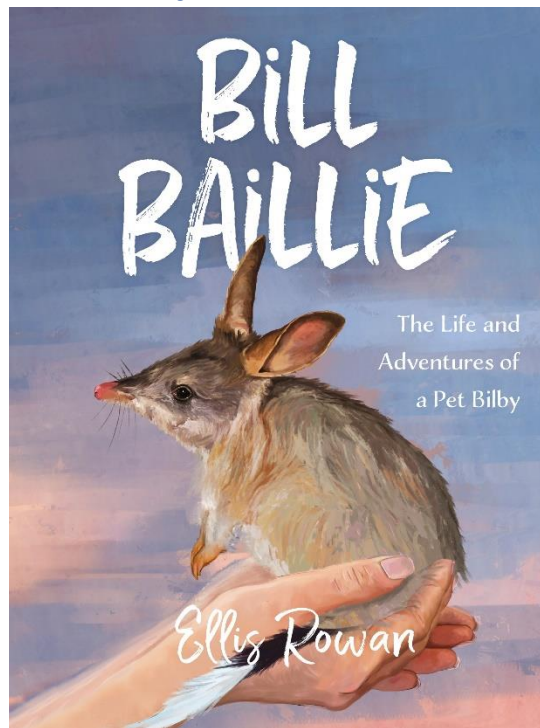


TEACHERS' NOTES

Bill Baillie: The Life and Adventures of a Pet Bilby by Ellis Rowan



Published in April 2018 by National Library of Australia, ISBN: 9780642279200
Recommended Year Levels: Years 2–6



Author: Ellis Rowan

Flower artist Ellis Rowan (1848–1922) has been described as ‘petite, plucky and prolific’. She was an intrepid explorer, who spent much of her adult life travelling to remote and often inaccessible places around the world, hunting for, identifying and painting the native flora and fauna. In all, she painted over 3,000 pictures.

Bill Baillie: The Life and Adventures of a Pet Bilby is an abridged version of the fictionalised true story of a baby bilby adopted by Rowan in the early 1900s. It is based on *Bill Baillie: His Life and Adventures* (Melbourne: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1908) and *Bill Baillie: The Story of a Pet Bilboa* (Melbourne: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1920s).

Australian Curriculum Content

- **Learning Area(s)**
 - English
 - Science
 - Humanities and Social Sciences
 - Visual Arts
- **General capabilities**
 - Personal and Social Capability
 - Critical and Creative thinking
 - Ethical Understanding
- **Digital Classroom**
 - Year 3 'Australian Symbols'
<http://www.nla.gov.au/digital-classroom/year-3/themes/australian-symbols>
 - Year 5 'Inland Adventures'
<http://www.nla.gov.au/digital-classroom/year-5/themes/inland-adventures>

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

These are activities to do before reading to prepare students for the concepts/themes explored in the book. They are not necessarily curriculum based.

- Look at the cover of the book with the class. What do you think this book will be about? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Discuss the broad themes contained in the book (e.g. conservation, native animals, human–animal interactions, Australian history, Australian flora and fauna).

ENGLISH (LITERATURE)

Year 2

Content description: Identify aspects of different types of literary texts that entertain, and give reasons for personal preferences (ACELT1590)

Elaboration

- connecting the feelings and behaviours of animals in anthropomorphic stories with human emotions and relationships

Activity

Bill Baillie is the fictionalised true story of a baby bilby adopted as a pet by flower artist Ellis Rowan in the early 1900s.

- Write a poem or a short story about your favourite pet—or a pet you would really like to have. When planning your story, think about:
 - Where it is set (e.g. the bush, the beach or the desert).
 - Whether you will present your pet as a real animal or as an animal wearing clothes and acting like a person (anthropomorphised).
 - How animals and people react to new experiences, or in dangerous or scary situations.

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- Discuss classic children's books that have animals as the main characters (e.g. *Wind in the Willows*, *Peter Rabbit*, *Diary of a Wombat*, *Possum Magic*).
- How are the animal characters presented in those books (e.g. has the illustrator drawn them wearing clothes or as real animals interacting naturally with their environment)?
- Discuss why they have been presented in that way.

Year 3

Content description: Discuss how language is used to describe the settings in texts, and explore how the settings shape the events and influence the mood of the narrative (ACELT1599)

Elaboration

- identifying and discussing the use of descriptive adjectives ('in the middle of a vast, bare plain') to establish setting and atmosphere ('the castle loomed dark and forbidding') and to draw readers into events that follow

Activity

Read the following text from the book:

*From a plateau, you looked down to a great salt lake that stretched away for miles ... The lake looked weird and dreary in the midst of its far-stretching plain. But at sunset the outcrops of rock turned to every shade of red and yellow. The lake became a sheet of quicksilver, and the fringe of sand around it was a delicate pink. Away on the edge of the dim horizon, the low hills were an intense blue, while across it the she-oaks were silhouetted, gaunt and grey against the sky. Ellis Rowan, *Bill Baillie*, p.2*

- Underline the descriptive adjectives used by Ellis Rowan in the above quote to evoke the setting and atmosphere of her story.
- Write a one-paragraph description of a sunset or sunrise where you live. Like Ellis Rowan, include geographical and built elements to evoke the setting (trees, mountains and the ocean; or towers, rooftops etc.), and descriptive adjectives to create atmosphere.
- Illustrate your description.

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- What sort of atmosphere does Ellis Rowan create in the above quote?
- Discuss how authors and illustrators work together in picture books to bring the setting to life. Consider elements like:
 - written descriptions
 - characters interacting with the setting through the storyline
 - background images in the illustrations
 - the setting becoming an actual 'character' in the book.

Year 4

Content description: Make connections between the ways different authors may represent similar storylines, ideas and relationships (ACELT1602)

Elaboration

- commenting on how authors have established setting and period in different cultures and times and the relevance of characters, actions and beliefs to their own time.

Activity

Every author sees the world they are describing through the prism of their own time and experiences. The way in which native animals are treated today differs greatly from the way they were often treated in the early 1900s. Through her botanical paintings, Ellis Rowan helped to document and preserve the flora and fauna of Australia in the early 1900s. As this quote shows, she was also aware of the effect of European civilisation on bilbies:

*Civilisation added traps to the dangers they had to face, and strange sounds broke into their hiding places. They hid further afield and moved warily. But, for all that, sometimes they came to grief. Ellis Rowan, *Bill Baillie*, p.3*

- Write a short story showing what would happen today if you were given an abandoned or injured baby bilby. Ask yourself:
 - How would I look after it?
 - Who would I contact?
 - What would they do?
 - How would the bilby be looked after?
 - What would happen to it once it had grown to adulthood?

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- Find other examples in *Bill Baillie* of attitudes towards animals that differ from those we have today. Consider the following questions:
 - How have attitudes changed?
 - Why have attitudes changed?
 - How do modern authors encourage the preservation of native flora and fauna through their books?

Year 5

Content description: Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details or information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts (ACELT1608)

Elaboration

- describing how aspects of literature, for example visuals, symbolic elements, dialogue and character descriptions, can convey information about cultural elements, such as beliefs, traditions and customs

Activity

The original version of *Bill Baillie* was published in 1908. The language, dialogue, traditions, customs and values in this version of the story reflect the era in which it was written. For this reason, the 1908 version of the book was abridged and edited to make it more readable and palatable for a modern audience.

The following quote is from Chapter 3 of the original version, in which Tabitha and Bill Baillie are attacked by a 'feral' donkey and the cook, Mandy, describes the offending animal:

'All Goongarrie knows 'im, an' 'e's Satan by name an' Satan by nature, although they do say 'e was a queer taking little critter when 'e was a foal. P'raps it wasn't fair to name 'im so—'e might 'ave thought 'e 'ad to live up to it. But the man as owned 'im thought a 'eap of 'im, an' petted 'im until 'e was as funny as a kitten, an' as spoiled as a child, an' 'e grew up as sly an' mischievous as a Christian. Knowin'! There wasn't a trick 'e wasn't after. Then 'is owner found 'im a bit awk'ard for a pet, an' give 'im away; an' the man 'e give 'im to couldn't make 'im useful, an' when 'e left Goongarrie 'e lef' Satan as a sort o' legacy behind 'im. An' now 'e's the pest o' the place.'

- Working in small groups, rewrite the quote to reflect modern language, punctuation and social values.

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- Did you find the quote easy to read and understand? What slowed you down or made the story hard to follow?
- In your modern version, which aspects of the text did you change and why?
- Examine the final paragraph on page 25 of the 2018 version of *Bill Baillie*. Which parts of the above text did the abridger change or delete? Why do you think she did this?
- Discuss how the social values (e.g. attitudes towards religion and the care of animals) expressed in this quote have changed over the years.

Year 6

Content description: Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1613)

Elaboration

- recognising the influence our different historical, social and cultural experiences may have on the meaning we make from the text and the attitudes we may develop towards characters, actions and events

Activity

The original version of *Bill Baillie* was published in 1908. The language, dialogue, traditions, customs and values in this version of the story reflect the era in which it was written. For this reason, the 2018 version of the book was abridged to make it more readable and palatable for a modern audience. For example, some incidents of violence against animals, people from other countries and children were omitted entirely from the 2018 version.

The following quote is from Chapter 3 of the original version, in which Tabitha and Bill Baillie are attacked by a 'feral' donkey called Satan, and the cook, Mandy, talks about the offending animal:

'A man in the kitchen at dishin'-up is wot I will not stand,' said Mandy, dexterously reversing a saucepan. 'An' it's them as you serves best as serves you worst. 'Larrup a boy when 'e's young, an' wen 'e's growed 'e'll work for y' an' look after y', me ol' mother useter say—'pamper 'im, an' 'e'll loaf on y' all 'is days, an' leave y' go to the destitute when y' can't work for 'im no longer.' 'E was spoiled by too much kindness w'en 'e was young. There aint no sense in usin' anyone to wot e aint goin' to 'ave. Treated proper 'e might 'ave been orlright — an' look at the useless brute 'e is.'

'I think you're a bit hard on Tom, you know, Mandy,' Tabitha ventured timidly. 'He's —'

'Tom!' said Mandy, wrathfully; 'Tom! I was talkin' of Satan!'

- Modernise the above passage from the original 1908 version of *Bill Baillie* by abridging and editing it. You must be able to validate/explain each change you make.

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- Why did the abridger delete this passage from the 2018 version of *Bill Baillie*?
- Why should books written over 100 years ago be abridged and edited to suit the social sensibilities and literary tastes of a modern audience? Possible discussion areas include:
 - Social:
 - subject matter
 - incidents of racism, sexism or violence against children or animals
 - Literary:
 - punctuation
 - sentence structure
 - dialogue
 - vocabulary
 - readability

Science (Biological Sciences)

Year 2

Content description: Living things grow, change and have offspring similar to themselves (ACSSU030)

Elaborations

- exploring different characteristics of life stages in animals such as egg, caterpillar and butterfly
- recognising that living things have predictable characteristics at different stages of development

Activity

- Draw or find pictures or photographs of a baby bilby and an adult bilby. Use labels to indicate how the bilby changes physically from babyhood to adulthood.
- Draw or find pictures or photographs of yourself as a baby and as you are now. Use labels to indicate how you have changed physically since you were a baby.

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- In what ways have both you and the bilby changed since you were babies?
- Does this happen with all animals, birds and insects? Investigate creatures with more obvious differences from birth to adulthood (e.g. caterpillar to butterfly; tadpole to frog) and/or animals that change very little, apart from in terms of size.

Year 3

Content description: Living things have life cycles (ACSSU072)

Elaboration

- comparing life cycles of animals and plants

Activity

Choose one animal (e.g. bilby, camel, dingo, hopping mouse, burrowing frog) and one plant (e.g. saltbush, mulga, parakeelya, Sturt's desert pea, spinifex) that thrives in the desert.

- Research in what ways each creature or plant is designed to survive in the desert environment.
- Draw a chart showing the life cycle of the animal you have selected.

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- What characteristics help animals and plants to survive in harsh climates?
- How do people survive in the desert (consider shelter, food, water sources, clothing etc)?

Year 4

Content description: Living things depend on each other and the environment to survive (ACSSU073)

Elaborations

- observing and describing predator-prey relationships
- recognising that interactions between living things may be competitive or mutually beneficial

Activity

*A dismal cry rose and rose, quivered and fell, only to begin again—a growing tremulous wail that deepened into a yell. Far off, another answered—and another, and another. Then closer and closer came the cry. The bushes crackled as a great yellow beast came out into the moonlight. Evidently it was a dangerous creature, for the owl flew away and all the busy bush folk were still. Ellis Rowan, *Bill Baillie*, p.14*

The above quote highlights the dangers that lurk in the desert for small animals like bilbies—including dingoes and owls.

- Research the challenges the bilby faces in the wild.
- Draw a chart with an image of the bilby in the centre, encircled by the animals and birds that are its predators.

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- How do bilbies survive against their predators in the wild? Are all their predators native animals?
- Examine the map on page 93 of *Bill Baillie*.
 - What are the main reasons for the drastic drop in the bilby population since the early 1900s?
 - What can we do to help redress this problem?

Year 5

Content description: Living things have structural features and adaptations that help them to survive in their environment (ACSSU043)

Elaboration

- explaining how particular adaptations help survival such as nocturnal behaviour, silvery coloured leaves of dune plants

Activity

- Research the anatomy and behaviour of bilbies.
- Draw a picture or find a photograph of a bilby and make a chart identifying the specific things that help bilbies to survive in harsh desert environments.

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- In what ways is the bilby adapted to survive in the desert?
- Discuss why, despite these physical characteristics, the bilby is now extinct or endangered in many parts of Australia?
- Discuss what people are doing or can do to ensure that the bilby does not become extinct in their area.
- Why is it important to conserve our native species?

Humanities and Social Sciences

Year 3

Content description: Draw simple conclusions based on analysis of information and data (ACHASSI058)

Elaboration

- explaining conclusions about how their place and community have changed and developed (for example, settlement patterns, local changes in plant and animal species, historic events, cultural celebrations)

Activity

- Find old photographs or paintings of your suburb/town/city about 100 years ago.
- Photograph the same places now.
- Create a chart highlighting the major changes to your suburb/town/city over time.

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- How has your suburb/town/city changed over time?
- Have the changes always been for the best?
- How can change, development and progress impact negatively on your environment?

Humanities and Social Sciences (Geography)

Year 3

Content description: The similarities and differences between places in terms of their type of settlement, demographic characteristics and the lives of the people who live there, and people's perceptions of these places (ACHASSK069)

Elaboration

- exploring people's feelings for place and the factors that influence people's attachment to place, through reading and viewing poems, songs, paintings and stories

Activity

In *Bill Baillie*, Tabitha was entranced by the countryside she was travelling through, and especially the native plants in each area, which is why she recorded them for posterity.

- Find songs, paintings, stories or poems about the area you live in.
- Write or paint your own creative piece about where you live, highlighting the things that you like most about it, including natural features.

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- Which natural features of your area do people in your class enjoy or value the most?
- Why is it important to conserve the natural assets of your area?
- How can you help to do this?

Year 4

Content description: The importance of environments, including natural vegetation, to animals and people (ACHASSK088)

Elaboration

- exploring strategies to protect particular environments that provide the habitats for animals (for example, planting bird-attracting vegetation)

Activity

Examine the map on page 93 of *Bill Baillie*.

- On the map, find the area in which you live. What colour is it? What does the colour mean?
- Create a map of your area, showing which of the following native Australian animals have never lived, have lived or still live there:
bilbies, koalas, kangaroos, emus, dingoes, possums, echidnas, wombats

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- What food and water sources and geographical features encourage native animals to live in your area?
- How can you protect your environment so that the native birds, animals and reptiles that still live in your area survive and thrive?

Year 5

Content description: The nature of convict or colonial presence, including the factors that influenced patterns of development, aspects of the daily life of the inhabitants (including Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples) and how the environment changed (ACHASSK107)

Elaboration

- mapping local, regional and state/territory rural and urban settlement patterns in the 1800s, and noting factors such as geographical features, climate, water resources, the discovery of gold, transport and access to port facilities that shaped these patterns

Activity

In *Bill Baillie*, Tabitha and Bill Baillie travel on different forms of transport to cross the desert and to get to towns and cities.

- Research how people have travelled from one place to another in your area or state.
- Draw two maps of your area, one showing transport in 1900 and the other transport in 2000.
- Include major towns and cities, water sources and geographical features.

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- How have the geographical features in your area/state affected the way transport facilities have changed over the years?
- In what ways do you think transport will change in your area over the next 100 years?

THE ARTS (VISUAL ARTS)

Years 3 and 4

Content description: Explore ideas and artworks from different cultures and times, including artwork by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to use as inspiration for their own representations (ACAVAM110)

Elaboration

- Considering viewpoints—meanings and interpretations: For example – What does this painting telling us about the past? How does the artwork use visual conventions to convey meaning? How did the artist work within a space, and at this time? How and why did they innovate their practice?

Activity

Ellis Rowan was a botanical artist. You can see many of her paintings on the National Library of Australia's website at www.nla.gov.au. She had a very distinctive style of painting, and she travelled widely around the world finding rare and unusual native plants and animals to paint.

- Take photographs or collect specimens of flowers and plants in your area.
- Using coloured paper as the background:
 - paint a 'portrait' of your local flora, or
 - create a collage of photographs depicting them.
- Find images of the work of other botanical artists from the early 1900s.
 - Compare their work with that of Ellis Rowan.
 - Discuss in what ways her paintings differ from the works of other artists.



nla.gov.au/nla.obj-138806417

nla.gov.au/nla.obj-138776966

nla.gov.au/nla.obj-138753912

Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- Why is it important to record the native flora and fauna of an area through paintings and/or photographs?
- How can we ensure that the plants and animals in our part of Australia are still there in 100 years? (e.g. seed banks and protected areas for endangered wildlife)

CONCLUDING ACTIVITIES

Creative Responses

- Paint a portrait of Bill Baillie and Ellis Rowan in the Australian outback. Include some other native desert plants and animals.
- Write a short story from the perspective of someone caring for native plants and wildlife in a remote area of Australia.
 - What are the challenges?
 - What are the highlights?
- Write and illustrate a picture book based on one incident from the life of Bill Baillie.
- Write a musical or play based on the story of Bill Baillie.
 - Find popular songs and poems from the early 1900s to include in your performance (e.g. songs about camels, kookaburras and emus in *Songs for Young Australians* at nla.gov.au/nla.obj-175231656/view?partId=nla.obj-175231662)
 - Paint backdrops and props for your play or musical based on Ellis Rowan's paintings of flowers and desert landscapes.

FURTHER READING

- **Books**
 - Fullerton, Patricia, *The Flower Hunter: Ellis Rowan*. Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2002.
 - Gallagher, Debbie and Brendan, *Bilbies and Bandicoots*. South Yarra, Vic.: Macmillan Library, 2011.
 - Hiddens, Les, *The Living Desert*. Ringwood, Vic.: Puffin Books, 2000.
 - Morgan, Sally, illustrated by Adele Jaunn, *Baby Bilby's Question*. Richmond, Vic.: Hardie Grant Egmont, 2013.
 - Oliver, Narelle, *Baby Bilby, Where Do You Sleep?* Melbourne: Lothian, 2001.
 - Pyers, Greg, *How Animals and Plants Survive in Australia's Deserts*. Melbourne: Heinemann, 2003.
 - Wignell, Edel, illustrated by Mark Jackson, *Bilby Secrets*. Newtown, NSW: Walker Books, 2014.
- **Websites**
 - Australian Bilby Appreciation Society, *Bilby Facts and Figures*, at [members.optusnet.com.au/bilbies/Bilby Society Fact Sheet.pdf](http://members.optusnet.com.au/bilbies/Bilby_Society_Fact_Sheet.pdf).
 - Commonwealth Department of Environment and energy, *Bilby (Macrotis lagotis)*, at environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/bilby-macrotis-lagotis