**ASO READER’S NOTES**

**TITLE: Rivertime**

**AUTHOR: Trace Balla**

**PUBLISHER: Allen & Unwin**

**PRICE: A$24.99**

**ISBN: 9781743316337**

**PUBLICATION DATE: April 2014**

**AUDIENCE: 8-12**

**READER: Carolyn Walsh, Allen & Unwin**

**SYNOPSIS**

‘All children need an Uncle Egg to open up the magical world of nature. We all need to get outside, away from television, computers and mobile phones, and what better way than a canoeing–camping trip? This is a delightful story about the joy of the outdoors.’
 DAVID SUZUKI

*Rivertime* is a tender story about a boy and his bird-watching uncle’s paddling trip on the Glenelg River in South Australia. At first 10-year-old Clancy isn’t convinced about the point of going on a paddling trip, after all he has lots to do at home building mini cities and watching TV. But as the trip progresses Clancy learns to pay more attention to his surroundings: from the creatures swimming around the canoe to the ancient landforms on either side of the riverbank. But it is Uncle Egg’s fascination for bird-watching that proves to be a complete discovery for Clancy, who soon learns to identify nearly as many different types of birds as Egg. By the end of the trip Clancy has learned important skills and, perhaps more importantly, how to appreciate the beauty of nature, and find true happiness.

Essentially*, Rivertime* is a story about slowing down, growing up and connecting with the land and its creatures. The story is a rite of passage – the boy is now old enough to join his uncle on an adventure canoeing and camping trip, learning how to look after himself far away from the distractions of modern life. This is a book that will make readers happy – it’s very Australian, a celebration of the bush and the rejuvenation of spirit it can give us when we spend time in it.

**AUTHOR STYLE**

It is said the best children's writers manage to find their inner-child, and that is certainly what Trace Balla has done in *Rivertime*. Her naive, child-like drawings are instantly accessible, yet rich in detail. The cartoon style text is likewise simple and fast moving, yet filled with revelations about the characters and the landscape they are negotiating.

The strong interplay between words and illustrations allows Balla to tell a great deal of the story solely in dialogue; interspersed with this is the quirky voice of the number-obsessed Clancy, adding humour as well as warmth to this charming story.

**IN THE AUTHOR’S OWN WORDS**

‘I took a canoe trip on the Glenelg over New Year a couple of years ago with my partner, Greg, who was the inspiration for Uncle Egg. I always keep a kind of sketch/ cartoony type of journal when I travel, to remember and to share...I prefer it to just taking photos; it seems a way that suits me best to record what’s going on, and I find it really absorbing and relaxing. I can get snippets of conversation, my thoughts and ideas; I can stop and sketch from nature and take a really good look at things....I wanted to share that (not just leave the journal under my bed), so when I was working on the script I used those bits, changing them to suit the story.

‘I became a twitcher on that trip…Yesterday I returned from a few days’ paddle on the Murray. I now own my own binoculars and can identify over thirty birds from that trip…this is someone who used to just have no idea a couple of years back. It really excites me now, so it’s great to share that, and I love putting all the different birds in there…

‘I really [wanted] to include Indigenous info in [*Rivertime*]. It’s important to me and I feel strongly that it’s important to us all.

‘I also really wanted to tell how it’s hard for the creatures when [we] humans take over everywhere, and show it’s important to tread lightly, slow down. Being in a canoe amongst those speedboats really helped show me what it’s like to be at the mercy of human impact...I understood first-hand a bit more how it feels. ‘Oh no! A human’s coming! Quick, be alert!’ All those stunned animals at night in the car headlights, all the damage we do to the environment…and how we really can tread more lightly, slow down, be quiet, look, listen…it means a lot to me. I like that I’ve got a medium in this book to show some of my views; to get people considering their impact on the planet.’

**AUTHOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Trace Balla is often found sketching in nature, riding her bike with her son, dancing, and growing vegies in her garden in central Victoria. She works as an illustrator, community artist, art therapist, animator, and writer of songs and stories.

**EDUCATIONAL APPLICABILITY**

Themes include:

* growing up
* slowing down
* connecting with nature
* connecting with country
* seeing another’s point-of-view
* treading lightly on the planet
* birdwatching

Suggestions for discussion and classroom activities:

* Before reading *Rivertime* ask students to consider the title and cover design. What sort of story do students expect this to be? Might it be a mystery or a crime story, a fairytale or something fairly true to life? Who will it be about and what might they do in the story? Encourage students to come up with specific things about the cover that influenced their answers (the image, the style of illustration, the title or font used, etc).
* Divide students into small groups to research the Glenelg River and its surrounds. Some useful websites include:

<http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/315669/Park-note-Lower-Glenelg-NP-River-guide.pdf>

<http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/explore/parks/lower-glenelg-national-park>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glenelg\_River\_(Victoria)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glenelg_River_%28Victoria%29)

and

Type Glenelg River in a Google Images search.

Ask students to find information on:

* The length of the River
* Where it is on a map of Southern Australia
* Its history – Indigenous and non-Indigenous
* Popular activities on the River
* Environmental concerns for the river, its surrounds and wildlife
* Read the story through once to your class and then return to individual pages for specific points of discussion. These might include:
* Look at the things Clancy will miss not having on the trip (page 9) and make a list of things you think you would miss most
* Look at the image on page 12 and describe the things Uncle Egg takes on the trip. What other things might you take?
* Look at the images on pages 22 and 23. What is one simple thing that this tells us we can do to protect the environment and native animals? What other things can we do to make sure our environment and native animals are protected?
* Look at the image that runs across pages 40 and 41. Why do you think the author/illustrator has run the text along the river’s bank? In your answer think about what Clancy is saying and feeling.
* Much of *Rivertime* is written in the first person and present tense. We see the journey as Clancy sees it and it is as though we are right there with him. Why do you think the author might have done this?
* Why do you think Trace Balla has included bubbles of text in the story? What is the difference between the two types of bubbles? How do the different ways words are presented in the story give us a better picture of what is happening?
* In a whole class discussion ask students if they think Clancy returns to his mum changed after his journey with Uncle Egg. In what ways has he changed and do you think he is better for this change?
* Download the free pocket bird-watching guide on the Allen & Unwin website at <http://www.allenandunwin.com/_uploads/documents/kidsandteens/Activity%20Sheets/Rivertime_bird-watching_guide.pdf>. Take students out in the playground to see if they can identify the birds they see there. If they see other birds get them to draw and write a small description to add to their pocket guide.
* Writing exercise: Write a story about a journey you have gone on. It can be a trip in a canoe, a plane, a car, a boat or by foot. Include in your story where you started, where you finished, who you were with and what you saw along the way.

**MARKETING AND SELLING POINTS**

* The book has been endorsed by David Suzuki, an award-winning scientist and one of the most influential environmentalists in the world.
* A free pocket bird watching guide (designed by Trace Balla and featuring the birds in depicted in *Rivertime*) is available on the Allen & Unwin website.
* Teaching notes will be available on the Allen & Unwin website at the time of publication.
* *Rivertime* will feature prominently in the Primary School Allen & Unwin newsletter.
* Review copies will be mailed broadly to relevant media.
* *Rivertime* will be advertised in a major children’s literary magazine.