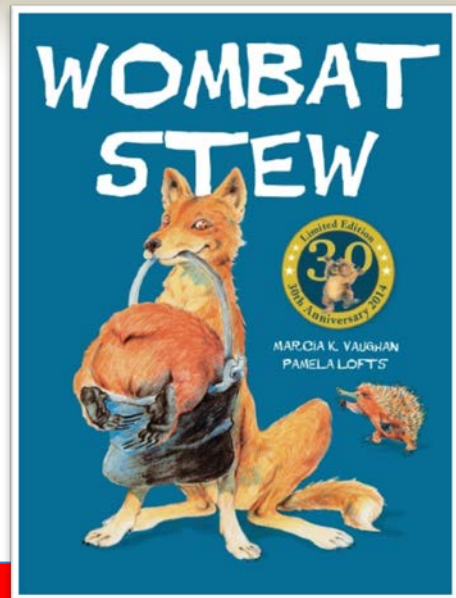


Wombat Stew

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Synopsis

In this lively story, a very clever dingo is thwarted in his attempts to make a wombat stew, when the other bush animals successfully band together to trick him. The repetitive, sung refrain invites children to chime in enthusiastically from the very first reading, while the predictable structure of the story is enhanced by the rich descriptive language used to introduce each animal character. Children will eagerly return to the text again and again to explore its many exciting features.

Read Aloud

Read *Wombat Stew* to your students for sheer enjoyment.

- Pause to induce the children to chime in on repetitive sections.
- In the first reading, use the story structures to invite prediction of words or outcomes.
- Encourage children always to use print to confirm their predictions.
- Allow all the time necessary for full enjoyment of the illustrations.
- Recognise that it is not necessary for all children to understand all of the words in order to thoroughly enjoy this experience.

Exploration

- Reread the story not once, not twice—but many times. With each reading, you can explore a different aspect of the language and story structure.
- Take opportunities as they arise to explore, in context, letter–sound associations, compound words, parts of speech, verb endings etc.

Over many sessions, as children listen to the story and spontaneously participate in the reading, a sense of confidence and satisfaction emerges at all ability levels.



Independence

- Encourage children to demonstrate their mastery and enjoyment of reading, either at home or at school.
- Be available to listen to the enthusiastic efforts of all your young readers.
- Observe and encourage the emergence of self-correction.
- Reinforce children's interest in either the content or the structure of the story, by introducing another book likely to appeal.

Extension

Wombat Stew gives plenty of scope for innovating on vocabulary, sentence and story structure. At this stage, many of the children are capable of writing their own stories independently. Others will still benefit from having you act first as scribe, thus enabling them to display rewarding inventiveness. Through this whole-group activity linked directly to written language, you are also providing children with a scaffold towards becoming self-motivated writers who are convinced of their ability to produce original, worthwhile personal writing.

After a few lively sessions singing the refrain from the story, children will soon realise that only two lines differ in each verse. Examine the lines that differ and discuss the choice of words used. This could be a starting point for finding all the words that end with a 'y' throughout the text. List them and ask children if they can add others that they know or can create from their own imagination.

brewy chewy lumpy crunchy munchy muddy yummy goeey billy creepy spicy chilly toothy snappy cracky tummy chappy blacky

- Build on the children's sense of fun by playing around with such nonsense words and phrases to make substitutions in the refrain.

Wombat stew,
Wombat stew,
Cracky, blacky,
Yummy, snacky,
Wombat stew!

Other ideas could include:

Cold and snappy,
For a chappy,

Lumpy, chilly,
In my billy,

Lummy, yummy,
In my tummy,

Bumpy, lumpy
Dumpy, jumpy,



- Allow children who are ready to attempt their very own versions by providing them with an outline of the structure.

Wombat stew,
Wombat stew,
_____, _____,
_____, _____,
Wombat stew!

- Suggest that Dingo could have been preparing other types of food besides Wombat stew. If he had decided to try to catch one of the other characters, Kookaburra, Emu or Platypus, they could have landed in Kookaburra cake, Emu soup or Platypus pie.
- After much discussion and playing with words, substitute these in the refrain to make entirely new verses.

Kookaburra cake,
Kookaburra cake,
Lummy yummy,
In my tummy,
Kookaburra cake!

Emu soup,
Emu soup,
Murky, burpy,
Steamy, slurpy,
Emu soup!

Platypus pie,
Platypus pie,
Hot and tasty,
Crunchy pastry,
Platypus pie!

- By this time, some children will be eager to write original verses of their own with the same type of humorous twist. As each one is completed, it should be featured in class sharing sessions so that everyone can celebrate their success as writers. The favourites could then be written up and sung along with the original verses.
- Explore the ways the author has used colourful language to give the strong atmosphere.

Write the sentence:

On the banks of a billabong, a very clever dingo caught a wombat.

Invite the children to think of other places the dingo could have caught the wombat.

The children may suggest:

On top of a mountain.
At the bottom of a cliff.
In the middle of the bush.
In the middle of an anthill.

As many of these places are physically inaccessible to a real wombat, it may be necessary to discuss this point and ask the children to explain why.

The second part of the original sentence may be changed to better suit the real world.

In the middle of an anthill, a very clever dingo caught an echidna.

At the bottom of a cliff, a very clever dingo caught a platypus.

- As each one of the episodes in the story begins with a similar type of sentence, you could innovate on them in the same way.

'Platypus came ambling up the bank' could become 'Platypus moved slowly through the mud.'

You can also create more possibilities for the children by recording an innovation in this way.

Waltzing out from the shade of the ironbarks came Emu.
Skipping out from the shelter of the gum trees came Emu.
Tripping out from the peace of the bush came Emu.
Dancing out from the depths of the thick bush came Emu.

- Over several days, select other phrases from the text and innovate on them with reference to the particular animals in the story, then widening the field to think about descriptive phrases for other bush animals. Use some of these phrases for models.

Sliding off his sun-soaked stone ...
Rubbing his paws together ...
Up through the red dust ...
Deep into the bush ...

After much discussion of the ways other animals move and some of the places where they are found, the children will come up with their own colourful phrases about the other animals.

Hopping across the dry plain ...
Swimming in the murky creek ...
Flying up to the sweet blossoms ...
Climbing up to the tender gumtips ...

Make sure the children understand the use of such phrases at the beginning of sentences and also in other positions. Peruse the text to find different examples and innovate new ones.



Hopping across the dry plain, came the big red kangaroo.
The big red kangaroo came hopping across the dry plain.

- Write each innovated sentence on card and cut off the phrase so that children can have fun making all sorts of variations. Of course, some of the combinations will make nonsense sentences, which the children will greatly enjoy. If you wish to extend this activity even further, you could put the sentences into a flip book for the same kind of hilarity while focussing the children's attentions towards interesting syntactic structures.

Climbing up to the tender gumtips came the big red kangaroo.

- Make a list of the words used in the text to suggest animal movement, to discuss how the particular word chosen often gives clues to the characteristics of the animal.

Emu—waltzing, arched.
Platypus—ambling, scooped.
Lizard—sliding, snapped.
Echidna—popped, bristled.
Koala—climbed, shook.
Dingo—danced, sang.

- Think of other bush animals and write some descriptive words for the way they move.

Fox—lurking, sprang.
Kangaroo—hopping, nibbled.
Kookaburra—flying, hopped.

- By now the children should be familiar with the recurring story structure. Give them the opportunity to identify the episodes as each animal comes on the scene and makes a contribution to the stew. Through discussion of the main events, get the children to help you build up an incident summary of the main events.

1. Dingo caught a wombat and decided to make Wombat stew.
Dingo danced and sang.
2. Platypus put big blops of billabong mud into the stew.
Dingo danced and sang.
3. Emu added her finest feathers to the stew.
Dingo danced and sang.
4. Old Blue Tongue flipped one hundred flies into the gooey, chewy stew.
Dingo danced and sang.

And so on.

You could decide to depict this as a time line instead.

- The children will be ready and eager to innovate on the story as a whole, using the ideas generated in the preceding creative sessions, coupled with the framework of episodes now mapped out for them. Look at the individual or group innovated refrains and discuss with the children which ones they feel could provide a focus for a new story.

They might choose Platypus pie or Emu soup, or some entirely different animal. (Maybe Quokka quiche for the more sophisticated!) Decide which animal characters will feature in the new story by examining the descriptive innovations the children came up with in previous activities, and putting these together to map out an entirely new storyline. A time line or incident summary of the new story will give the sequence of events for the final link.

Then use the original text to assist you to enlarge the episodes into a full text.

- If you act as scribe, while the children become the illustrators, you could create a class Big Book to read and enjoy, thus adding to your classroom resources of worthwhile reading materials for your children to use every day.

Remember ... some children, once familiar with Wombat Stew, will be ready to write their own stories, inspired by what they've read, but not necessarily using the same structure. Encourage them, accepting their invented spelling with all the enthusiasm creative effort deserves.

Celebrate their success as writers by selectively publishing their work for everyone to share, thus reinforcing their positive self-image as successful writers.

Cross-Curricular Explorations

The children themselves are likely to be your greatest source of ideas for activities in art, craft, science, HSIE/SOSE, environmental education, drama, poetry, music movement—even in maths and physical education. The activities outlined here are examples only of the approaches you might develop. The purpose of all such activities should be seen as a means of deepening each child's understanding of the story.

- Arrange a bulk loan from your school library of other stories and expository texts relating to Australian animals and encourage children to research further information about the animals featured in Wombat Stew. Older children could build up profiles of particular animals under headings such as Description of animal, Characteristics, Movement, Habitat and Diet. They may find the task simpler if they approach their research with some key questions to assist them. These should be worked out co-operatively with the children.

Description

What class of animal is this?

Describe its colour, shape, size and skin covering.



Movement

How many legs does this animal have?
How does this animal move?

Habitat

Does the animal live on land or water?
Does the animal live above the ground or below the ground?
How does it build its home?

Diet

What does the animal eat?
How and where does it find its food?

The children will enjoy recording their research on simple wall charts, with either their own art work or old magazine pictures as illustrations. They may like to report their findings to the class as a group, or to small groups within the class.

Younger children could contribute to a set of facts built up with the teacher, and written in list form.

What do wombats look like?

Wombats are furry.
Wombats have hairy noses.
Wombats are one metre long.
Wombats weight forty kilograms.
Wombats have short legs.

What do wombats eat?

Wombats eat leaves.
Wombats eat grass.
Wombats don't drink much water.

Where do wombats live?

Wombats live in forests.
Wombats live in open woodlands.
Wombats dig deep, cool burrows.

Encourage the children to draw illustrations for charts made up in this way.

- Use this research as a starting point for graphing characteristics of the animals. For example Habitat could be shown pictorially with younger children.

Above ground	Below ground	In water
Kookaburra	Echidna	
Emu	Platypus	Platypus
Lizard	Lizard	
Dingo		
Koala		
Wombat	Wombat	

Set older children the task of classifying the animals and adding other Australian animals they have read about during their research.

Bird	Reptile	Fish	Mammal	Marsupial
Kookaburra	Lizard		Koala	Koala
Magpie	Snake		Dingo	
Galah			Wombat	Wombat
			Platypus	Platypus

- Work with the children in creating a mural of how they think the billabong scene would look. Discuss with them where the different features should be placed and what materials would be most effective to give atmosphere to the mural. Also, encourage the children to collect resources from the environment to make the mural more authentic, eg bark for trees, birds' feathers, sticks for echidnas' quills.
- Make materials available so that children may be encouraged to construct masks or puppets of the characters, to use as props for dramatisation. Paper plates are a useful base for the masks, but children also love to create their characters from cardboard and junk.
- Leave the refrains displayed so that they can be referred to as the children re-enact the story. Some children may like to make their characters to match the innovative story.
- It is a good idea to have a set of teacher-made masks and puppets for free use by the children, as invariably they are keen to take their creations home to share.
- Children may also decide to construct their own imaginative, brightly coloured 'creepy crawlies' through availability of a variety of art materials. A number could be made, easily, with sections of egg cartons painted or collaged.
- With the children, model the recipe for Wombat stew using a real recipe format.



What you need

1 pot of billabong water
1 fat wombat
10 big blobs of billabong mud
6 fine emu feathers
100 flies
About 20 different sorts of creepy crawlies
Lots and lots of gumnuts

Equipment you need

1 big billy-can
1 stick for stirring

What to do

Catch one fat wombat and leave aside while the other ingredients are prepared.
Boil the pot of water.
Add the mud, feathers, flies, creepy crawlies and gumnuts.
Dance and sing.
Stir frequently while adding the ingredients.
Taste the stew.
Prepare for a shock!

Children should refer back to the text during this writing so that they are checking to see what sequence the ingredients were in. A section of the class will want to make up other animal stew recipes in the same lighthearted vein:

Possum Stew

What you need

1 billy-can of salty sea water
1 fat possum
6 bananas
20 butterflies
60 maggots
10 furry caterpillars
1 cup of sand

Equipment you need

1 big billy-can
1 piece of driftwood

What to do

- Catch a possum and take it to the beach.
- Boil the billy-can of salty sea water.
- Mash the bananas and add to the water.
- Add the butterflies, maggots, furry caterpillars and the cup of sand.
- Stir with a piece of driftwood while you sing and dance around the billy-can.
- Taste the stew.
- Prepare to be poisoned!

- The children may like to ask friends and relatives for their favourite stew (or casserole) recipes to begin a class collection.
- Make a real stew in the classroom, following a true recipe, but adjusting quantities to suit the number of children in the class. Have the recipe written up on a chart for the children to follow. You could even make up your shopping list from the recipe and actually take a group of children with you to do the shopping, after working out the cost.
- After the children have helped prepare the stew and have tasted it, take a vote on who liked or disliked the stew and show the score using tally marks.

Yes	No

- This cooking experience may lead you to considering much broader concepts such as wants and needs and who provides us with goods and services. People must work together to achieve a common goal. (Even the animals in the original text knew how to do this when they tricked Dingo.)

If you decide to look at goods and services, make a list of the ingredients you used in the stew and next to each one, write the place of supply.

Meat — butcher
Carrots — fruit shop
Onions — fruit shop
Stock cubes — supermarket

Through discussion, help the children to decide on one item to follow through from primary production to the shop where it was bought.

With **wants** versus **needs**, you could make two lists of food.

Food I want to eat

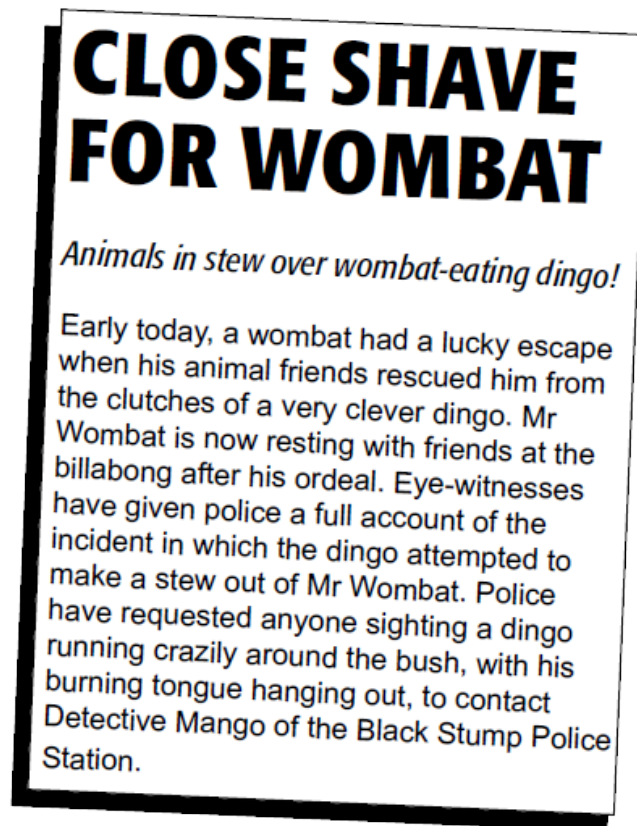
lollies
ice-cream
cakes
biscuits
potato chips
cordial

Food I need to eat

vegetables
fruit
bread
meat
fish
milk

- As the kookaburra is not actually mentioned in the text, much discussion could centre around his role (if any) in the plot. You might have the children imagine this character to be a news reporter for *The Billabong News*.

It would be lots of fun thinking up headlines he might have used in his report of the 'wombat incident'.



The children should then be encouraged to give details of the whole affair as if they are television newsreaders or newspaper reporters. You may need to read some simple newspaper reports to the children, or even model a report for them.

- Make up an animal quiz game with your class. You could use both the original text and its innovation to find the clues about the animals. Children need to make up about three clues for their particular animal.

I have a graceful neck.
I came waltzing out of the shade of the ironbarks.
I dropped my finest feathers into the stew.
Who am I?

The clues can be written on a small card, with the answer on an identical card, to make a game for children to play in pairs after it has been used by the whole group.

- As music is at the very heart of this story, it may be made an integral part of this unit. There are many songs about Australian animals that can be learnt and sung enthusiastically.
- During physical education time, lead the children to explore the ways they can move their bodies in line with what they know of size, shape, characteristics and movement of the animals in the story. The description of the emu as 'waltzing' should suggest slow, graceful movement on two legs, while the 'sliding' movement of Old Blue Tongue would require four legs and a fully stretched body, horizontal to the ground. Discuss with the children how their bodies feel as they make the different shapes and movements of the animals. Musical instruments such as the triangle, tambourine and wood blocks may be added to further assist the children to sense the movements of the animals.
- Through these creative movement activities, coupled with the musical refrain, encourage your children to improvise their own 'dingo dance'.
- By putting the dingo dance together with the creative movement exercises, you have the ingredients for staging an improvised dance-drama as a grand finale to the whole unit. Very few props are required. See if you can get an old cauldron type cooking pot to use as the billy, while a piece of blue cloth thrown on the floor will serve as a billabong. If the children have made masks during the time, encourage as many as possible to be wearing them.

For the actual presentation, have a competent reader reading from the text, while a few children play the instruments at the appropriate time. The rest of the children can be grouped so that each small group represents one of the characters in the story.

Finally, if possible, arrange for an audience. It may be another class in the school, some parents or the school's administrator. Above all, help the children celebrate their success in a reading/writing classroom.

Further Resources

Related Stories

Argent, Kerry, *One Woolly Wombat*, Omnibus.

Fox, Mem, *Possum Magic*, Scholastic Australia.

Fox, Mem, *Sail Away: The Ballad of Skip and Nell*, Scholastic Australia.

Fox, Mem, *Wombat Divine*, Scholastic Australia.

McGovern, Ann, *Stone Soup*, Scholastic Inc.