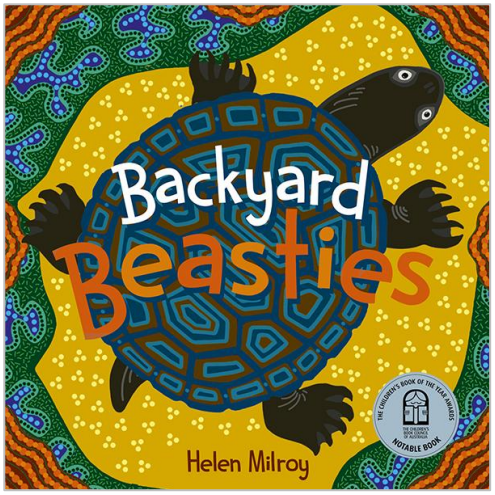
BACKYARD BEASTIES

HELEN MILROY
ISBN (HB): 9781760998448
YEAR LEVEL: K–3
CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Sustainability





ABOUT THE BOOK

From the author of *Backyard Birds* and *Backyard Bugs*, Helen Milroy's picture book *Backyard Beasties* is designed to teach us all about the croaking, barking, screeching, mewling creatures that share our homes. From beastie besties, like the Pomeranian and the pussycat, to clucking chickens and licking lizards, the jewel-like illustrations make this book a joy to share.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Helen Milroy is a descendant of the Palyku people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia. She was born and educated in Perth. Helen has always had a passionate interest in health and wellbeing, especially for children. Helen studied medicine at the University of Western Australia (UWA). She is currently a professor at UWA, a Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, a Research Fellow at The Kids Research Institute Australia, and Patron of Reading at Fremantle Press.

THEMES

- Backyard animals
- Australian wildlife
- Observing and celebrating nature
- Connecting with your environment

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

K–3 English
K–3 Biological Sciences
K–3 Visual Art

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author page: fremantlepress.com.au/contributor/helen-milroy
- Backyard Buddies: https://backyardbuddies.org.au

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Discussion questions

1. How many different backyard beasties do we meet throughout the story? Have you ever observed any of these animals in your backyard? Do you remember what they were doing or how they behaved? What other animals have you observed in your backyard? Turn to a partner and share.
2. How many animals in the story are native to Australia? How many are introduced species? What is the difference? How have introduced species impacted native animals in your local area?
3. How many of the animals in the book are wild? How many are domesticated? What is the difference? Why is it important not to feed or attempt to handle wildlife?
4. Scientists call animals that sleep in the day nocturnal and those that sleep in the night diurnal. What nocturnal animals do we meet in the book? And what diurnal ones do we meet?
5. As night falls, **'cat begins a noisy fight'**. Why should cats be kept indoors overnight? How have feral cats negatively impacted Australia's native wildlife?
6. **'Backyard beasties all around. With many more still to be found!'** How many different animals can you find in your own backyard? Schoolyard? Local park? Keep a nature diary for one week in which you spend fifteen minutes every day closely observing one of these locations. Record any animals you see, the sounds they make and the way they behave. Do you notice that different animals appear at different times of the day? What did you enjoy most about taking the time to observe these locations more closely than you ordinarily would? How do you feel when you spend time in nature? Which is your favourite backyard beastie and why?

Creative writing

1. This story is narrated through a series of rhyming couplets (two lines that rhyme and have very similar rhythmic structure). For example: **'Chicken clucks to meet the dawn** / **as possum slips across the lawn'**. Do you think rhyme makes the story more fun to read aloud?
2. When reading as a class, invite students to identify the rhyming couplets (sentence pairs) and clap the syllables in each line to get a sense of the rhythm.
    a. How many syllables are in the first line of each couplet?
    b. How many syllables are in the second line of each couplet?
    c. Do all the couplets throughout the book follow this same rhythmic pattern?
3. Underline the rhyming words in each of the couplets below. The first has been done for you:
    a. **'Turtle slips into the pond / where gecko lies beneath a frond'**
    b. **'Bobtail ventures slowly out / while dog bounds madly all about'**
    c. **'Frog croaks out a song of night / then cat begins a noisy fight'**
4. Can you create your own rhyming couplet about two backyard beasties that are not in the book?
5. 'Who am I?' game: In pairs, choose an animal from the story and write three clues for a partner to guess (e.g. A bat: I sleep during the day, I hang upside down, I have wings).
6. If you could wake up to find any animal in your backyard, what would it be? Write an imaginative short story!

Visual art

1. What style has the illustrator used to draw the animals (e.g. realistic, cartoon, abstract)? What medium/s has she used (e.g. acrylic, watercolour, pencil, ink)? How has she used pattern, shape, repetition and layering in the backgrounds? How would you describe the colour palette? What do you like best about this illustrator's style?
2. Create a new spread for *Backyard Beasties*. The right-hand page should contain an illustration of a backyard beastie in the style of Helen Milroy (where possible choose an animal not already in the story). The left-hand page should contain a sentence describing the animal's action. Bind spreads together to create a unique class edition of the book.
3. Create a sculpture of your favourite animal from the story using plasticine, clay or recycled materials.
4. Create a shoebox diorama of your backyard using recycled materials. Include the animals you have observed there.
5. Create popstick puppets of the backyard beasties using recycled materials to read along with or retell the story.
6. Make a sketch of your backyard with at least five animals camouflaged into the surroundings for a friend to try to find.

7. What would your dream backyard look like? On an A3 piece of paper, draw or paint a picture and label the different features.

Biological Sciences

1. Choose your favourite animal from the story and create a fact sheet, poster, pamphlet or PowerPoint with the following information: English name(s), Indigenous name(s), physical characteristics, habitat, diet, life cycle, interesting facts, labelled diagram, conservation status.
2. Sorting activity*:* Print six packs containing fourteen cards each (the ten animals in the story and the headings 'Domestic', 'Wild', 'Native' and 'Introduced'). In groups of four, sit in a circle. Place the four heading cards face up in a line and the others facedown. Take turns to select an animal card, flip it over and place it under an appropriate heading.
    a. Extension activity*:* How else might the animals be grouped (i.e. what other labels could they use to distinguish between them, e.g. carnivore, herbivore, omnivore, predator, prey, mammal, reptile, etc.)?
3. Visit the Backyard Buddies website for a host of DIY projects (e.g. Create a Lizard Friendly Garden, Build a Frog Pond, Build a Nest Box, and many more!): backyardbuddies.org.au/create-habitats/home-diy-projects
4. Invite students to read the resource 'Creating a Habitat Haven' and use this information to design their very own native garden: backyardbuddies.org.au/habitats/create-a-habitat-haven
5. How does having a native garden help local wildlife?
6. As a class, discuss threats to native animals such as introduced species like foxes and cats, loss of habitat and plastic pollution. What can we do to help?

Mathematics

1. As a class, make a list of all the different animals found in students' backyards. Create a tally chart to record the frequency. Which animals are the most common? Which are rare? Graph the results as a bar graph and line graph.

First Nations cultures

1. Helen Milroy is a descendant of the Palyku people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia and was born and raised in Perth on Whadjuk Noongar Country. Find out the name of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples from the area in which you live and create a class poster showing the names of some local backyard beasties in local First Nations languages.
2. Animals are often very important in First Nations stories. Research the cultures of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples from the area in which you live and find out which native animals are important and why.

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