

## ASO READER'S NOTES

**TITLE:** *Where Are You, Banana*  
**AUTHOR:** Sofie Laguna  
**ILLUSTRATOR:** Craig Smith  
**PUBLISHER:** Allen & Unwin  
**PRICE:** \$24.99  
**ISBN:** 9781743310533  
**PUB DATE:** July 2013  
**AUDIENCE:** 3-6  
**READER:** Carolyn Walsh, Allen & Unwin

### SYNOPSIS:

Roddy's best friend is his dog, Banana. They play together, sleep together and go everywhere together...almost. One day Roddy's family visit his Aunt Celia and decide to leave Banana at home. At the end of the visit Roddy rushes back home only to find Banana missing. After finding a hole under the fence Roddy and his dad search up and down their street but Banana isn't to be found. So desperately does Roddy miss his friend, he decides to go out alone before sunrise to look for him. At first all seems hopeless until he hears a howl coming from *under* the street. Soon he discovers that Banana is trapped in a hole made by road workers and knows he must come up with a plan.

This warm and witty story of a boy's devotion to his pet is something all young children will relate to. An audio version, available via a QR code at the beginning of the book or by going online to [www.allenandunwin.com](http://www.allenandunwin.com), adds another dimension to the reading experience.

### STYLE:

Sofie Laguna's use of first person narrative achieves a very warm and intimate tone throughout this story. The reader immediately recognises Roddy's deep connection with Banana, making the dog's disappearance and eventual rescue all the more dramatic. Tension is further intensified by Laguna's choice of present tense to tell most of the story. We, like Roddy, are unsure of Banana's fate until the end of the story.

Craig Smith's watercolour illustrations complement and extend the warmth and intimacy between Roddy and Banana. They also tell us a lot about the rest of Roddy's loving family. For instance, the slightly exaggerated sizing of his parents (his father, in particular, often fills much of an image) creates a sense that he embodies qualities of strength and reliability. Contrasting illustration size, background detail, perspective and colour saturation further extend the story, as well as making it a visual delight.

### AUTHOR MOTIVATION:

Sofie Laguna writes of the motivation behind *Where Are You, Banana?*, 'Sadly, [it] was inspired by the loss of my dog, Tigger. Tigger was very old when he died, and we'd had a terrific long life together but that didn't make it any easier. I learned how tough it was to be without him, and that is what Roddy learns too, when Banana escapes. I know they are very different things – but when Tigger died I spent a lot of time thinking about him, and all the ways I loved him and all the years we'd had together, and I wanted to write about a missing dog who matters very much.

'Roddy really needs Banana – his parents are so busy with the twins and Banana is his special companion. They do great things together, and they share a silent language – a boy-

dog language that is very important to Roddy. Banana makes Roddy feel safe and loved and when he goes missing Roddy simply has to find him. The world can't go on without Banana! That's why he finds the courage to go out and look for him alone. Roddy will not give up until his dog is home.

'Sometimes something sad can inspire a warm and happy story – it's strange. Maybe I am trying to make sense of the loss. I don't know exactly. I do know that I understood Roddy's love and attachment, and the importance of Banana. It felt really good to write the story.'

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Sofie Laguna has written several popular books for children and young adults (*Bird and Sugar Boy*, *My Yellow Blankie*, *Too Loud Lily* and *Bad Buster*). She is also an actor. *One Foot Wrong* was her first adult novel. She lives in Melbourne.

### **ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:**

Craig Smith is one of Australia's most prolific children's book illustrators. He has collaborated with many of Australia's best-loved authors, and his books include *Cat, Billy the Punk*, The Cabbage Patch series by Paul Jennings, several books by Doug MacLeod including *Sister Madge's Book of Nuns* and *Where's Mum*, and several books for Allen & Unwin including *The Big Ball of String*, *The Boy Who Built the Boat* and *Heather Fell in the Water*.

### **EDUCATIONAL APPLICABILITY:**

Themes include: attachment, loss, courage, fear, determination, family relationships, community relationships, the love of an animal, human-animal attachment, problem solving.

Suggestions for discussion and classroom activities:

1. Before reading, examine the front and back covers and read the blurb. What sort of story do you think this is going to be? What makes you think that? After reading it, did the book meet your expectations? Was it what you expected or was it different? How?
2. Ask students to bring in photos of their pets. [Those students who don't have a pet might bring in a picture from a magazine of a pet they would like to have]. Place the photos around the class and have each child give a short presentation about their pet, describing the type of pet it is, its name, funny things about it and the jobs that need to be done to look after it properly. Now read the book again and ask students to use words to describe the relationship between Roddy and Banana. Put the words up around the classroom, along with the photos of real pets.
3. Compare two images of Banana: the first is of him being tickled on the head by Roddy (first double spread) and the second is of him howling in Roddy's backyard (second double page spread). Ask students what emotions Banana is feeling in each image, i.e., is he happy or sad? What elements are in the illustration to make you think he is feeling that way? Are there any clues about his emotions in the text that appears alongside these images?
4. Look at the two images of Aunt Celia's backyard. The one on the left is only moments before the one on the right but many things have happened in between. In groups of two, ask students to describe what has happened to: each twin, Penelope the hen, Roddy, Aunt Celia's cat and Dad.

5. In a whole class discussion ask students if Roddy did the right thing when he left his house so early in the morning and in the pouring rain. List the reasons why he needed to do it and the reasons why it was not a safe thing to do.
6. Ask students to tell or write the same story from another character's point of view. Suggested characters might be Banana, Mum, Dad, the twins, Mr Bray, or even Roddy's family cat.
7. The author uses special words to describe how Banana is feeling in the hole. These include 'whimper', 'whine' and 'shiver'. What do these words mean and what do they tell us about how Banana is feeling?
8. Look at the final image of Banana on the endpapers (inside back cover). Ask students to write a story about Banana's next adventure.

#### **MARKETING AND SELLING POINTS:**

- Review copies will be mailed broadly to relevant media.
- The book will be featured in mailings and newsletters to schools and is on the Allen & Unwin website.
- The book will be advertised in a key children's literature journal.