

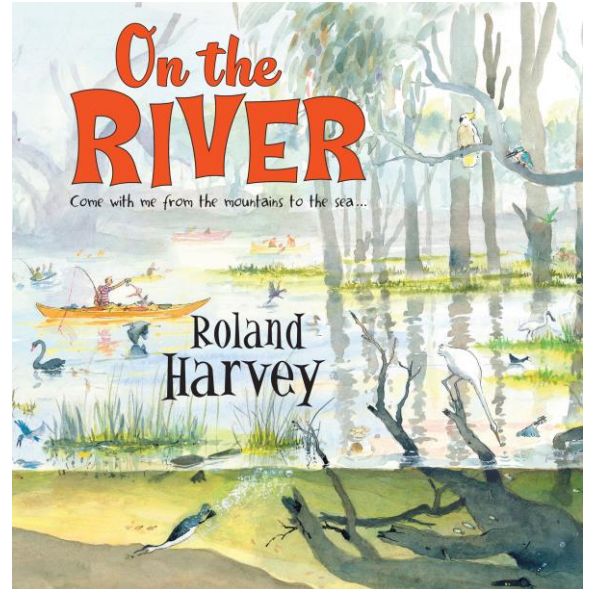
On the River

By Roland Harvey

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hardback

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Summary

A delight for all ages from the creator of the bestselling 'At the Beach' series.

On the River sings with beautiful watercolour depictions of life in, on and around the river. Roland Harvey and his new pelican friend are off on an adventure to walk, fish, canoe, raft, windsurf, sail, paddle-steam, houseboat and even fly their way along the Murray River, from its smallest beginnings in the high country to where it meets the sea.

Together they discover the story of the river: its secrets, history, ecology, people and animals. And you're invited, too!

On the River is about the Murray River, from top to bottom. The Murray River, in turn, is only a part of the bigger picture: the Murray-Darling Basin, which is a vast area draining a lot of Queensland, NSW, Victoria, ACT and South Australia. The system is vitally important to graziers, food growers and communities for drinking and domestic use, for irrigation, for hydro power, for recreation, for the health of the environment wildlife and habitat, and in earlier times, for transporting wool and produce to the cities and bringing supplies and labour to the bush.

Links to the curriculum

Roland Harvey says: *The text is quite simple and does little more than explain the illustrations, and was aimed at about years 5-6 level, (when the Murray Darling is on the curriculum), but is simple enough to be read by younger readers and teachers (!). It is a great lead in for discussion and further reading. Although the book is about the Murray River, a lot of the content applies to other Australian rivers. It also has relevance for towns within the MDB, as far north as Queensland.*

The Murray River specifically features in the national and state curricula for both primary and secondary classes and a study of the river can fit numerous other aspects of these curricula:

- Yrs 6/7 HASS (Humanities and Social Sciences)
- Yrs 7-10 History
- Yrs 7-10 Geography
- Yrs 7-10 Civics and Citizenship
- Yrs 7-10 Economics and Business

The book and its companions are also very useful in teaching visual literacy to English speakers and English to those just learning the language. The fun and visual aspects are good for grades 1,2 and 3. Older students will gain from having an overview of the conflicted situation - the balance of demands from the environment, from communities and from the fruit growers and industries in five states.

Visit <https://www.allenandunwin.com/resources/for-teachers> for free download-able teachers notes, reviews by teachers, extracts and more. And sign up to the Allen & Unwin e-newsletter to receive monthly updates on new resources!

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Note from the author, Roland Harvey

Themes

Having a great fondness for the Australian landscape and its inhabitants I thought there was a great opportunity to reveal the history and some of the secrets of our major river, the Murray. Most people cross the Murray, see little bits of it, fly over it, visit a few tourist spots but seldom see the system as a whole, or appreciate its complexity or the role it plays in our culture environment, economy and lives. For example, not everyone would know that the future and health of the lower Murray, the Coorong and Adelaide's drinking water supply depends as much on how much rain falls in Queensland as what is done on the Murray itself.

The river is subjected to many often conflicting demands: water for irrigation (and hence the survival of fruit, nut and wine industries and small towns along the river); recreation; transport; environmental flows and bird and fish habitats; extraction of water for drinking (Adelaide relies on fresh Murray water for between 40% - 90% of its drinking water, depending on each year's needs and the river's capacity); and has also to cope with various kinds of pollution and insecticide runoff.

At one stage the Coorong was seriously affected by the closing of the Murray mouth, which stopped the flushing of the area with salt sea water and consequent toxicity of a very important habitat and the loss of fish and bird life.

To attempt to capture the spirit of all that in a 32 page, mainly illustrative book for kids which will be read by parents, teachers and hopefully tourists is no small challenge.

I have immersed myself in the river and its culture and allowed my impressions to take over the story telling. Many things occur many times and many places but I have mentioned them only once or twice, in their most important contexts. I have tried to avoid taking sides in any of the conflicting issues, and hope it is a catalyst for more reading and researching.

I have tried to show the diversity and beauty of the river as a babbling mountain stream, as a mighty watercourse and playground, and as a saltwater habitat of the greatest beauty as it reaches the sea and the Coorong.

How I work

As far as space allowed, I tried to give equal prominence to indigenous, environmental, commercial, tourist, recreational and historical aspects of the river, and make it look like a great place to be (which it is!).

It might be obvious from the illustrations that I have spent a lot of time on and in the river, from top to bottom, and have a great love for it.

The Murray's story is a big one, and I could only hope to give an overview and some insights. I always use humour both visual and the written word, poems, diagrams and so on. For example, to sum up the situation at the junction of the Murray and the Darling, I realised that rather than a list of problems, it could be done in the form of a letter from Murray to Darling.

Activities for younger students

Kids in class could have a lot of fun with the following activities:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make maps• Write letters• Draw birds and fish• Draw diagrams showing the workings of locks, hydro, paddle steamers etc.• Make a list of problems faced by river communities and environments | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make a list of things to do on and around the river• Make a list of things that are made and grown on the river• Design a houseboat• Make a poster of all the foods that grow along the river |
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In the classroom...



Related resources

Internet

At the time of writing these notes, the national curriculum was being updated, which means the links to ACARA contained in the following websites may now be obsolete. However, the specific teaching resources are as useful as ever.

The Discover Murray website has a number of useful pages:

<http://www.murrayriver.com.au/education/>

<http://www.murrayriver.com.au/about-the-murray/water-use-and-consumption/>

[Natural Resources SA Murray-Darling Basin](#) is the agency that delivers programs and projects on behalf of the regional NRM board and Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources for the SA Murray-Darling Basing NRM region. See teaching resources at:

<http://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/samurraydarlingbasin/education/teaching-resources/water>

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority educational resources:

<http://www.mdba.gov.au/education/teachers>

[The Murray-Darling Basin - Department of the Environment](#) downloadable teacher kit.

[The Murray Darling Basin - Geography - Melbourne High School Library](#) themes, resources & links.

Books

For younger readers:

What Do You Think? a story about the plight of the River Murray by Elizabeth Frankel. 18 pp, pb, ISBN 978 0 97569 030 7. Self-published, available from sales@jcirving.com.au or PO Box 662, Waikerie, SA 5330.

The Source Annotation: Two Regent parrots notice something is changed about their river (the Murray) and ask many of the riverside animals what they think is different.

An illustrated educational story about the effect of diminished river flow due to high levels of irrigation and town use of the river water on the plants and animals that depend on the river flow.

The Adventures of Softbill the Strong by Eleanor Stodart. 1997, Envirobook, Sydney. Short novel/animal story.

The Source Annotation: Softbill is born in the upper reaches of the great Murray River but after a meeting with a seagull is inspired to try and swim to the sea. His journey charts the changes of the river as it makes its way to the outlet at the Coorong in South Australia where Softbill succeeds in his quest and then turns back to make the journey home.

For middle-years readers

The Mighty Murray by John Nicholson. hb 2002, pb 2005, Allen & Unwin, Sydney. Illustrated non-fiction.

And, of course, *Storm Boy* by Colin Thiele is an environmental loss-of-innocence Australian classic set in the Coorong. It has been published in many different editions, some abridged and some with photographs, and produced as a film and a play.