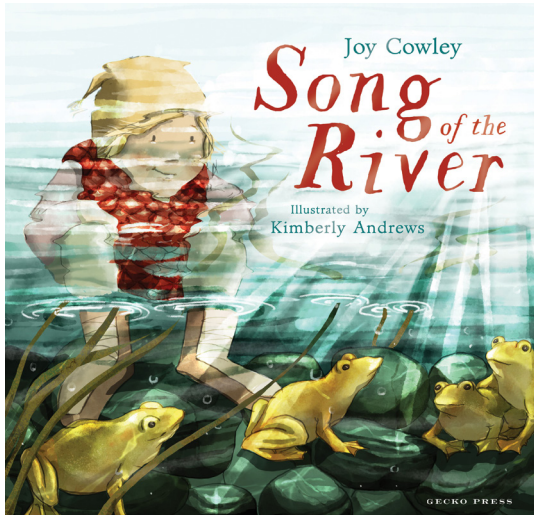


TEACHER NOTES

Song of the River

Joy Cowley & Kimberly Andrews



Resources for teachers working with children aged 2 to 7+ years

Synopsis

High on a mountain in the middle of a snowy forest, a boy called Cam watches the meltwater trickling through the trees.

“Come with me,” it says, promising to take Cam to the sea.

And away they go, boy and creek, laughing as they tumble down the slope until the water becomes a rushing stream, and then a river flowing sedately through the plain. But wherever it goes, the river’s song remains constant, and Cam follows happily, enjoying the sights and sounds until they meet the ocean.

Themes

- The life story of a river
- The wonder of connecting with the natural world
- Water on the move
- How people use rivers
- Change
- The power of curiosity and imagination

Talking about this book

Once you’ve read *Song of the River* and shared your immediate responses, ask questions to help children think more deeply about every aspect of the book. Overleaf are some ideas to get you started.

What did you like best about Song of the River, and why?
Do you think Cam travels all the way to the sea? Why / why not?
Does this book remind you of anything else you've read? How?
What would you say to Cam?
What was the most surprising thing in this book?
Why do you think the river sings?
What did you learn from this book?
What do the pictures show that isn't mentioned in the text?
Who would you recommend this book to, and why? What would you tell them about it?
Compare Cam's river to a stream or river you know well.

Building on your reading experience

The cross-curricular activities below open doors to new ideas and give children lots to talk and write about.

For children aged **2+** look for activities marked **N**

For children aged **5–7** look for activities marked **I**

For children aged **7+** look for activities marked **J**

Compose a soundscape for Cam's river (N, I, J)

Splashing, singing, barking, chattering...

There are lots of noisy words and ideas in this book. Building a whole-class soundscape is a fun way to explore them, and will generate many ideas for writing.

Choose a picture and ask **what's making a noise?** Read the text, checking for noisy words, and use your voices to explore these sounds. Can you cry like the birds, or rumble like an engine?

Ask everyone to choose their favourite sound and perform it like a musician. Appoint yourself conductor to tell everyone when to start, when to get louder or softer, and when to stop. Practise until you're proud of your result, then record your performance.

Listen back and discuss. Could it be improved? Make changes.

Extend Use musical instruments or found objects to add more sounds.

Follow up Write about how you created your soundscape, or write descriptively about your experience.

Investigate water flow (N, I, J)

Talk about going **downhill** and **uphill**. What do these words mean?

Cam's river flows from the mountains to the sea. Find pictures showing the water flowing downhill. Does it ever flow uphill?

Investigate water flow outdoors using water-channelling equipment or a collection of half gutters, pipes and bowls. Ask questions to inspire and extend children's curiosity.

Can we make the water flow more quickly, or slow it down?

Can we stop it flowing? How?

What makes it flow from one place to another?

Allow plenty of time for free play and exploration, then talk about what you've observed and why you think it's happening.

Excavate a system of streams and channels in sand or mud, then add water. What happens? Help children formulate questions and answer them.

Can we find a way to help the water flow along our channels?

Is there anything we can do to stop it leaking away?

Can we make a dam?

Support children to structure their thinking and transfer their learning to this book.

What have we learned about water?

What does this tell us about Cam's river?

Follow up Share your experiences and conclusions in a verbal presentation or written report.

Use all your senses to explore Cam's river (N, I, J)

Choose a picture and imagine you can step into it. Ask questions that help you use all your senses to explore this amazing place.

What can you see?

What can you hear and smell?

What does the water feel like?

What else can you touch?

What are people saying?

What are you going to do, now you're part of this story?

Using touch alone, explore related objects hidden in cloth bags.

Dip your fingers in water, then listen as it's splashed or blown.

Draw patterns inspired by what you've experienced, or create abstract paintings with watercolours. Write poems to accompany your artwork.

Extend Nursery children love multisensory play environments—and older children love creating them!

To make an underwater play tunnel for little ones, decorate a fabric tunnel or similar crawl-through space with watery, weedy fronds of textured fabrics and other safe materials.

Cut holes in the sides, so children can reach through to touch hidden objects (stones, toy frogs...) or dabble their fingers in a water bowl. Add a surprise activity at the end—**blending watery paint in sealed bags; blowing bubbles in blue water**—and supervise children closely as they explore.

Introduce this activity by discussing the illustration of Cam and the frogs, and build on it by painting pictures inspired by your experiences.

Explore the river's ever-changing voice (I, J)

"Come with me, come with me, I will take you to the sea..."

Although the river's song remains constant, its voice changes. Re-read the text to find the words and phrases that tell us how it sounds. Why does the river's voice keep changing? Do these voices match the different locations? How?

What would the voice of a leaping fish sound like? What about the voice of an engine soaked in oil? Try “speaking for the river” in a way that matches each description.

Experiment, then add your favourite voices to a re-reading of the whole book.

Follow up Write about the river’s changing voices and how you explored them.

What’s floating on Cam’s river? (I, J)

Invite children to describe one of the boats in this book, then ask others to guess which boat they chose. Examine the pictures to discover more about these boats and how they’re used.

Find boat-related words—**wharves, barges, tugboats, engine, ropes, cranes, cargoes**—and explain what they mean. Can you collect more ‘boat words’ and find exciting ways to display them?

Look at the farmer in his rowing-boat. Using found and other materials, can you build a boat that will float? Check its seaworthiness in a paddling pool of water, then draw your boat and add notes explaining all its features.

Follow up Can you find a way to power your boat?

Imagine your boat is sailing down Cam’s river. What adventures does it have?

Going on a watery expedition (N, I, J)

Cam’s adventures begin when he looks closely at the natural world, asks questions, finds answers and allows his imagination to take him somewhere new.

Develop your observation skills by getting to know a stream or river really well. Plan activities to help you notice your surroundings and record what you see, hear, smell, feel and taste. Take photographs, sketch and make audio recordings.

Talk about where the water comes from and where it goes. Have you been to the sea? What was it like?

If you put a toy boat in your stream or river, how long would take to reach the sea?

What would happen to your boat on its journey? What would it see?

Follow up Use your experience to kickstart writing for a purpose: a natural history guide, instructions on how to organise another expedition, a poem to share with another class, a website article about your trip.

Mapping Cam’s river (I, J)

What does this book tell us about the life story of Cam’s river?

Find words telling us about the river’s appearance and behaviour—**creek, stream, trickle, splash, waterfall, deeper, wider, bank**. Make sure you understand them, then add more river-words—**estuary, marsh, lake, rapids**. and explain them, too.

Examine the illustrations and talk about the landscapes they depict. What features can you see? **A line of trees, a road...** What would each one look like from a bird’s eye view?

Working together, create a sketchmap for each illustration in the book. Arrange your sketches to follow the river’s journey from Cam’s forest to the sea, then use them to help you draw a picture-map showing the entire journey.

How does it compare with your journey to school?

Follow up Write about the river's journey, or report on how you created your map.

Talking to rivers (I, J)

What do Cam and the river say to each other?

Re-read the story, inviting children to speak for Cam and the river. Then write their conversation as a dialogue and read aloud.

Would you have enjoyed *Song of the River* if it had been written in this way? What did Joy Cowley add to Cam and the river's conversation to make her text more interesting?

Find words and phrases that tell us about the river's actions and emotions. Choose your "top three" and explain why you like them.

Can you spot rhymes or rhythms in this dialogue? Why do you think the river repeats itself? What is the impact of these rhymes, rhythms and repetitions on people reading *Song of the River*?

Imagine you're talking to Cam's river, or a river you know well. What will you ask, and how will it respond? Explore ideas, then write your conversation in dialogue form.

Work in pairs to perform your dialogues.

Follow up Add descriptions, narrative and other text to make your dialogues more interesting.

Watery ideas for arty explorations (N, I, J)

Drip inks onto paper, then use straws to blow into patterns, or tip the paper to create a flow.

Explore watercolour as a medium, discovering how it behaves differently on wet and dry paper. What happens when wet colours meet?

Blow bubbles into coloured water with a straw to create prints. When they're dry, add line-drawings using black ink.

Investigate colour-mixing using water-based paints (or discover which art materials will or won't mix with water). What effects can you create using water-resistant media plus a wash of coloured paint or ink?

Why do people need rivers? (I, J)

What does this book tell us about the way we use rivers?

Put on your detective hats and examine the text and pictures for clues!

How are people using the river in this book? Why do you think these things are happening?

Why do you think people live near the river?

Why have they built towns and cities along its banks?

How do they use its water on their farms, and in their factories and homes?

Can you think of other ways of using the river? **Fishing, irrigation, drinking water, swimming, canoeing, as a power supply...**

Discuss these uses from your own perspective.

Where does the water in our classroom tap come from?

How do we grow the fruit we eat at break?

Has anyone been on a riverboat trip?

Follow up Write about the river's journey in this book and explain how it helps people. Or draw an annotated picture showing the same information.

Make an underwater diorama (I, J)

Look at the picture of Cam observing the frogs. We're sharing the frogs' perspective—Cam's feet are part of their underwater world, but the rest of his body is above the water. Can you see the sun shining through the water and lighting up the frogs?

Ask children about their experiences of being underwater. What do they know about underwater wildlife?

To create underwater dioramas from cardboard boxes, remove one side and paint the interior blue and green. Glue sand and stones to the base and cover the top in blue cellophane. Tape strips of green tissue paper to it, so that they hang down like weeds.

Use modelling materials to make frogs and other underwater creatures and add them to your diorama. Bring it to life by shining torches through the lid. Move the beams to spotlight different features as you provide a commentary.

Follow up

Create a recorded soundtrack for your diorama.

Write about how you created your diorama, and illustrate with step-by-step drawings.

More writing ideas (I, J)

Tell the story from the river's point of view.

Observe water on the move—as rain, in streams, or disappearing down plugholes—and collect words and phrases to describe it. Use to help you compose your own poems.

What happens when Cam and his grandfather visit the seaside?

Write a factual account of a river's journey from the mountains to the sea.

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