional Information'

<i>Factual Information</i>	<i>Fictional information</i>

Rivertime birds and animals

Many birds and animals are shown in *Rivertime*. Some live in trees, some on the river banks, some in the water and others on the ground along the riverbank.

Look at the book's illustrations and then draw a picture and list the habitat for these birds and animals.

<i>Name of bird or animal</i>	<i>Habitat</i> <i>(In the trees, in the water, along the riverbanks?)</i>	<i>Draw a picture of the bird or animal</i>
<i>Red tailed black cockatoo</i>		
<i>Azure Kingfisher</i>		
<i>Long necked tortoise</i>		
<i>Koala</i>		
<i>Rufous Bristlebird</i>		
<i>Blue-tongued lizard</i>		
<i>Black swan</i>		
<i>Great Cormorant</i>		