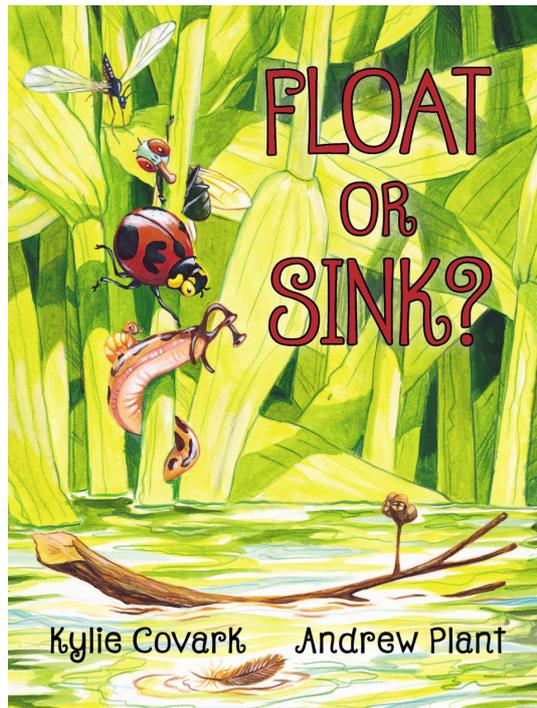


Teachers' Notes: *Float or Sink?*



Author: Kylie Covark
Illustrator: Andrew Plant
Publisher: Ford Street

*There's a stick in a creek, bobbing along, rolling on, light but strong.
But what happens if a ladybug lands on top? Or a flea or a fly? A gnat or a slug?
What about one devious duck?
What do you think?
Float or sink?*

About the Author

Kylie Covark is an Adelaide-based educator, poet and children's author. She is an inaugural recipient of a mentorship through Raising Literacy Australia's *Emerging Author and Illustrator Mentoring Project* and has received awards for her manuscripts. *Float or Sink?* is her debut picture book.

Author Note – About Writing the Story

Whenever there is a big rainstorm, my children and I love to go down to the river near our house and watch the water rushing by. On one of these walks, my little boy threw a stick into the fast-rushing water. We watched it get swept along and ran beside it, wondering if it would float or sink.

Then we got distracted. We noticed a rainbow. He climbed a tree. There were some rocks to explore.

When we remembered about the stick, we went back to look. There was a stick, snagged in some reeds. There was also a single feather lying in the water, but no birds in sight. We had a beginning for the stick's adventure, and we had an end. The middle was a mystery.

This book tells the story of what I imagine might have happened while we weren't looking.

About the Illustrator

Andrew Plant lives in Melbourne and is an illustrator, author, mural painter and theatre set designer. He studied to be a zoologist, but quickly realised that he loved illustrating animals more than studying them.

Andrew has now contributed artwork to over 160 books and magazines, including writing and illustrating several Early Learning titles, science education books and picture books. Over the last few years, he has focused almost exclusively on picture books, as they allow the greatest scope for his imagination to take flight. Several of his picture books have been CBCA Notable Books.

As author/illustrator, he has created *The Poppy*, *The Perfect Leaf* and *Jump!* with Ford Street Publishing. He has also illustrated *Spark*, *Glitch*, *Pippa* and *Tulip and Brutus*.

Illustrator Note – About Illustrating the Story

When I first receive the text for a new book to illustrate, it's both exciting and scary. I'm excited to read a brand-new story, to see what ideas it fires up in my imagination. I'm also scared that I won't come up with something fresh and imaginative, and that the author will be disappointed with what I've done. It's a big responsibility, to take someone else's hard work and carefully chosen words and turn them into pictures.

Luckily, I love rhyme, so when Kylie's story landed in my Inbox, I knew straight away that it was a story I wanted to illustrate. That doesn't happen all the time – a lot of rhyming is *awful*, and occasionally I've told the publisher that I don't want to illustrate a particular story, because it just did nothing for me. But Kylie's beautiful rhythm was so catchy – it actually *sounds* like a bobbing river when you read it out loud. And the characters were so much fun – bugs are a bit of a thing with me. Both *Glitch* and *Tulip and Brutus* are about bugs and various other invertebrates of various sorts. I love their huge variety and strangeness, and have always used real species as the basis of the characters. Of course, I give them a lot more emotion than you usually see on a beetle or fly's face, but it is a fiction story!

So who are the characters? The first one we meet is the ladybug. She is a little different from the way most people imagine a ladybug, as she doesn't have the usual spots. She is *Coccinella transversalis*, scientifically speaking, the Transverse Ladybird. Why did I pick that species? Well, the spotted red ladybug that many people are familiar with is not an Australian, it's not a native species, but introduced. I wanted an Aussie for the story. The

spotted Australian species is more yellow to orangey-red than true red, and Kylie's words are very specific – 'Ladybug red'! The Transverse can also be orange, but also really red, so she was it! There's my picky scientific background coming in!

The gnat and flea are also Aussies, as is the beautiful fly. He is actually the Australian sheep blowfly! Not so nice if you're on a farm, but he does have gorgeous colours. The slug is *Limax maximus* – very impressive, the Leopard Slug. She is introduced, I'm afraid, but is basically found everywhere, except Antarctica, and is very large compared to the others, and I needed a large slug to balance the stick at the end of the story and hug the gnat. Who would have thought it could get so complicated! There are colourful native slugs, but the scarlet ones, in particular, I couldn't use.

Why not? Because of the design of the story. There aren't many words in *Float or Sink?* and so the spreads alternate between text pages and picture pages. I wanted the text pages to look like they belonged to the book and so just having white backgrounds with the words was out of the question. Yet I couldn't show too much of the action because that was what the picture spreads were for. And so I came up with the idea of the background of monochrome, slightly abstract close-ups of the character who is being introduced in the text, who we then see clearly on the following spread. There's almost two separate books. That actually worried me a bit until I thought of the fairly obvious solution of having the repeated question 'Float or sink?' on the picture page, which ties the text spread and the following picture spread into neat pairs. What has all this got to do with not using red slugs? The ladybug already had her red text background, and I didn't want two of the same colour!

For students with sharp eyes, all the characters are in fact introduced in the first picture of Ladybug Red balancing on the stick. Look closely at the water! As each character is introduced, they disappear from the water and we see them clearly on the stick. Queen Quack, however, only appears on the water once we've met everyone else. She, by the way, is a Mallard. They are an introduced species too, but she's so nasty that I didn't want to use one of our lovely native ducks. Most female native ducks are also very dull in colour, whereas she has that rather pretty pinkish bill and bright blue wing feathers, called the speculum. The native Pink-eared Duck is gorgeous (look her up), but it just felt wrong having such a beautiful villain. It's hard enough to make fleas and slugs likeable as it is!

Activities: Illustrations

Ask students to carefully look for the creatures hidden in the water. Can they identify them?

As the story progresses, what do the students notice about the hidden creatures? Have them guess which creature might appear next. Who do they think will be last?

Activities: Guided discussion

Before reading

Have a look at the cover and the title page. Ask students what they think the story might be about.

Read the blurb. Ask students what they think might happen in the story. Ask who (or what) they think the characters might be.

Ask students if they have ever seen a stick floating in a creek or a river. Ask if they know whether sticks usually float or sink in water. Would a tiny little twig float? What about a great big log?

During reading

Some of the pages don't have many words. Ask students to consider and describe how the pictures help tell the story.

Ask the students to look at the spots on Ladybug Red. Notice they aren't round. There are many types of ladybugs in the world, with different colours and patterns. Notice the colour and size of the other characters in the book.

After reading

Ask students what they notice on the final page. Where did the characters who had been on the stick end up? What do the students think happened to Queen Quack?

Ask if the book ended the way they thought it would end.

Ask students who their favourite and least favourite characters were. Why?

Re-reading

Ask students to join in with the repeated rhyme as you read, e.g. '*What do you think? Float or sink?*'

How many characters ended up fitting on the stick? Ask children to count along by holding up a new finger each time a character arrives.

Activities: Rhyme

Ask students if they can think of any other characters or creatures who might like to join the gang on the stick. Where might they be going?

Students could even try adding themselves to the story.

For example,

Kylie Covark rides down to the park, on top of the stick where the bug does a trick...

Andrew Plant drinks tea with an ant, on top of the stick where the bug does a trick...

Some names are trickier to rhyme, but it's fun to have a go!

If they can't think of a rhyme for their name, they could try these ones (or invent their own):

A funny old pig...

on top of the stick where the bug does a trick.

e.g. is wearing a wig

Little Prince Mouse.....

on top of the stick where the bug does a trick.

e.g. is building a house

Ferdinand Frog.....

on top of the stick where the bug does a trick.

e.g. shares cake with a dog

Princess Magpie.....

on top of the stick where the bug does a trick.

e.g. pretends she's a spy

What would happen if all these characters tried to fit on the stick?

Ask the students to draw a picture of their funny new characters on the stick.

Activities: Science

1. Fill a large clear container with water.
2. Collect some objects, such as a ball, a stick, a pencil, a rock etc.
3. Ask students whether they think each object will float or sink, and why.
4. Ask them to record their predictions and observations.

OBJECT	DO YOU THINK IT WILL <i>FLOAT OR SINK?</i>	WERE YOU CORRECT? ✓ OR ✗

Activities: Science

The mission:

Ladybug Red and her fabulous family of acrobatic ladybugs have decided to take their circus show on tour to all the towns along the river. Your students have been given the job of creating a boat to get them down the river. The ladybugs don't mind what the boat looks like, but it has to float!

Ideas for collecting materials:

Ask students to bring in recycled items from home, such as old plastic bottles, empty berry punnets, or cans.

Take students on a nature walk. Ask them to collect leaves, seed pods, sticks, flower petals, and other items that have fallen to the ground. Remind them not to damage plants by pulling parts that are still alive.

Get students to suggest other items or craft supplies that may be useful.

Brainstorm

- Why do some objects float, and others sink?
- What materials might be good for a boat?
- What do you think will happen to those materials in water?
- What would happen if your boat filled up with water?
- How can you stop water getting into your boat?
- What would happen if you tried to stick too many different things together?
- How could you test your boats?

Have a go!

Once your students have made their boats, test them in water. Did anyone manage to build a boat that floats?

Discuss the results.

Ladybug Red is very grateful for the help!

The activities in these teaching notes have been designed to align with the following content descriptions from the Australian Curriculum.

Language

ACELA1786 – Explore the different contribution of words and images to meaning in stories and informative texts

ACELA1439 – Recognise and generate rhyming words, alliteration patterns, syllables and sounds (phonemes) in spoken words

Literature

ACELT1575 – Recognise that texts are created by authors who tell stories and share experiences that may be similar or different to students' own experiences

ACELT1578 – Identify some features of texts including events and characters and retell events from a text

ACELT1579 – Replicate the rhythms and sound patterns in stories, rhymes, songs and poems from a range of cultures

ACELT1580 – Retell familiar literary texts through performance, use of illustrations and images

ACELT1831 – Innovate on familiar texts through play

Chemical Sciences

ACUSSU003 – Objects are made of materials that have observable properties

Science Inquiry Skills

ACSIS014 – Pose and respond to questions about familiar objects and events

ACSIS233 – Engage in discussions about observations and represent ideas

ACSIS012 – Share observations and ideas