

## BENEATH THE TREES

CRISTY BURNE

ILLUSTRATED BY AMANDA BURNETT

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YEAR LEVEL: Y3–6

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: Sustainability

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Cam and Sophie feel like they've been travelling forever to get to the rainforest and the river and their cousins. They just want to see a platypus in the wild, but with the rain tipping down and the river turning wild they can't see a thing. Until suddenly, they can. A platypus is just below them, and it needs help! But when their rescue attempt goes horribly wrong, it's not just the platypus that needs saving ...

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cristy Burne grew up climbing trees, jumping drains, chasing cows and inventing stories. She has a passion for learning through doing and loves to inspire creativity, daring and resilience in her readers. Cristy is a children's author and science writer with degrees in biotechnology and science communication. She has also worked as a science circus performer, garbage analyst, Santa's pixie, and atom-smashing reporter.

### THEMES

- Wildlife conservation
- Rainforests of Australia
- Bush safety
- Resilience

### AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y3–6 English

Y3–6 Biological Science

Y3–6 Art

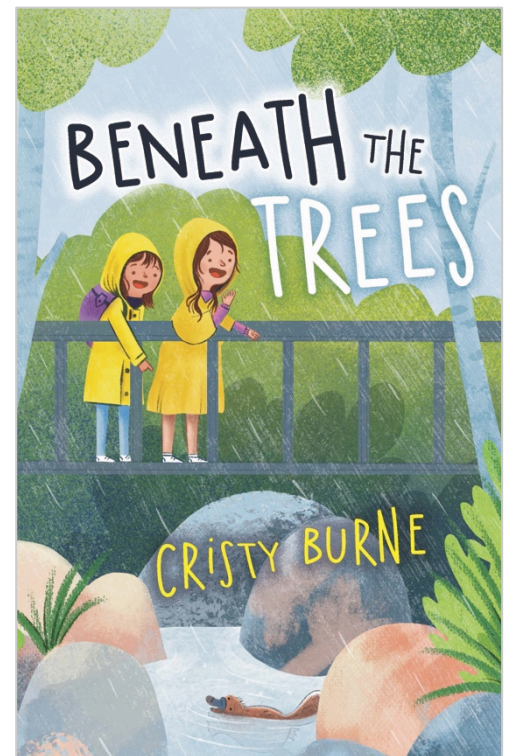
### USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: <https://cristyburne.com>
- More great books for kids by Cristy Burne: <https://www.fremantlepress.com.au/contributors/cristy-burne>

### CLASSROOM IDEAS

#### Discussion questions

1. *They'd travelled halfway across Australia, to the longest stretch of subtropical rainforest on the continent, to the world's best spot for seeing wild platypus.* (p. 6) What is a 'rainforest'? What does 'subtropical' mean? In which Australian state do you think the story takes place?
2. On her website, author Cristy Burne states this book is *based on the true story of a family hike that I went on in Eungella National Park, Queensland*. Locate this park on a map.
3. How did the platypus in the story get the plastic wristband so tight around its neck?
4. What does it mean to be 'sensible'? Give examples from everyday life.
5. Why does Jack refuse to wear an emergency poncho or a raincoat? Is that a sensible decision? How does the poncho end up saving Cam and Sophie? Why is it wise to wear bright colours in the bush?
6. Why do Cam and Sophie arrive at the riverbank before Jack, even though he got carried out first?
7. *'Shouldn't we stay where people can find us?' Cam asked. 'They'll find us sooner if we're closer,' he said.* (p. 28) Was it a good idea to stray into the forest, or should the group have stayed put? Why does moving from the spot where you were lost make it harder for rescuers to reach you?



8. How can you avoid getting lost in the bush? And if you do get lost, what should you do? (Useful link: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-02/tips-to-survive-in-the-bush/7681572>)
9. *Do not panic, Cam told herself. They were all alone, far from help. Stay calm.* (p. 49) What does 'panic' mean?
10. *Cam took a deep breath and used her sharp fingernails to pincer the leech. It's just like grabbing a sausage with barbeque tongs, she told herself. See? That was easy. Now be quick.* (p. 41) What are some techniques Cam uses throughout the story to avoid panicking in very stressful situations?
11. *There was no other way. 'We have to go back.'* (p. 68) How does each character (Cam, Sophie and Jack) react when they realise they have to retrace their steps after such a difficult trek?
12. What ways does Cam find to keep Sophie and Jack calm and focused throughout their journey? How does she use humour to help Sophie?
13. What is 'hypothermia'? What signs of it does Jack show?
14. How important is positive thinking and positive self-talk in an emergency? Why so? Give examples from the book, as well as from your own personal experience.

## Creative writing

1. Write a short story on the theme 'overcoming obstacles'. What will your central character try to achieve? What obstacles will they face on their way? What creative solutions will they come up with?
2. Write a letter or email addressed from Jack to Cam, a week after their ordeal. What lessons has Jack learned from the experience?
3. Write a poem about being in a rainforest, drawing on the five senses to create vivid imagery.

## Biological science






1. Create a fact sheet about the platypus with the following headings: scientific name, physical characteristics, habitat, diet, life cycle, interesting facts, labelled diagram, conservation status, conservation threats, sources (i.e. a list of sources you used for your research). (Useful links: <https://australian.museum/learn/animals/mammals/platypus> and <https://platypusspot.org/learning-centre/conservation-threats>)
2. Why is plastic deadly for water creatures? How does plastic get into the waterways? What is single-use plastic? What can we do to help protect water animals from plastic pollution? (Useful link: <https://www.marineconservation.org.au/ocean-plastic-pollution>)
3. According to the Australian Department of Agriculture, *Rainforest comprises only 2.7% of Australia's total native forest, but provides habitat for 60% of Australia's plant species, 60% of butterfly species, 40% of bird species and 35% of mammal species.* This means rainforests are extremely important for animal biodiversity. Write a report about rainforests in Australia, using the following headings: definition of rainforests, distribution of rainforests in Australia, types of rainforest, layers of vegetation in a rainforest, threats to rainforests, importance of rainforests, sources (i.e. a list of sources you used for your research). (Useful links: <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/forestsaustralia/profiles/rainforest-2019> and <https://parksaustralia.gov.au/botanic-gardens/pub/rainforest-gully-teacher-notes.pdf>).

## Art

1. View images of Eungella National Park and research its flora and fauna. What animals live there? What plants grow there (including trees, ferns and mosses)? Draw or paint a picture of the landscape in a medium of your choice.

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# IS THAT A DUCK? OR AN OTTER? NO, IT'S A PLATYPUS!

In *Beneath the Trees*, Cam and Sophie are on an adventure to see a platypus in the wild. But what is a platypus? Unique to Australia, platypus are special mammals known as monotremes.

Do you know the correct answers?

1. Monotremes are different from other mammals because they lay \_\_\_\_\_
2. Female platypuses feed their babies with \_\_\_\_\_
3. Platypus live on land but have webbed \_\_\_\_\_ and waterproof fur.
4. Male platypuses have a venomous spur on each hind \_\_\_\_\_
5. Like sharks, platypus use electroreceptors in their \_\_\_\_\_ to hunt their prey
6. The platypus has been featured on the Australian \_\_\_\_\_ cent coin since 1966.

Invent your own unique Australian animal. What does it look like? Where does it live? What special features does it have, and why?

My animal is called:



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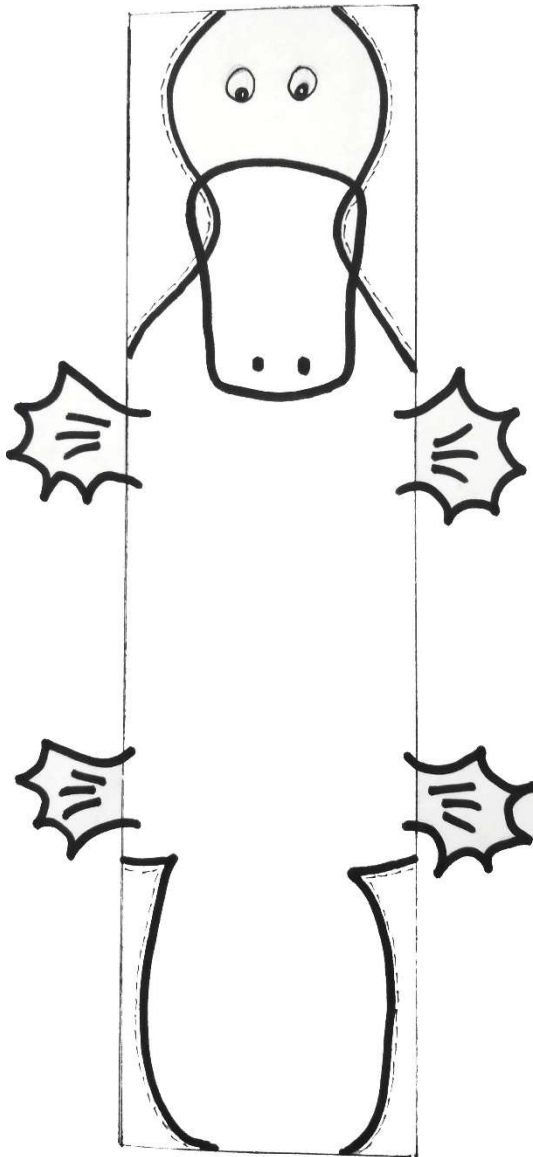
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Answers  
1. Eggs  
2. Milk  
3. Feet  
4. Legs  
5. Bill  
6. 20

# BENEATH THE TREES

Platypus are AMAZING! Join Cam and Sophie on their survival adventure with your own platy-tastic bookmark.



## *You will need:*

- Brown card
- Black paper
- Black pen/pencil
- White pen/pencil
- Scissors
- Glue

## *What to do:*

- 1: Cut the brown card into the shape of an ordinary bookmark
- 2: Cut your ordinary bookmark shape into a rolling pin shape (see the dotted lines in the diagram)
- 3: Cut webbed feet and a bill from the black paper and glue them on.
- 4: Decorate by drawing eyes, nostrils and web lines on the feet. Enjoy with a good book.

