

Monkey's
Great Adventures

Afloat in

VENICE

TEACHER RESOURCES



words & pictures • Tina Wilson

Knitting • Joan Wilson

Music • Matt Otley



TEACHER RESOURCES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE RESOURCE NOTES

Jenny Botje has been involved in teaching for over 40 years. She has taught all year levels in both rural and metropolitan primary schools, as well as being involved in specialist education programmes and administration roles. Her love of, and enthusiasm for, children's literature was fully employed in her 17 years as an Education Officer at The Literature Centre in Fremantle, WA. In this role she presented visual literacy workshops to students and teachers using exhibitions of the original artwork from Australian picture books. She loved witnessing the connection students and teachers developed as part of the workshops. Jenny has a passion for picture books which is reflected in her bookshelf at home.

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For more information about Monkey's Great Adventures go to
Monkey's website or follow him on instagram @monkeysgreat



“Monkey can’t wait to use his new camera in Venice ... but along the way he discovers something more precious than sight-seeing!”

BOOK ONE: AFLOAT IN VENICE

Monkey goes on a holiday to Venice, having had to take a long plane trip followed by a long boat trip to get there. On arrival in Venice, Monkey sets out to explore. He meets Clarabella who asks what Monkey is doing in Venice. When Monkey replies that he is taking photos with his new camera, Clarabella offers to show him the sights. They have a lovely time together until Monkey loses his camera and then loses Clarabella.

This delightful story for young readers is about adventure, loss and the power of friendship.

THE SERIES: MONKEY’S GREAT ADVENTURES

Afloat in Venice is the first in the series *Monkey’s Great Adventures* written and illustrated by Tina Wilson. *Monkey’s Great Adventures* is a children’s picture book series that revolves around a small toy monkey photographed in locations all around the world, in real-life scenarios and with bespoke hand-knitted characters and props. It is a graphic novel style adventure series for young children who believe that their own favourite toys are real.

Imaginative, nostalgic and quirky, each book in the series features Monkey, who finds himself in all sorts of scrapes where he learns about himself and the world around him.



**A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR - TINA WILSON**

In 2013 my partner, Matt Ottley, gave me a little toy monkey for my birthday. I started taking Monkey, as we called him, with me when I travelled away. On my first trip, to the indigenous communities of Djaradin/Lombadina in Western Australia where I was undertaking art workshops, I sent amusing photos back to Matt to show what Monkey had been up to. It was just light-hearted fun, but I found other people wanting to get involved; Airline hosts gave Monkey his own food and addressed him as 'Sir'. People played along, pretending that Monkey was real. This was when the seed of an idea came to me. Perhaps I could share Monkey's adventures with a wider audience.

My mother, who had always loved knitting, was surprised when I asked her to knit a pair of shorts for Monkey, and before I knew it she had put her quirky touch to knitted sunglasses, shoes, toothbrushes and toothpaste. Other things followed, not necessarily to do with Monkey's personal being: food, caterpillars, rocket ships, aliens, and lots of potential friends for Monkey.

We had so much fun working together - Mum sending packages in the post that were full of strange, knitted things and me photographing Monkey with them.

Monkey started to have a life of his own and I was reconnecting with both my childhood and my mother. I realised there was potentially great healing value in the concept of childlike playfulness for other adults as well. Through Monkey I rediscovered the importance of taking time out to imagine, daydream and have fun.

Monkey has been to many amazing places; Hong Kong, South Korea, Czech Republic, Paris – but he still loves being at home, particularly now with the Covid pandemic having restricted his travelling. Currently he is busy growing tomatoes in his vegetable garden and star gazing at the night sky to spot UFOs.





ENGLISH

✧ Questions

After the reading of the book, encourage the discussion of the children's recollection of the story through questions, such as:

- Where did Monkey go for a holiday?
- How did he get there?
- What was the special present that Monkey was given before he went on his holiday?
- Where did Monkey meet Clarabella?
- Clarabella showed Monkey around Venice. What were some of the things they did?
- How did they get around Venice? Why didn't they go in a car?
- What happened to Monkey's camera?
- How do you think Monkey would have felt when his camera fell into the gondola?
- What did Clarabella do?
- What did Monkey do?
- What were the animals telling Monkey when he asked them if they had seen Clarabella?
- How do you think Monkey would have felt at the end of the story?
- What has Monkey learnt from this adventure?
- On the cover and title page it reads Monkey's Great Adventures before the title, *Afloat in Venice*. What does this tell us? What do you think Monkey might get up to in future adventures?
- What did you notice about the way the illustrator has created these illustrations? What things can you find that have been knitted?
- The illustrator has used a combination of framed illustrations and illustrations that are 'bleeding off the page' (where the illustration goes to the edges of the page). What other techniques have been used in the layout of the illustrations and text? e.g. speech bubbles, the clicks of the camera, the different placement of the text...
- How many bridges can you find in the book? What does this tell us about Venice?

Note: A detailed page-by-page list of questions focussing on visual literacy is included at the end of these activities.





✧ Mime Retell

With structure, mime is a fabulous way to retell a story. Students follow teacher instructions and can all participate at the same time. The students start by miming Monkey packing for his holiday, freezing in position on a given signal. The teacher can prompt the next part of the plot by asking the students “What happened next?”. Again, students mime this and then freeze at the given signal before the next plot prompt. This activity can be done for as much of the story as you wish.

✧ Puppet Retell

Students make a popsicle stick puppet of Monkey or Clarabella. In pairs, use the puppets to re-enact parts of the story. Take Monkey and Clarabella on another adventure.

✧ Good Morning

When Clarabella introduces herself to Monkey she says “Buongiorno”. What does this mean? What language is it?

Do you or any of your family speak another language? Make a chart of all of the ways that people in your class say good morning/hello.

Can you do the same for goodbye?

✧ Words from Italy

Lots of words that we use are originally from Italy. Can you add to these...
cappacunio, gelato, lasagna, pasta, pizza, salami, cello, piano, ballet, balloon...

✧ Interesting Words Chart

The students and/or teacher identify any words in the story or related to the story that are unfamiliar e.g. afloat, alley, buongiorno, canals, devastated, disappeared, floating city, gondola, gondolier, magical, oar, sight seeing...

✧ Letter writing

Write a letter to Monkey referring to some of the good and bad things that happened in the story. Tell Monkey something about you and a time that you lost something special.

✧ Afloat in Venice music soundtrack

Compare and contrast the music and the book. What does the music bring to the story? For more information about the music see *In the Composer's Own Words* later in these notes.



✧ Class innovation on another Monkey Adventure

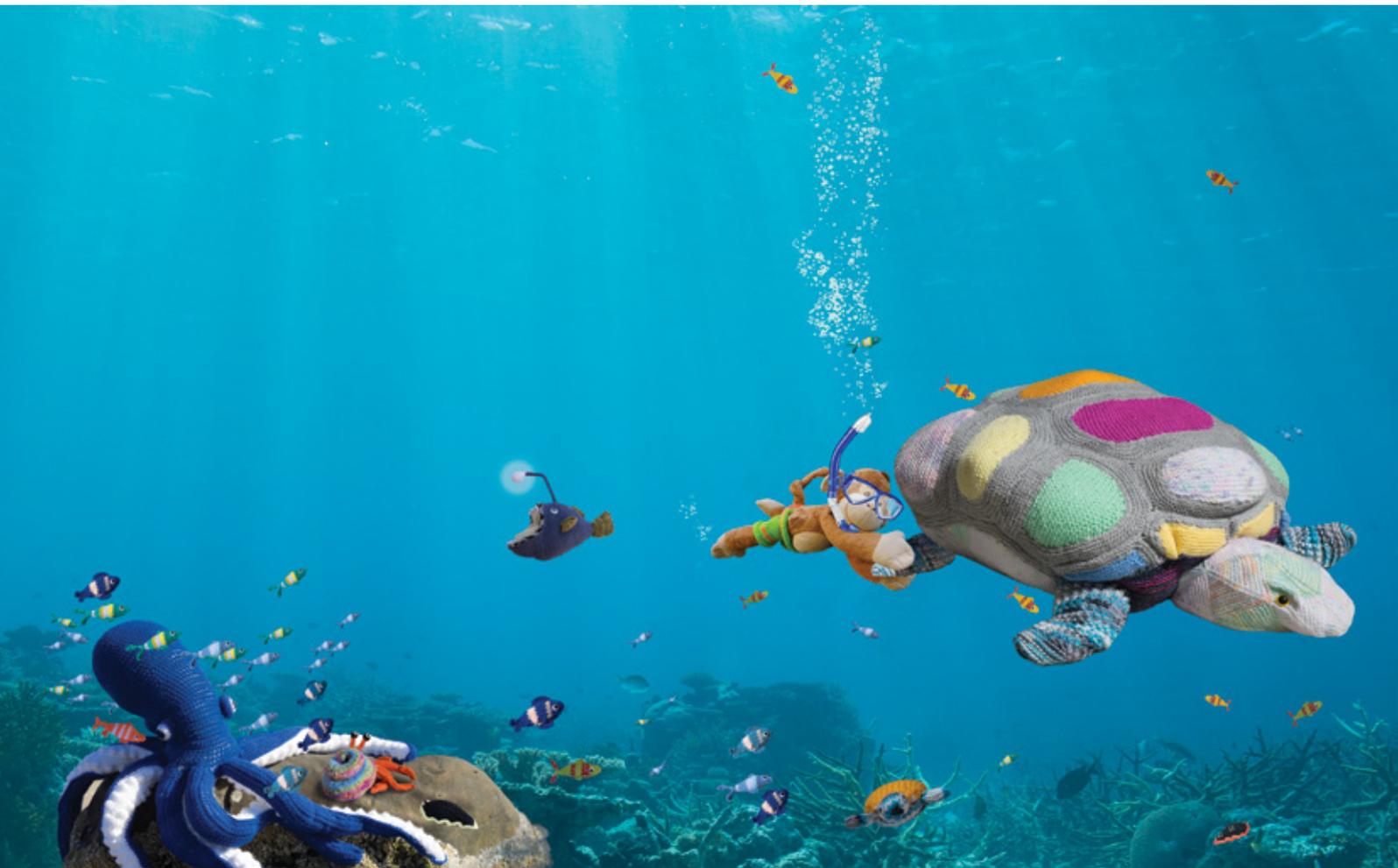
Where could Monkey go next? The class to contribute ideas for the teacher to write a class story. Model the writing in front of the class.

As a class decide:

- Where will Monkey visit? e.g. your school, a farm, the zoo etc
- How will Monkey get to there?
- Who will he meet? (maybe the class mascot)
- What will they do together?
- What could go wrong?
- How will this be resolved?

The story could be written/typed as a class book with each student illustrating a part of the story.

Note: The below image is a sneak preview from Book 2 in the Monkey's Great Adventure Series. What do you think this book will be about?





HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Venice is a city of palaces and churches built on more than 100 islands. These islands are linked by 400 bridges with canals instead of roads; and boats instead of cars and buses.

- What evidence did you see of this in *Afloat in Venice*?
- Locate Venice on a globe/map/digital application e.g. Google Earth
- Which country is Venice in? Which continent?
- Which hemisphere is it in?

On a map, locate northern New South Wales in Australia where Monkey lives. Trace Monkey's journey from there to Venice.

Looking at the illustrations in *Afloat in Venice*, list as many features of Venice as you can e.g. water, bridges, some buildings like palaces... Compare Venice to where you live.

Compare the forms of transport in Venice to where you live.





THE ARTS

Drama

Students make the shape of the following objects from the story:

- a) Individually
 - A flag
 - Monkey climbing up the steps
 - A full moon

- b) In partners
 - A bridge
 - A gondola
 - A camera

Individually, students show the following emotions using facial and body expressions:

- Excited about going on a holiday
- Frightened when Monkey was alone amongst a crowd of people
- Surprised when the camera slipped from Monkey's grasp
- Exhausted when Monkey got to the top of the stairs

Tableau

In groups of 4 or 5 students to choose a scene from the book and arrange themselves in a freeze position to replicate the scene. The audience is to guess which scene it is. This is always best to have a group model first.





Music

The music composed by Matt Ottley for *Afloat in Venice* conveys a variety of emotions that Monkey was experiencing while on his adventure in Venice.

Play 3 or 4 sections of the music to the students and have them draw or write a few words in response to the music. Some suggested sections are:

- The introduction (excited) 0.00.00 – 0.00.59
- The aeroplane trip (ominous) 0.01.40 – 0.01.53
- The boat trip (relaxed) 0.02.11 – 0.02.30
- "...that seemed to grow straight out of the sea" (curious) 0.05.34 – 0.05.56
- "Monkey was devastated." (frightened) 0.06.52 – 0.07.05
- "...he could see the whole of Venice." (hope) 0.08.28 – 0.08.45
- Asking the friends if they had seen Clarabella (sad) 0.09.41 – 0.10.04
- Clarabella came back to Monkey (joy) 0.10.24 – 0.10.33

The piano, violin, viola, cello, double bass, French horn and clarinet are the instruments used in this composition. Discuss if anyone is familiar with any of the instruments.

Can the students recognise when the piano is playing? Any other instruments?

HEALTH (PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH)

Emotions

Monkey experienced a range of feelings throughout his adventure. Below is a list of emotions experienced by Monkey, Clarabella or the other animals. Choose the emotions which are suitable for the age group. Discuss the meaning of emotions and when we might feel like this. Students could be given an emotion each or in pairs. They could identify when this emotion was evident in the story.

Amazed	Confused	Exhausted	Kind	Sad
Anxious	Curious	Flabbergasted	Lonely	Scared
Apprehensive	Delighted	Frightened	Nervous	Surprised
Astonished	Determined	Frustrated	Overwhelmed	Thoughtful
Brave	Disappointed	Happy	Proud	Tired
Cheerful	Enthusiastic	Interested	Relaxed	Upset
Confident	Excited	Intrigued	Relieved	Worried

What would you do?

Monkey was feeling devastated when he dropped his camera. What could you do if you see someone who is devastated?



Keeping Safe

During the story there were times when Monkey was feeling safe. There were also some times when he may have been feeling unsafe.

When was Monkey feeling safe? Why? Clues?

When was monkey feeling unsafe? Why? Clues?

Have you ever been lost? How did you feel? What did you do?

What could Monkey have done if he thought he was lost?

Role play asking an adult for help.

SCIENCE

Discuss the 5 senses – hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch.

Think about Monkey's adventure in Venice. Do a class brainstorm for each of the senses.

- What is something Monkey saw? e.g. lots of bridges, gondolas, rooftops, gondoliers
- What is something Monkey heard? e.g. music in the distance, people chattering, water sloshing
- What is something Monkey smelt? e.g. pizza
- What is something Monkey touched? e.g. the pipes he climbed up, his camera, the book staircase
- What is something Monkey tasted? e.g. pizza, toothpaste

As a class write a line for each sense. For example:

In Venice

Monkey saw lots of beautiful bridges crossing the canals

Monkey heard sloshing as oars sliced through the water

Monkey touched Clarabella's ears as he climbed on her shoulders

Monkey smelt the hot pizza that was served on the gondola

Monkey tasted toothpaste before he went to sleep

It was the best holiday!

Students to think of their favourite holiday and brainstorm ideas about their holiday place with each sense. Then write a senses poem as above.

In

I saw

I heard

I touched

I smelt

I tasted

A closing line eg. I had so much fun!



OTHER ACTIVITIES

Class Buddy/Mascot (soft toy)

A class buddy would be an ideal addition to the classroom after having read *Afloat in Venice*. The choice of what to choose is endless! The name of the buddy could be decided in a class discussion.

Each week/weekend one student takes the class buddy home and enjoys time with it – e.g. taking it to the park, playing games, having it at the dinner table etc. Students could create a photographic diary of their time together in for example, 5 photos. Students could write journal entries from either the student's or the buddy's point of view.

In class, students could share something special that they did with/for the buddy. A short question/answer session with the class may also be appropriate.

Spot the Knitted Creatures

See how many times you can find the seagull. This seagull will also be appearing in Book 2. Many of the knitted creatures throughout the Monkey's Great Adventure series will reappear in later books, after all, animals can travel too! How many times do you see mice? Have fun looking!

Special Guest

Invite a special guest e.g. parent, grandparent to demonstrate how to knit and show examples of what they have knitted. The class could compile some questions to ask the guest.

Favourite toy

- Did you have a favourite childhood toy that could never leave your side?
- Do you still have this toy today?
- Why did you love it and how does it make you feel?
- Are there any special memories, funny or tragic anecdotes you can share e.g. how your toy got lost, perhaps it got to go somewhere special with you?

Using one of many available digital storytelling apps students replicate the illustrator's process by taking photographs of their favourite toy in, for example, 4 different places. Write a sentence or phrase for each image.

Other books with soft toys and photographed illustrations

The following books also have a soft toy as the main character and have photographic illustrations. If they can be located, they would be great to compare and contrast with Monkey's adventures.

- *Dougal the Garbage Dump Bear*, Matt Dray, Penguin Books Australia, 2003
- *Dougal and Bumble and the Long Walk Home*, Matt Dray, Penguin Books Australia, 2006



FRIENDSHIP

What Makes a Good Friend?

Monkey found a friend in Clarabella.

Think Pair Share: In pairs students take turns to answer these questions.

- What makes a good friend?
- What do you like to do with your friends?

After this, students could share their thoughts (in a circle) with the whole class.

Responses to these questions could be drawn and displayed in the class.

Other books

Clancy and Millie and the Very Fine House, Libby Gleeson & Freya Blackwood, Little Hare Books, 2009

Lost and Found, Oliver Jeffers, HarperCollins Children's Books, 2005

Rose Meets Mr Wintergarten, Bob Graham, Walker Books Australia, 2004

HOLIDAYS

Monkey went on a holiday. Students discuss where they have been on a holiday. Where was their favourite holiday?

Make a class pictograph of the students' favourite holiday destinations. The destinations could be displayed on a map.

Other books

Old Tom's Holiday, Leigh Hobbs, Hardie Grant Children's Publishing, 2016

Are We There Yet?, Alison Lester, Penguin Group, 2004

TRAVEL

Monkey travelled by plane and boat to get to his destination. Discuss how the students travelled to their destinations. Again, this could be displayed as a pictograph or a bar graph.

Monkey was a tourist in Venice. What are the sorts of things tourists might do when they go to a new place? If a tourist came to your town, what sorts of things could they do?

Compare *Afloat in Venice* with one of the books below, e.g. *Pig the Tourist*. Discuss the similarities and differences between the two books and /or the characters. Show this as a Venn Diagram

Other books

Pig the Tourist, Aaron Blabey, Scholastic Australia, 2019

Mr Chicken All Over Australia, Leigh Hobbs, Allen & Unwin, 2019

Mr Chicken Arriva a Roma, Leigh Hobbs, Allen & Unwin, 2016

Mr Chicken Lands on London, Leigh Hobbs, Allen & Unwin, 2014

Mr Chicken Goes to Paris, Leigh Hobbs Allen & Unwin, 2009



LOSS

Monkey lost his camera and he also thought he had lost a friend. Tina Wilson thought she had lost Monkey. (See 'Monkey is Alive' in Tina's notes) Have you ever lost something special? How did you feel? What do you do to make yourself feel better in times like this? e.g. breathe, try to imagine finding your something special...

Look at the page when Monkey realises that Clarabella had disappeared. What did the illustrator do to convey Monkey's feelings? Show me what your facial expression would be if you lost something special. Now use your whole body, including facial expression, to show me how you would feel if you lost something special.

Paint a picture of when you lost something. Think about your body position. What colours what could you use in your painting to match how you were feeling?

Other books

Stick Man, Julia Donaldson and Alex Scheffler, Scholastic UK, 2017

Oh, Albert!, Davina Bell & Sara Acton, Viking, 2016

Max, Marc Martin, Puffin Books, 2014

Where Are You, Banana?, Sofie Laguna & Craig Smith, Allen & Unwin, 2013

Amy and Louis, Libby Gleeson & Freya Blackwood, Scholastic Australia, 2007

PERSEVERANCE

Other books

The Dreamer, Il Sung Na, Chronicle Books, 2018

Gary, Leila Rudge, Walker Books Australia, 2017

Little Koala Lost, Blaze Kwaymillina & Jess Racklyeft, Omnibus Books Scholastic Australia, 2016

The Very Noisy Bear, Nick Bland, Scholastic Australia, 2015



READING 'AFLOAT IN VENICE'

Before reading a book aloud to students, it is best to have previously read it aloud yourself. It is preferable to first read the book to the students for pure enjoyment, ie. with no interruptions or questions, before reading the book again focussing on various aspects of it. Asking a variety of questions, both open and closed, can enhance the students understanding of the story.

Following is a variety of questions, many of them based on the illustrations. Teachers can choose which questions are suitable for their students and when to ask them.

These questions may be particularly useful for homeschool teaching, small group work or one-on-one teaching.

QUESTIONS

Who is the main character? How do we know? Are there any other characters? Who are they? Where is this story set? How do we know? Where is Venice?

Front Cover

Show the students the cover. What can you see? What do you think the book is about? What makes you say this?

Why has the author called it *Afloat in Venice*?

What can you tell about Venice from the front cover?

Who can we see on the front cover?

Why has the illustrator positioned Monkey so that we can't see his face?

What is Monkey holding? What else?

Where is Monkey?

Front Endpapers

The endpapers are the two pages fixed to the inside of the front cover of a hard covered book.

What can you see on the front endpapers? How are these pictures different from the front cover? Why do you think they are in black and white? What can you see in these pictures? Are these pictures in other illustrations in the book? Why do you think the illustrator has chosen to put these pictures on the front endpapers?





Back of front endpapers (Imprint Page) – pI (Title Page)

Who/What are the following?

- The Title
- The Author
- The Illustrator
- The Publisher
- The Knitter
- The Composer
- The Dedications

What do you notice about the dedications? Why do you think the dedications have been set out in the way that they are? How do we know which dedication is written by which person?

What objects are on these pages? Why do you think they are there?



pp 2-3

Monkey was going on a holiday

What is happening in these six framed illustrations? Why has the illustrator chosen to have six illustrations rather than one double page spread or two single page illustrations?

pp 4-5

He wanted to make sure he had everything he would need.

Where do you think Monkey is? What else is on the bed?

pp 6-7

It took almost two exhausting days by aeroplane, ...

What is happening on these pages? Where is he going?

pp 8-9

Finally, Monkey was in Venice!

Where is Monkey? What can he see? Have we seen this page before? (cover)

pp 10-11

In an alley, just outside his room, he set out to explore.

What do you notice about the text on these pages? Why is some of the text in bubbles? What is the cat saying? Is that what we say in Australia? What do you think Buongiorno means? What language is it? Who is the cat speaking to? How do we know? What do we call it when two or more people are talking to each other? (conversation)



pp 12-13

Here, let me help you.

What is happening on page 12? What is the cat's name? Why do you think the author chose the name Clarabella for the cat - and not a name like Clare? The text says 'Monkey took his first photo.'

What did Monkey take a photo of? How do you know? When photographing or drawing something from above, it is known as a "birds-eye view". Why do you think it is called this?

pp 14-15

Clarabella led...

What do you notice about where Monkey and Clarabella are in the 3 small images? Can you describe the 'magical adventure' that has been shown in this illustration? Why has the text 'on a magical adventure' been placed where it is? (It is a reading path which, together with the bridge, is leading our eye to the cyclic adventure of Clarabella and Monkey.)? How many times do you see Monkey and Clarabella in the large photo? You may like to check this with the movie.

pp 16-17

through a floating city ...

Why is it described as a floating city? Is it really floating? What are things that you have seen floating on water - in rivers, lakes, the ocean, pools etc? Do you know what this boat is called? (a gondola) A gondolier is a person who drives a gondola. The gondolier stands at the back (the stern) of the gondola facing the front (the bow) and rows with a long oar. Tell me about this gondolier. Which direction is the gondola going? What are some things that the gondolier may have seen before he went past Clarabella and Monkey? Where are Monkey and Clarabella? Why do you think they are in a gondola? Where is Monkey? Why do you think he is on Clarabella's shoulders?

pp 18-19

that seemed to grow straight out of the sea.

Where are Clarabella and Monkey? What are they doing? Think of as many verbs as you can. What seems to be growing 'straight out of the sea'? Can you think of any things that you have seen that look like they are growing straight out of water?

pp 20-21

Click!

What are some of the things that Monkey has taken photos of? Can we see these photos? Tell us about the food that Monkey and Clarabella are about to eat. Why do you think they would be eating pizza? The text on page 21 says '... but it was starting to get late.' How do we know from the illustration that it is starting to get late? What do we call this type of moon?



pp 22-23

Monkey wanted to take just one more photo.

Where are Monkey and Clarabella? What might happen next? How might Monkey be feeling? How might Clarabella be feeling? Why?

pp 24-25

Suddenly Monkey's camera...

Describe what is happening on these two pages? How would Monkey be feeling?

pp 26-27

Monkey was devastated.

What does devastated mean? What are some other words to describe how monkey might be feeling? How does the illustration show us that Monkey is feeling like this? (Monkey is small amongst lots of tall people; there is little colour in this illustration – dark silhouettes and shadows) Why did the illustrator do this?

pp 28-29

He began searching...

What is Monkey searching for? Where does he look? What do you notice about the placement of the three small square images in relation to the text? What are some other low places that Monkey could have searched? What are some other high places?

pp 30-31

until he was so high he could see the whole of Venice.

What things could Monkey see from here? How might Monkey be feeling? What high places have you been to? How did you feel?

pp 32-33

Have you seen Clarabella?

Who does Monkey ask if they have seen Clarabella? Why don't these animals help Monkey? How do you think Monkey would be feeling?

pp 34-35

Monkey was frightened and alone.

By looking at the illustration, how do we know that Monkey is feeling frightened and alone? What might he be doing? Can you remember a time that you have felt frightened and/or alone? Have a look at the colour of the wall on the left hand side and then the colour of the wall on the right hand side of the illustration. What do you notice? Why do you think it is lighter on the right hand side? (The illustrator is foreshadowing that there is some hope - something good is about to happen.) What do you think might happen next? What is the evidence that this may happen?



pp 36-37

Clarabella! Where have you been?
How might Monkey be feeling now?
How might Clarabella be feeling?
The final text on this double page spread says “Monkey had found something even more precious than his camera...” What do you think Monkey has found? Can you see another animal on this page? Is this animal on any other pages in the book?



pp 38-39

... he had found a friend.
What has happened on this page?
Who do you think has taken the photo on page 38? What do you think the photo is of? What do you notice about the size of the last illustration in the story? Why do you think it is like this? What can you see in this illustration?

p 40-back of back endpapers

Knitting Inspiration and Something Extra

Back endpapers

These are the two pages fixed to the inside of the back cover of a hard covered book.

What can you see on the back endpapers? Are the back endpapers the same as the front endpapers? How are they different? What do you notice about some of the animals on the back endpapers?

Back Cover

What is happening on the back cover?
Have you seen this illustration before?
What written information is on the back cover? Why do we have a blurb on the back of a book?





BEHIND THE SCENES

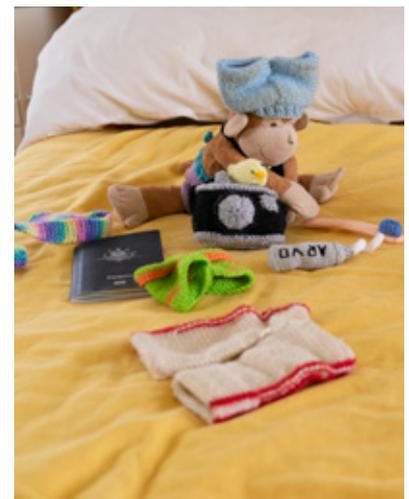
In the Author/Illustrator's Own Words

From conception to actual print *Afloat in Venice* has taken over four years to complete.

It began with a simple idea, to write a story for Monkey in Venice. Matt and I had booked a trip for 2017 (my first time to Europe) and were forced to head off to the airport eight hours early because of imminent flooding. We made it out of our home just in time. It was surreal to arrive in Venice and be surrounded by canals, and then to be receiving messages from our friends who were also surrounded by water of a different kind, facing one of the worst floods in 100 years.

Prior to going to Venice, I had spent months researching and drafting different story ideas, but nothing seemed to work. When I expressed my frustrations to Matt he said, "Of course you're finding it hard, you've never been to Venice." I realised that I had to wait until I was there for the right idea to come along.

I did however decide on the main character for the story, Clarabella – a white cat, as I needed my mum to knit it in time for me to take it with me in my suitcase. She knitted two white cats, one in a sitting position, and the other with moveable legs so I could change the positions. She also knitted a brown cat, some mice, a seagull, a suitcase, toothpaste, a camera, slices of pizza... and of course some clothes for Monkey. Our suitcases were filled with knitted things.



For the first two days of our trip I went out searching for inspiration and locations to photograph Monkey. I still didn't know what I was looking for so I took hundreds of photos of Monkey in different places and doing different things. In the evenings I would look through them to see if an idea could come to me. Slowly, a story formed... Monkey, like many other tourists, was there to take photos with his new camera. He was so caught up in getting the right shot that he had forgotten one of the best things about travel; meeting new people and making friends.



Once that idea came to me, I wrote the bones of the story, then we scouted Venice for the best locations and spent the rest of our time photographing potential scenes. I took over 2000 photographs in total.

Where possible I photographed Monkey and his friends in-situ in real locations, as this is part of the process I enjoy, the challenge of getting Monkey to look real. I have a small wire frame that I made which helps Monkey stand but didn't take it with me to Venice so I had to get Matt to hold Monkey up for me. When it is impossible to put Monkey in a location then I use Photoshop to add him later, and I also use Photoshop to remove Matt's hands and arm from the photos, as well as people and other objects from the photos that can be distracting.

My creative process is very fluid throughout, my rough plan constantly changes as the photos themselves begin to inspire different ideas, and sometimes the photos make me go back and change the story.

Photographing in real life scenarios allows me to interact with the environment and the people in it. I love the reactions and interactions of people watching me set up the scenes, sometimes people are oblivious, and other times they take part in the process by pretending Monkey is real. Monkey was very lucky to have gondola drivers and lots of tourists wave as they passed by our window each morning.

We were very surprised when I sat Clarabella the Cat down on the street one afternoon, and a local cat started rubbing against her. It found the knitted cat very intriguing. I used these real-life photos for the endpapers of the book.





CHOOSING THE CHARACTERS - CATS IN VENICE

In deciding upon a main character for Monkey to meet in *Afloat in Venice* Tina did some research into the animals and birds that have lived (or still live) in Venice. She came across some very interesting stories about cats and learned that Venice's streets were once filled with wild cats living side by side with Venetians. She thought a cat would be the perfect friend for Monkey.

According to Ione Wang from Culture Trip cats were brought into Venice by traders from the Middle East and were valued by the local population for their usefulness in keeping away rats, in houses as well as on merchant ships. Special breeds were introduced in the 13th century that were adept hunters and were credited with helping to save the city from a plague in 1348 by keeping disease carrying rats at bay.

The following website has some interesting notes about the history of cats in Venice, including some of its most famous cats.

<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/italy/articles/what-happened-to-venices-street-cats/>

However, since the late 1990's, Venice's cat populations have been decreasing in size. Below is a link to a wonderful, informative website by Jeff Cotton that goes into great detail about the disappearance of Venice's cats, including explanations for the venetian cat's dwindling numbers and also the responses by Venetians and visiting tourists.

<http://www.fictionalcities.co.uk/veniceandcats.htm>



When Tina visited Venice in 2017 she stayed for eight days, allowing time to wander the amazing city. She did come across cats, but they were few and far between and many of them appeared to be owned by locals. Clarabella drew a lot of attention from the local cats, much to the surprise of onlookers (see endpapers).

The name Clarabella was chosen because it is a derivation of Clarabelle, meaning dazzling; bright; brilliant (in latin origin). Its roots are in Latin; *clāra*, feminine of *clārus* clear + *bella*, feminine of *bellus* beautiful. Although not necessarily a venetian name, it is based on Clara which is a name known to exist in Venice in the 1600s.

Interestingly "Clarabella" is also the name given to an eight-foot flute stop on an organ.



THE MUSIC

Afloat in Venice includes original music composed by [Matt Ottley](#) and an additional version specifically narrated for the visually impaired. The music, performed by members of the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra, is fun and transporting and can be listened to with or without the book.

The music can be downloaded for free from [Matt's website via this link](#).

The production of the CD for inclusion in *Afloat in Venice* has been funded in part by Create NSW, and copies of this book will be donated to children's hospitals around Australia and selected not-for-profits/charities working with children, refugees and adults with disabilities.

Inspired by his trip to Venice, composer Matt Ottley, wanted to create a musical soundtrack that helps bring Monkey to life. He had wanted, for a very long time, to write a piano piece that had an upbeat ragtime feel to it and this story was a perfect vehicle for that.

In the Composer's Own Words

"For *Afloat in Venice* I created a musical work for piano, string quintet (two violins, viola, cello and double bass), French horn and clarinet.

The opening solo piano has a ragtime feel to it to give a sense of innocence and naivety. It's all about the sheer joy of life. When the narrator says "Monkey was going on a holiday" and we hear the strings doing a very faint tremolo, the piano comes in with a tune that contains an interval (minor third) that is very common in nursery rhyme tunes. I chose that deliberately to reference music that children the world over will be familiar with, as this creates a sense of familiarity and comfort. There is a melody that incorporates the main tune from the opening piano section, but also has within it this minor third throughout the rest of the work.

As Monkey sets out on his long plane trip around the world a French horn comes in. I chose a French horn because it has such a warm, mellow sound but can also be quite mournful, which is important later on in the story. The clarinet, similarly, can sound warm and jazzy as well, but can also be very melancholic.

When Monkey arrives in Venice the music follows him up a very long staircase to reach the top of a bridge. The French Horn sighs with a huge amount of relief when Monkey has finally made it to the top. The full ensemble comes back in with the original theme, full of excitement at the prospect of Monkey's adventures in Venice.

When Monkey meets Clarabella and says he is taking photos with his new camera the French horn comes in with the nursery rhyme type theme, and then that theme is combined with a sense of exuberance and fun as the music takes off on an adventure through the floating world of Venice.



When Clarabella says “Be careful Monkey” (when Monkey tries to take his one last photo) we hear the cello and double bass coming in with a low tremolo (a building rumbling sound full of tension). We know just from this sound alone that something possibly bad is about to happen. When Monkey drops his camera there’s a big discordant thump on the piano – perhaps this is Monkey’s heart skipping a beat – and we hear in slow motion the camera falling through the air into the gondola below.

The music now changes mood dramatically as Monkey finds himself alone. When he goes out searching for Clarabella the melody we hear on the French horn and clarinet is based on the words “Clarabella, where are you?” (this comes in after the words of narration “high and low”). Initially the French horn and clarinet are just singing “Clarabella”, and then in various arrangements of “Clarabella, where are you?”

Then we get to a moment of silence where Monkey starts to cry. Silence is sometimes very important in music because it makes the music that surrounds it much more powerful. The silence represents the fact that Monkey has no idea what to do now, he is completely lost and alone and doesn’t know where to go. But then, we hear the click of the camera (plucked string on a violin) and the joyous exuberance of the opening theme comes in again as Monkey is reunited with Clarabella.”

THE KNITTING

All of the characters in *Afloat in Venice*, besides Monkey, are hand-knitted by Tina’s mother, Joan Wilson, who lives on a small farm in Snake Valley, Victoria. It has been a fabulous way for them to stay connected during COVID while living in different states and has given Joan a sense of purpose for her knitting, making her feel good knowing she can contribute to Tina’s creative endeavours.

Joan started knitting when she was about eight years old. She taught herself to knit through trial and error – her mother wouldn’t teach her and said she couldn’t do it, so of course Joan had to prove her wrong. Joan had spent years watching her older sisters knitting, but they had left home around the time she started learning.

Joan loves to knit toys, the stranger the better, but hates knitting things that have more than 100 stitches on them, such as jumpers etc. She is quite a fast knitter and Clarabella the cat took about three days for her to complete. Joan mainly knits whenever she has a spare moment, mostly at night while watching television.

At the back of the book are links to knitting patterns for the key characters so people can make their own knitted toys. These pages also acknowledge the original pattern makers for their designs.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

Tina Wilson is an author, illustrator and artist with a passion for books.

Tina has worked as a freelance artist/designer across Australia (including Allen and Unwin, Harper Collins and Bryce Courtenay, illustrating her first children's book for renowned author Jill Morris in 2003).

In 2007 Tina created Western Australia's premier art prize: The Black Swan Prize for Portraiture (now the Lester Prize). In 2013, Tina was awarded the City of Perth Premier's Active Citizenship Award for her contribution to the arts and in 2018 was honoured to become Patron for the Lester Prize.

Following its success, Tina resigned in 2017 to return to her own creative practice, with a focus on writing, illustrating, and publishing books. Tina moves between painting, drawing, writing, curating...and drinking chai! Tina now lives in a rainforest in the Northern Rivers, New South Wales with her partner, Matt Ottley.

Matt has collaborated with Tina on her picture book series, *Monkey's Great Adventures*, by composing music to accompany the books. The music will be performed live to audiences as part of the popular Sound of Picture Books initiative, a partnership between Matt Ottley, The Literature Centre and the West Australian Symphony Orchestra.

For more information visit: www.tinawilsonartist.com

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Matt Ottley, an internationally acclaimed illustrator, writer and composer, is also an endorsed Yamaha musician, plays flamenco guitar and piano and composes music for picture books.

As well as composing the music for *Monkey's Great Adventures*, Matt has also composed music for a variety of picture books he has illustrated including:

- *Dumazi and the Big Yellow Lion* - Valanga Khoza and Matt Ottley, Scholastic, 2019
- *The Incredible Freedom Machines* - Kirli Saunders and Matt Ottley, Scholastic, 2018
- *Teacup* - Rebecca Young and Matt Ottley, Scholastic, 2016
- *Parachute* - Danny Parker and Matt Ottley, Hardie Grant, 2013
- *Tree* - Danny Parker and Matt Ottley, Hardie Grant, 2012

For more information visit: www.mattottley.com



ABOUT THE KNITTER

Joan Wilson is a proud stay at home mum, having raised five children on her family farm in Snake Valley. A passionate ‘crafter’ she has tried her hand at just about every craft form, from leatherworking, painting, tapestry, beadwork, making dolls out of air-drying clay, sculpting, decoupage ... the only thing she doesn’t like doing is cooking! She’d rather be knitting something than making dinner.

An author herself, Joan is particularly interested in local history and has written about the goldfields in her local area of Snake Valley, Victoria and produced a number of books for the Snake Valley Historical Society, including one about the Britannia quartz mining disaster.

Joan loves gardening, history, coins, crafts and collecting things.

For more information about Monkey’s Great Adventures go to Monkey’s website.

www.monkeysgreat.com





Thank you for reading these teacher resources. We hope they have been helpful and that your students will enjoy 'Afloat in Venice'.

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