

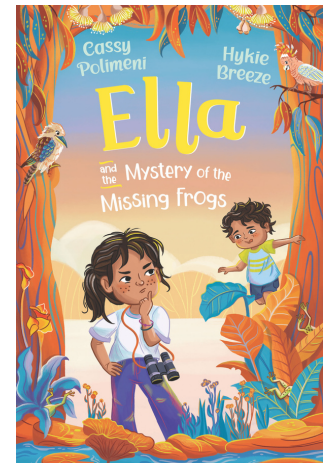
Ella and the Mystery of the Missing Frogs

Written by Cassy Polimeni, illustrated by Hykie Breeze

Synopsis

Ella is having one of those days when everything seems to be going wrong. It doesn't help that her little brother Will keeps interfering, making things even worse. But most alarming is Ella's realisation that the frogs in her backyard pond have disappeared. Worried there is something seriously amiss, she takes matters into her own hands with unintended consequences. With the help of her teacher, parents and best friend, Ella comes to understand that both frogs and humans have superpowers that can help put things back on course.

Part of the delightful *Ella and the Frogs* series, this is a story that celebrates patience, empathy, balance – and frogs!



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Themes

- Frogs
- Action
- Adaptations
- Patience
- Empathy
- Balance
- Families
- Responsibility

About the series

Ella and the Frogs is a four-book series by Cassy Polimeni, illustrated by Hykie Breeze, that will appeal to 5 to 8 year olds who are interested in nature, animals, and science. If a child loved *What Zola Did*, *Lemonade Jones* and *Violet Mackerel* they'll love *Ella and the Frogs*.

Why frogs? With extreme sensitivity to changes in their environment, frogs are the canaries in the coal mine of climate change. Places where frog populations are in decline tend to be where the environment is most at risk. They can be found in rural and urban settings, so are accessible for kids from all walks of life. Connecting with nature has been proven to positively impact kids' moods, confidence, sense of empathy and social responsibility.

Links to the Australian Curriculum

Learning Area	Year level
English	Foundation–3
HASS	Foundation–3
Science	Foundation–3
Health and Physical Education	Foundation–3

Writing Style

Written in first person, present tense, *Ella and the Mystery of the Missing Frogs* is an absorbing and page-turning read for 5–9 year-olds. Told over ten short chapters, it is accessible to independent readers whilst also making an excellent read-aloud text. The characters and plot are relatable and engaging, with effective figurative language allowing readers to easily sink into the story and identify with Ella and her feelings of frustration, concern and ultimately, love for her family. Her ability to accept advice from others helps share important values such as patience and empathy. With references to frogs and their special adaptations, as well as the superpower of human sensitivity and understanding, there are several classroom applications for this text, particularly in Years 1–3.

Study notes

- Before reading, discuss the front cover of *Ella and the Mystery of the Missing Frogs*. Describe the facial expressions and body language of Ella and her brother Will. What clues do we get about the plot and themes of the story?
- In the opening chapter, we are told that 'frogs are a sign of a healthy environment' and that 'they can tell when something isn't right' (pg 1). How does this immediately add tension and complication to the story? Make predictions about the plot of *Ella and the Mystery of the Missing Frogs*.
- Ella wakes up feeling 'weird' (pg 3), then the rest of her morning is filled with disasters. Have you ever had a morning when it seems as though everything is going wrong? Share with a friend.
- Why does Ella think her day is cursed? Is she right or are these merely a series of coincidences? Discuss.
- Using the illustrations below as a guide, write a journal entry in the role of Ella about your disastrous day. Upon reflection, how might you have handled things a little differently?



Study notes

- Discuss the friendship between Ella and Mai. How does Mai help Ella?
- Imagine you are in Ms Cleven's 2C class. Write a set of instructions for cleaning out the frog bog properly. Include details from the text (see Ch 2) to help write these instructions.
- On pg 14, Ella says, 'It's not fair. Owen wrecked my picture but I'm the one who has to clean up'. With older students, discuss how this is a metaphor for younger generations feeling responsible for cleaning up the environmental mistakes made by previous generations.
- Ella reads a book called *Frogs of the World* that is 'about different kinds of frogs and their superpowers' (pg 20). With your class, create your own illustrated version of this book. Include amazing facts about a variety of frogs and their adaptations.
- Why does Ella hug the *Frogs of the World* book to her chest? Why does it feel like 'a lucky charm' (pg 23)? How does the illustration below show how this book has helped Ella through her disastrous day. How do books help you? Share in a reflection.



- In the role of Ella, write a journal entry about the book sliding off your lap into the pond.
- Ella is frustrated with her brother, Will. How do her parents help keep balance in the family? Do you and your siblings sometimes irritate one another? How do you restore your relationship afterwards? What can you learn about your own relationships from *Ella and the Mystery of the Missing Frogs*? Share in a reflection.
- In what ways is Ella's dad intuitive? Why does he realise there is more to Ella's anger than just Will? How does he model patience?
- When Ella and her dad decide to collect rainwater to add to their frog bog, she says 'it feels good to have a plan' (pg 31). Why is this often the case when problems arise? What does this share about the power of problem-solving and sharing problems with a trusted adult?
- Describe Will's actions in *Ella and the Mystery of the Missing Frogs*. Why is Ella so angry with him? Why does she feel that he never gets into trouble? Write a recount of this story from Will's point of view.
- In class, Ella is learning about animals with special abilities, such as cats, dogs, fish and cheetahs. Choose an animal and create an information poster sharing their unique features and abilities.

Study notes

- Ella says, 'I know being patient and a good listener are important parts of being a scientist' (pg 51). In what other circumstances are patience and good listening important?
- When Will follows Ella out into the garden at midnight, Ella is told 'You're the big sister... You need to be responsible' (pg 62). In what ways is this true? How does Ella feel hearing this? Why do older children have different responsibilities to their younger siblings? How is this true in your family? Share in a reflection.
- Ella asks Ms Cleven if she thinks, 'humans have superpowers too?' (pg 73). Why does Ms Cleven see empathy as a superpower? What are other examples of human superpowers? Give examples to support your thinking. What are your superpowers? What are those of your friends? Create a classroom display to share the class's superpowers.
- How does Ms Cleven help Ella by saying: 'Everyone has thoughts like that sometimes, but it's what you do with those feelings that matters...Worrying about these things means you are sensitive to other people and their feelings. That's a good thing' (pg 75)? Why does Ella 'think about Ms Cleven's words for the rest of the day'? How is sensitivity a superpower?
- Ella imagines Will 'working away in his room in secret, trying to do something nice for me because he knows how much I love frogs. I remember what Ms Cleven said, about how being sensitive can be a superpower. Maybe Will has it too, in his own way'' (pg 82). Make predictions about Ella's next moves before reading further.
- How is Ella's gesture of giving Will a jar filled with origami frogs a sign of her growth and love for him? Make origami frogs for your classroom using the following instructions: <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/how-to-make-an-origami-frog.html>
- Using the illustrations below, explain how Ella's character has grown and changed throughout *Ella and the Mystery of the Missing Frogs*.



- Practice note taking by summarising the information on *How to be a Frog Scientist* on pages 88–89.
- Visit the Australian Museums FrogID page at <https://www.frogid.net.au/>. With your parents, use their app to identify any frogs you find in your local area.
- Create a Thought Tunnel by having students form two lines facing one another. Choose volunteers to assume the roles of Ella, Will, Mum, Dad and Mia. As these characters walk through the tunnel, allow students to ask questions of these characters to better unpack the plot, characters and themes of *Ella and the Mystery of the Missing Frogs*.

Study notes

- Using the chapter headings and illustrations in the table below, create a Story Map to show the main characters, settings and events of *Ella and the Mystery of the Missing Frogs*.

 1 A Funny Feeling	 2 The Curse	 3 Frogs of the World	 4 Taking Charge	 5 The Pest
 6 Animal Superpowers	 7 The Midnight Mission	 8 The Morning After	 9 Surprise Superpower	 10 Making Things Right

- Discuss the use of figurative language throughout the text, and how it contributes to the story. Examples include:
 - 'Clouds of smoke fill the air and the smoke alarm wails' pg 4.
 - 'Will...squeals, which sounds worse than the alarm' pg 4.
 - 'Will is coming out, looking like a zebra' pg 5.
 - 'it still tastes sharp and sticky' pg 6.
 - 'Gritty bits of sand leftover from the beach crunch between my teeth' pg 6.
 - 'Goosebumps prickle my skin' pg 7.
 - 'Will comes crashing out to join me' pg 7.
 - 'I hear rain tap-dancing on the roof. A few drops at first, then what sounds like a waterfall' pg 14.
 - 'Water cascades over the edge of the table' pg 14.
 - 'One corner disappears beneath the murky water, sending bubbles to the surface' pg 24.
 - 'The pages are tinged green with pond slime' pg 27.
 - 'There's a lump in my throat. I swallow, but it doesn't go away' pg 27.
 - 'The ground is wet and the air smells fresh and alive' pg 33.
 - 'I feel a fizz of excitement – it's perfect weather for frogs!' pg 33.
 - 'touching the squishy moss makes me feel better' pg 35.
 - 'My heart sinks like a stone' pg 35.
 - 'Some are upside down, others are lying on their side like skittles' pg 35.
 - 'Anger bubbles up inside me, spreading all the way to my fingertips' pg 36.
 - 'The pages were crinkled like the paper fans we make on hot days' pg 36.
 - 'Will runs past him like a naughty puppy' pg 39.

Study notes

- 'The whole class turns to look at me, their eyes and mouths making wide circles like goldfish' pg 44.
- 'An idea plops into my mind and begins to grow like frog spawn' pg 47.
- 'At midnight it screeches in my ear' pg 50.
- 'Cool air nibbles at my nose' pg 51.
- 'The moonlight makes everything look black and white like an old movie. I hear rustling in the trees and a spooky sound. A low groooowl, then a screeeech! My heart speeds up. I want to run back inside but my feet are frozen to the ground' pg 51.
- 'Something flashes past me in the trees and then stops' pg 51.
- 'I feel a flicker of hope' pg 51.
- 'Will copies me, making a 'ssss' sound like a snake' pg 57.
- 'Will follows, his little feet clomping like a baby elephant' pg 57.
- 'White light floods the backyard' pg 58.
- 'Will whimpers and I feel my insides go cold, like the Arctic wood frog getting ready to hibernate' pg 65.
- 'My eyelids feel heavy' pg 68.
- 'The bad feeling is still there, wriggling in my tummy like a worm' pg 73.
- 'I feel a trickle of relief' pg 78.
- 'The trickle gets stronger, like a pond filling up. Will is going to be alright' pg 79.

Other books in the series

- *Ella and the Amazing Frog Orchestra*
- *Ella and the Sleepover Safari*
- *Ella and the Call of the Wild*

Find out more or purchase online: <https://uwap.uwa.edu.au/collections/ella-and-the-frogs-series>

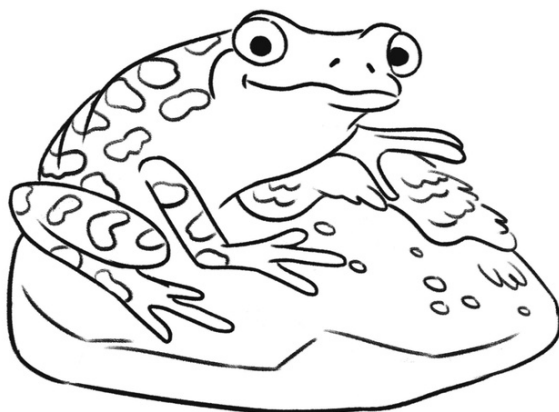
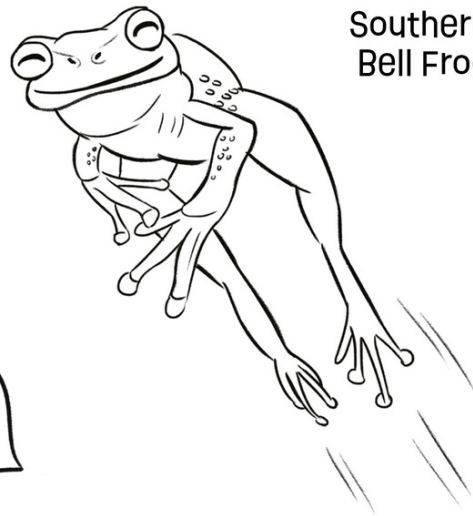
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Common Eastern Froglet



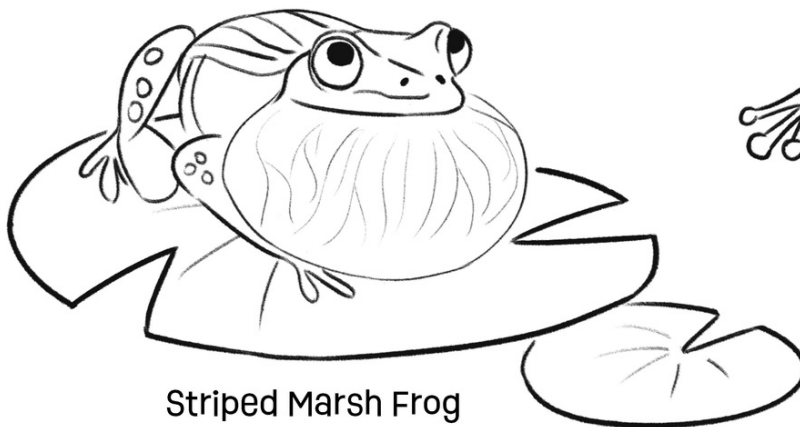
Southern
Bell Frog



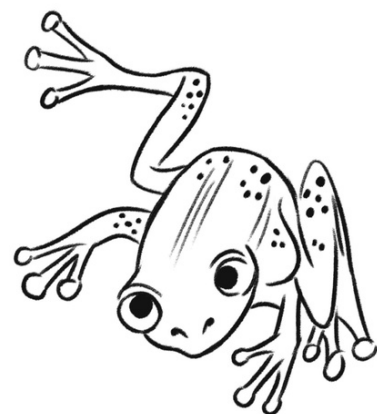
Spotted Marsh Frog



Peron's Tree Frog



Striped Marsh Frog



Southern Brown
Tree Frog