



# On the river

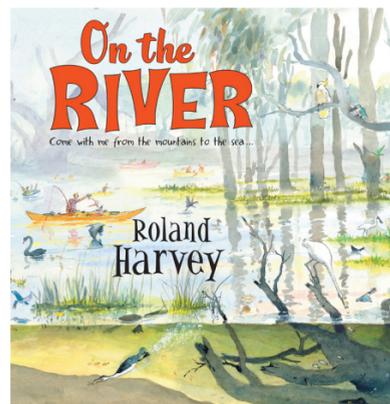
## Using quality literature springboard

English  
Stage 4  
Years 7-8



### On the river

HARVEY, Roland  
Allen & Unwin, NSW, 2016  
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**USER LEVEL:** Stage 4  
**KLA:** English  
**SYLLABUS:** English K-10  
**SCIS 1761562** \$24.95

### Related texts:

- *All the way to W.A.* by Roland Harvey
- *In the bush* by Roland Harvey
- *To the top end* by Roland Harvey

### Resources:

- [On the river teaching notes](#)

Learning and teaching activities in this springboard are centred on outcomes and content from the [NSW English K-10 syllabus](#) and the [English Textual Concepts resource](#).

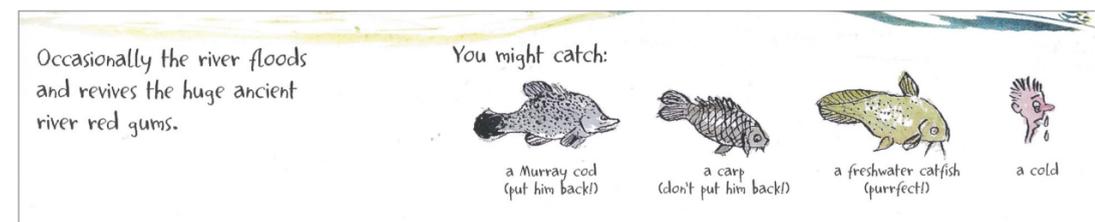
## What is it about?

*On the river* is a picture book that tells the story of the Murray River from the mountains to the sea. The beautiful watercolour images are supported by playful text that shows the many functions of the river, bringing it to life. The *representation* of the river creates a *narrative* that involves many characters and acknowledges environmental conflicts and changes over time. Whilst the book provides a subtle message about the importance of the river to Australians, with historical and factual information, it primarily engages readers through its highly detailed and joyful imagery and the humorous tone evoked through wordplay and intertextual references.

This text is appropriate for teaching students about *representation*, *narrative* and *intertextuality*. It could also be used to show an alternative way to present an argument and can readily support learning of *code and convention*; *connotation*, *imagery and symbol*; *genre*; *perspective*; *point of view*; *style* and *theme*. It can also be used to address cross-curricular priorities and capabilities including *Sustainability*, *Critical and Creative thinking*, *Literacy*, and *Civics and citizenship*. K. Hodkinson

## Why is this important? Why does it matter?

Harvey's representation of the river follows his previous *representation* of Australian landscapes through picture books. He is obviously passionate about the Murray River and portrays its life through imagery including the river, flora, fauna, townships, water transport and industry. However, the animal and human interactions with the river are central to each page and build understanding of the important place of the river in Australia. Diversity, busyness and joy are conveyed through the detailed images, which include fisherman being eaten by monsters, skiers losing their swimming costumes, and taking selfies with a tortoise. The humour is further conveyed through the language, such as puns (e.g. *You might catch: a Murray cod [put him back!] ... a carp [don't put him back!] ... a freshwater catfish [purrfect!] ... a cold*) and, at times, the laconic tone and illustrations. This is evident in the *SKI ETIQUETTE* vignettes, as a skier goes through a tree: *good! ... Not good ... Worse*. There are other cultural indicators to be considered with the *representation* including Aboriginal history and language, inventions such as paddle steamers, and the recreational and agricultural uses of the river, along with elements of *intertextuality* (e.g. references to Ned Kelly and Banjo Patterson). These, combined with the personification of the river, including the writing of a letter to its friend Darling concerning its poor health; establish the *narrative* through the text based on the river being viewed as a character. Students can consider their own experience and culture in relation to their response to the *narrative*, along with both the ideas and values implied through the text and how it attempts to engage our emotions and intellect. Students can see the uniqueness of these elements being combined to create an entertaining *narrative* about a cultural icon and may be asked to experiment with the many features included in this text to create their own.





# On the river (continued)

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Roland Harvey - discussing the artwork for the book *in the bush* by Roland Harvey videos

### How do I use the text (and learning processes) to teach the textual concepts of *representation*, *narrative* and *intertextuality*?

#### Intertextuality activity:

Explain to students that the use of *intertextuality* enhances and adds layers of meaning to texts. In this text, *intertextuality* adds meaning through our history, alluding to our cultural identity and values, and even creating humour at times, such as the pictorial *representation* of Noah's Ark in the image depicting the town of Mannum. Ask students to consider the new interpretations that the intertextual reference brings to the *representation* of the river and the *narrative*. Then consider how their own experience affects their response to the text. Complete rows on the table about the Mannum page together as a class. Then break students into groups to identify other references throughout the book and the types of meaning they add to a reading. After completing the table and having a class discussion, ask students to write a paragraph analysing the way their own experience impacts on their response to this text and its use of various intertextual references (*connecting* and *engaging personally*).

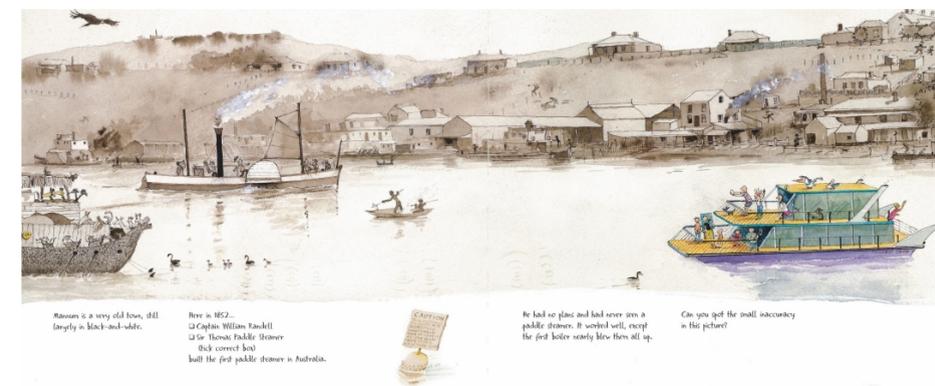
EN4-1A

- consider and analyse the ways their own experience affects their responses to texts

EN4-6C

- recognise, explain and analyse the ways literary texts draw on readers' knowledge of other texts and enable new understanding and appreciation of aesthetic qualities (ACELT1629)

- investigate how visual and multimodal texts allude to or draw on other texts or images to enhance and layer meaning (ACELA1548)



Intertextual reference & page found	How is it presented? (Explicitly/implicit/inferred)	Link to history	Link to cultural identity/ values	→	What does it add to the representation of the river?	What does it add to the narrative?	→	Impact on me
<b>Noah's ark</b> (On Mannum page)	Visual Implied		Christian beliefs	→	It infers the river has been there for a very long time and has seen some great historical moments	Adds to the view that Mannum is a <i>very old town</i> and there are many stories intertwined with it	→	It stood out to me because they aren't animals we see in Australia and I know the story of Noah's Ark. It made me laugh because it seems so out of place.
<b>Reference to Captain William Randell</b> (On Mannum page)	Written Explicit	Date and building of first paddle steamer in Australia	Travel on the river is important and we value our history	→	That the river has inspired people to make great things	It adds to the movement of the narrative between towns	→	It made me realise how old the town is and how inventive people were back then. I know nothing about paddle steamers but I'm sure it would be hard to build without plans. It was humorous, with the tick a box option of <i>Sir Thomas Paddle Steamer</i> .
				→			→	
				→			→	
				→			→	



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### Developing the character of the river activity:

Explore the *representation* of the river throughout the *narrative*. Ask students to describe the character of the river on one double spread and to list the language and images that created this view. Students then consider what emotions or opinions are evoked by these techniques. As a class, decide on the common techniques used throughout the book to build the character of the river. One obvious aspect of the river's character is that it is joyful and no doubt many references to humour will have been found in the previous activity. Now ask students to consolidate their understanding of the development of humour in relation to the *representation* of the river by asking them to find an instance of each of the language techniques including pun, intertextuality, understatement, personification, and a couple of their favourite examples of visual humour. Then ask students to create a ladder ranking the techniques from weakest to strongest with an explanatory statement for the first, middle and last place on their ladder (*understanding and engaging critically*).



EN4-1A

- compare the ways that language and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts (ACELT1621)
- identify and evaluate devices that create tone, for example humour, wordplay, innuendo and parody in poetry, humorous prose, drama or visual texts (ACELT1630)

### Considering aspects of representation activity:

Ask students to nominate what percentage of the book is given to Indigenous, environmental, commercial, tourist, recreational and historical aspects of the river. Then read and discuss *How I work* in the [On the river teaching notes](#), available on the Allen & Unwin website. Harvey states that he tried to give them equal prominence. Revisit the picture book, focussing on each of the different aspects, and create a mindmap for each. Discuss the students' findings and what they indicate about the composer's experience, knowledge, values and perspective. Then ask students to write a response answering the question *Does On the river provide greater aesthetic or social value?*, with paragraphs focussing on these aspects and the development of the *narrative* and *representation* of the river (*understanding and engaging critically*).

EN4-5C

- critically analyse the ways experience, knowledge, values and perspectives can be represented through characters, situations and concerns in texts and how these affect responses to texts
- discuss aspects of texts, for example their aesthetic and social value, using relevant and appropriate metalanguage (ACELT1803)

EN4-8D

- explore and appreciate the ways different cultural stories, icons, Aboriginal images and significant Australians are depicted in texts

### 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.*

### Experimenting with techniques and form with reflection:

In pairs, students decide on another Australian setting, natural or built, that they can depict in a picture book format and relate to an environmental issue. Set stages and time frames for students to follow, including research, outline, development of humour, development of issues, *intertextuality*, visual *representation*, development of character and *narrative*, peer review and editing. At each deadline, students need to write a reflective statement about what they have learned from the process, to accompany the final product. Each pair must produce a text which includes both a *narrative* and *representation* of an element of the Australian landscape using and adapting elements studied during this unit (*experimenting and reflecting*).

EN4- 2A

- use processes of representation, including the creative use of symbols, images, icons, clichés, stereotypes, connotations and particular aural, visual and/or digital techniques

EN4- 4B

- create imaginative, informative and persuasive texts that raise issues, report events and advance opinions, using deliberate language and textual choices, and including digital elements as appropriate (ACELY1736)
- experiment with particular language features drawn from different types of texts, including combinations of language and visual choices to create new texts (ACELT1768, ACELT1805)

EN4-9E

- use and reflect on metacognitive processes used for planning, including brainstorming, mind mapping, storyboarding, role-play and improvisation