

The Frog's First Song

AUTHOR

JAZZ MONEY

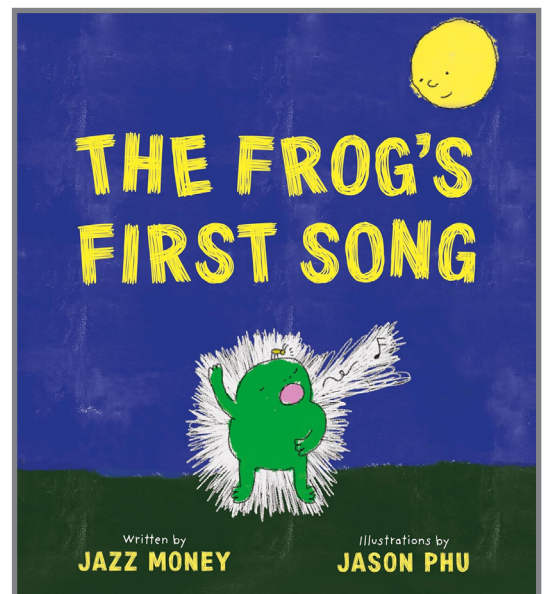
ILLUSTRATOR

JASON PHU

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Primary



SYNOPSIS

The Frog's First Song is a playful picture book about the joys of belonging, community, courage, teamwork, collaboration and friendship. This debut picture book is a unique and melodic ode to taking chances, using your voice and coming together in song and dance. It's also a timely and sensitive story about the power of togetherness in dark times.

It was inspired by a national art project that Money and Phu both worked on in 2023 and integrates inspiration from Chinese parables and First Nations Creation stories.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jazz Money is a Wiradjuri poet and artist whose work spans installation, digital, performance, film and print. Their writing has been widely published nationally and internationally and performed on stages around the world. Jazz has published two award-winning collections of poetry, *how to make a basket* (UQP, 2021) and *mark the dawn* (UQP, 2024). *The Frog's First Song* is their first children's picture book.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Jason Phu is an artist working across a wide range of mediums, including printmaking, painting and performance. His work references folktales, family history and funny jokes. Sometimes it includes imagery from comics, cartoons and Chan paintings. Jason is a three-time Archibald Prize finalist and won the Sulman Prize in 2015.

THEMES

- The joys of belonging and community.
- How having courage, using your voice and taking chances can open up new worlds of opportunity.
- How teamwork, collaboration and friendship can help you to grow and make new achievements.
- The power of coming together in song and dance to bind communities in connection and tradition.
- The power of togetherness in dark times.

STUDY NOTES

WHILE READING

Imagery and Artist's Style

- Invite students to work in pairs and discuss their favourite page spread in the book? Why is this their favourite?
- Discuss the first pages, where the darkness of the well is depicted. How would students feel if they were that single

lone frog in the darkness not knowing what was out there? What feelings do they have viewing these drawings?

- Discuss the illustrations where the frogs are singing to moon from their lily pad stage and where the trees, stars and flowers are smiling. What feelings do students have when they look at these images? How are they different to the first images of darkness? Why is it happier when they are with other frogs and connecting with the moon and stars?
- Discuss the use of bold colours—a feature of the artist's style. If you have a local, accessible community street art/ graffiti art mural or installation, go there and view the art, making comparisons to Phu's work. Why are the colours so bright and bold? Are there other similarities between Phu's work and your local street art example? How do these features make the art and the building/area of town interesting to look at? Why do we put street art in our communities?

Frog symbolism

- Phu's artwork is also inspired by Chinese proverbs. These often provide advice on how to live in the world in similar ways to Dreaming stories and lore. The 'frog in the well' proverb warns us not to become narrow-minded by staying in our own little place, or comfort zone, and not seeing what is out there in the world. It tells of a frog who was so happy living in his well, until he meets a sea turtle who teaches him about the vast sea. The frog suddenly realises his ignorance and limited knowledge and experience of the world. Teachers can read about this proverb here: <https://chinese-story-collection.blogspot.com/2010/09/frog-in-well.html>
- Show students a picture of a frog in a well and a sea turtle in the ocean. Summarise and explain the Chinese proverb using these picture props. Discuss how in *The Frog's First Song*, the main frog character becomes more knowledgeable when they meet the other frogs, and they go out and meet the moon, stars and world around them. Discuss how the more you learn the more you can appreciate and respect other people, places and living things.
- Learn about the life cycle of a frog.
- Discuss some of the symbolism of frogs in different cultures. Many cultures see them as symbols of fertility, abundance, rain and cleansing, and transformation. Consider why these beliefs exist in relation to what we understand about their life cycle.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- Play a game such as dance freeze (when the music is playing you can dance around the room, but when it stops you must freeze until it starts again).
 - Then, go outdoors (if possible) and sing a well-known song together, such as 'Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' or other songs your class knows. Add challenges such as singing as quietly as possible, as loudly as possible, or emphasising the body part loudly, 'KNEES', 'TOES'!

After these activities, gather students together in a yarning circle and discuss how they felt before the lesson, during the lesson and now. Explore how this activity helps you to feel happier and more energised and teaches you how to build closer friendships with classmates.

- Have students draw pictures about how music, singing and dancing makes them feel.
- Learn and practise some First Nations language songs from around Australia using the following resources, which are publicly available for classroom use:
 - AIATSIS Languages map < <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia> >
 - Yarrabil Bula: a First Languages Australia project with the ABC, with teacher notes available. Collaboration celebrates First Nations languages through the power of song—First Languages Australia <<https://www.firstlanguages.org.au/news/collaboration-celebrates-first-nations-languages-through-the-power-of-song>>
 - Marrin Gamu: a First Languages Australia project interpreting 'Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' into different languages. <<https://marringamu.com.au/>>
- Read and practise the dance steps taught in *Our Dance* by Jacinta Daniher and Taylor Hampton. Discuss the similarities and differences between this book and *The Frog's First Song*. Discuss the importance of understanding your local landscape and animals, and how both books encourage us to connect with and appreciate local wildlife.
- Create a class song and dance to demonstrate community, friendship and belonging. Begin with students working in pairs to create 2–4 dance moves and a short song to go with the dance. Join pairs into groups of 4 to put their dance moves and song together. Have the groups share their work. Then, work as a class to put the group songs together into a class song.

- Using the following resources and, preferably, a local Indigenous knowledge holder such as the local Indigenous rangers of your region, learn about what 'connection to Country', 'Dreaming' and 'Creation' means at a basic level (these are complex concepts that First Nations people themselves spend their lives learning).
 - <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/connection-to-animals-and-country>
 - <https://www.commonground.org.au/dreamy/stories/bilabang>
 - <https://www.commonground.org.au/dreamy>

With this understanding, re-read the below section of *The Frog's First Song*:

'All the frogs are full of joy, for they now know that there is more to this darkness. There is each other, and now there is song. The song is creation, and with it the frogs feel brave. They begin to dance a little, then hop a little, singing and hopping and learning the shape of the world.'

Discuss how this section shows us the concept of 'Creation'. Discuss the brave feeling the frogs have—why might they be feeling brave right now? Emphasise their connection to Country as they are 'learning the shape of the world'.

- The National Art Project description of Phu's work states that his 'funny frog story encourages us to tell a story of our own'. Support students to create their own family history story and diorama/tableaux/artwork. If appropriate, invite families in to support their child in the activity before enjoying a shared morning or afternoon tea, modelling and emphasising the importance of community and togetherness.

AUTHOR OF NOTES

CARA SHIPP