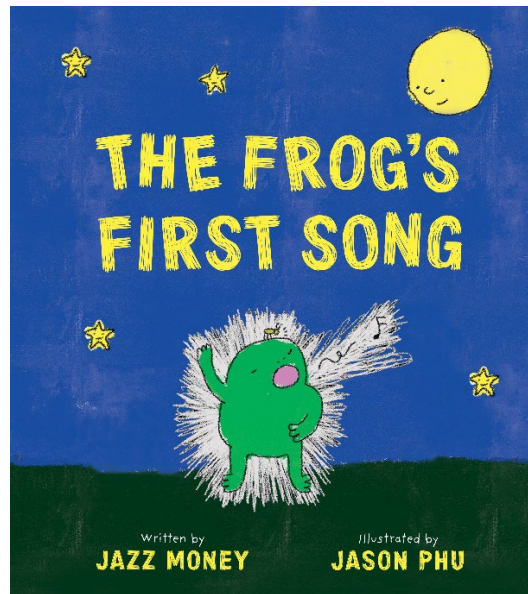


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THE FROG'S FIRST SONG

Jazz Money & Jason Phu



Teachers' Notes

Prepared by Cara Shipp, a practising teacher,
in context with the Australian curriculum

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SYNOPSIS

The Frog's First Song is a playful picture book about the joys of belonging, community, courage, teamwork, collaboration and friendship. This debut picture book is a unique and melodic ode to taking chances, using your voice and coming together in song and dance. It's also a timely and sensitive story about the power of togetherness in dark times.

It was inspired by a project for [The National](#) that Money and Phu both worked on in 2023 and integrates inspiration from Chinese parables and First Nations Creation stories.

THEMES

Themes covered in this book include:

- The joys of belonging and community
- How having courage, using your voice and taking chances can open up new worlds of opportunity
- How teamwork, collaboration and friendship can help you to grow and make new achievements
- The power of coming together in song and dance to bind communities in connection and tradition
- The power of togetherness in dark times

STUDY NOTES**Connections to Music and HPE/Health curriculum**

A major theme that is developmentally appropriate for the book's intended age group (3–7 years) is the power of music, song and dance. We know that there are many health and wellbeing benefits of engaging in these activities and we also know they have special cultural, spiritual and health benefits for First Nations people.

Connections to HASS (History and Geography) & English

First Nations Creation stories and songs help to teach about the past and present and can be seen as examples of narratives about past and present life as well as narratives about connection to place/significant and special places.

Connections to Science

If desired, activities in this guide could be extended into learning about the frog life cycle and working with local waterways and FrogWatch groups on frog conservation.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**Activity:**

Play a game such as dance freeze (when the music is playing you can dance around the room, but when it stops you must freeze until it starts again). Next, go outdoors (if possible) and sing a well-known song together, such as 'Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' or other songs your class knows. Add challenges such as singing as quietly as possible, or as loudly as possible, or emphasising the body part loudly, 'KNEES', 'TOES'!

After these activities, gather students together in a yarning circle and discuss how they felt before the lesson, during the lesson and now. Explore how this activity helps you to feel happier and more energised and teaches you how to build closer friendships with classmates. Have students draw pictures about how music, singing and dancing makes them feel.

Teachers may like to build on this activity to summarise and share some of the following ideas in age-appropriate ways:

- Singing can bring communities together, can be a way to teach, learn and practice language and culture, and can uplift people in challenging times.
- Singing together can bond groups and promote wellbeing.
- Music and song are known to be therapeutic in terms of physical health as well; thought to lower cortisol (stress hormone), boost the immune system, support better breathing and lung function, assist with speech therapy and with memory (especially in people with Alzheimer's and Dementia).
- Music, singing and dancing can release endorphins and lower pain. ([Benefits of Singing: 10 Ways Singing Boosts Your Health](#), 10 November 2020).

The importance of reviving and promoting language in First Nations communities is linked to the above-mentioned benefits. Not only does knowing your cultural language provide a sense of identity and belonging, but it has also been found by doctors across the world to improve First Nations peoples' physical health and lower disease as well ([Indigenous doctors from across the globe point to the benefits of first languages in health - ABC News](#), 5 December, 2024; The Baya Gawi songwriting project: ['The more you tell a story, the](#)

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[stronger the story becomes' | Pursuit by the University of Melbourne](#), 9 July 2024).

Activity:

Learn and practice some First Nations language songs from around Australia using the following resources, which are publicly available for classroom use.

- Locate the language group/Country on the [AIATSIS Languages map](#) and discuss the location of that community in relation to yours. You may find out more about the language if it has an entry in the [Gambay](#) First languages map.
- Yarrabil Bula: a First Languages Australia project with the ABC, with teacher notes available. [Collaboration celebrates First Nations languages through the power of song — First Languages Australia](#)
- [Marrin Gamu](#): a First Languages Australia project interpreting 'Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' into different languages. With classroom activities, including support for discussing the challenge of endangered languages and guidance on how to work with your local community to record your own local song.

Activity:

Read and practice the dance steps taught in *Our Dance* by Jacinta Daniher and Taylor Hampton. Discuss the similarities and differences between this book and *The Frog's First Song*. Discuss the importance of understanding your local landscape and animals, and how both books encourage us to connect with and appreciate local wildlife.

[Our Dance by Jacinta Daniher - Books - Hachette Australia](#)

If accessible to you, contact the authors of *Our Dance* to arrange a school workshop. Alternatively, look for other local First Nations groups who may come and teach song and dance.

[Home | Birrang Cultural Connections](#)

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Activity:**Imagery and artist's style**

- Invite students to work in pairs and discuss their favourite page spread in the book? Why is this their favourite?
- Discuss the first pages, where the darkness of the well is depicted. How would students feel if they were that single lone frog in the darkness not knowing what was out there? What feelings do they have viewing these drawings?



- Discuss the illustrations where the frogs are singing to moon from their lily pad stage and where the trees, stars and flowers are smiling. What feelings do students have when they look at these images? How are they different to the first images of darkness? Why is it happier when they are with other frogs and connecting with the moon and stars?



- Discuss the use of bold colours – a feature of the artist's style. If you have a local, accessible community street art/graffiti art mural or installation, go there and view the art, making comparisons to Phu's work. Why are the colours so bright and bold? Are there other similarities

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between Phu's work and your local street art example? How do these features make the art and the building/area of town interesting to look at? Why do we put street art in our communities?

Activity:**Frog symbolism**

- Phu's artwork is also inspired by Chinese proverbs. These often provide advice on how to live in the world in similar ways to Dreaming stories and lore. The 'frog in the well' proverb warns us not to become narrow-minded by staying in our own little place, or comfort zone, and not seeing what is out there in the world. It tells of a frog who was so happy living in his well, until he meets a sea turtle who teaches him about the vast sea. The frog suddenly realises his ignorance and limited knowledge and experience of the world. Teachers can read about this proverb here: <https://chinese-story-collection.blogspot.com/2010/09/frog-in-well.html>
- Show students a picture of a frog in a well and a sea turtle in the ocean. Summarise and explain the Chinese proverb using these picture props. Discuss how in *The Frog's First Song*, the main frog character becomes more knowledgeable when they meet the other frogs, and they go out and meet the moon, stars and world around them. Discuss how the more you learn the more you can appreciate and respect other people, places and living things.
- Learn about the life cycle of a frog (see resources below). <https://supersimple.com/article/lifecycle-of-a-frog/>
natgeokids.com/uk/discover/science/nature/frog-life-cycle/
- Discuss some of the symbolism of frogs in different cultures. Many cultures see them as symbols of fertility, abundance, rain and cleansing, and transformation ([Frog Spiritual Meaning: A Journey into Symbolism and Significance - Wisdom Of The Spirit](#)). Consider why these beliefs exist in relation to what we understand about their life cycle. This activity could also lead to frog conservation lessons, participation in waterways clean ups or local [FrogWatch](#) programs.

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Activity:

Create a class song and dance to demonstrate community, friendship and belonging. Begin with students working in pairs to create 2–4 dance moves and a short song to go with the dance. Join pairs into groups of 4 to put their dance moves and song together. Have the groups share their work. Then work as a class to put the group songs together into a class song. This activity would work well with an Elder in residence or local Indigenous performer to support.

Activity:**Connection to Country**

The website 'Common Ground' has an article explaining connection to Country:

<https://www.commonground.org.au/article/connection-to-animals-and-country>

It also has a collection of stories that celebrate First Nations storytelling and connection to Country, in a series with teacher resources called 'Dreamy'.

Money is a contributing storyteller with their piece called '[Bilabang](#)' and you can listen to other stories in the Dreamy series: [Dreamy | Mindful stories from First Nations Storytellers](#)

Using the above resources and, preferably, a local Indigenous knowledge holder such as the local Indigenous rangers of your region, learn about what 'connection to Country', 'Dreaming' and 'Creation' means at a basic level (these are complex concepts that First Nations people themselves spend their lives learning). With this understanding, re-read the following section of *The Frog's First Song*:

'All the frogs are full of joy, for they now know that there is more to this darkness. There is each other, and now there is song. The song is creation, and with it the frogs feel brave. They begin to dance a little, then hop a little, singing and hopping and learning the shape of the world.'

Discuss how this section shows us the concept of 'Creation'. Discuss the brave feeling the frogs have – why might they be feeling brave right now? Emphasise their connection to Country as they are 'learning the shape of the world'.

Activity:

The National art project description of Phu's work states that his 'funny frog story encourages us to tell a story of our own'. Support students to create their own family history story and diorama/tableaux/artwork. If appropriate, invite families in to support their child in the activity before enjoying a shared morning

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or afternoon tea, modelling and emphasising the importance of community and togetherness.

Further resources

State Library of QLD Curriculum Connect provides classroom activities based around library collections and exhibitions. The 'Spoken' exhibition of 2020 provided support to celebrate and discuss First Nations languages in the classroom. [Spoken: Foundations of First Nations Languages](#)

Common Ground leads a national celebration of Dreaming stories from October to November each year. Schools can sign up to receive five stories and teaching resources to celebrate First Nations storytelling, connection to Country and Dreaming. [First Nations Bedtime Stories 2024](#)

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

A few years ago, Jason asked me to write about an artwork he was making, which was all about singing frogs. We spoke about ancestral frog stories, and at that time I was really obsessed with choirs and the joyful act of singing in groups – I still am obsessed with how special it is to sing with other people! Instead of writing an art essay I decided to write a short story about singing frogs. I wrote the first draft of the story very quickly. I was having so much fun writing.

After finishing the story, I thought it would make a good children's book, and asked Jason if he would like to illustrate. In the story the frogs find one another first through song, then by dancing, hopping and moving out of the well into the light of the moon. I think being a part of communities is so important to help us feel safe, nurtured, joyous and supported and I am glad that the frogs reminded me of the power of gathering together.

Fun fact: in Wiradjuri there are lots of different words for different frogs and many of them sound like the sound the frog makes! Like *dubu*, *gungalang* and *gurranggarang* – all of these words are really fun to say out loud.

ILLUSTRATOR MOTIVATION

I had an art exhibition where I created a whole band of robotic frogs that sung funny little frog songs I composed with my friend Vinny. I asked Jazz to write about the origins of the frog band, in whatever way she pleased, and as a poet and writer she chose to write a short story. We talked about the story and that

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potentially frogs could have made some of the first animal sounds on planet earth and we both thought this was very interesting.

I liked the idea of the frogs being in the dark and moving into the light of the moon, a celestial body that influences the waterways and tides of the planet. I chose to start with pitch blackness, then a colourless world and then a world full of colour with the frogs bathing in all the wonder of nature that delights the senses, the wind, flowers, the moon and ponds. Some inspiration for this story and the pictures are Plato's *Allegory of The Cave*, Pond Sage Meme's *Unbothered. Moisturised. Happy. In My Lane. Focused. Flourishing.* and Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad* series.

Fun fact: the first time I saw frogs was when my parents and I went to adopt a dog from a family moving back to Japan. The two kids who belonged to the couple offered me a giant bucket filled with hundreds of baby frogs, the size of peanuts, from their backyard pond. They wanted a good home for their frogs as well as their dog. Unfortunately, we couldn't look after hundreds of frogs in our apartment; I always wonder where they are now.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jazz Money is a Wiradjuri poet and artist whose work spans installation, digital, performance, film and print. Their writing has been widely published nationally and internationally and performed on stages around the world. Jazz has published two award-winning collections of poetry, *how to make a basket* (UQP, 2021) and *mark the dawn* (UQP, 2024). *The Frog's First Song* is their first children's picture book.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Jason Phu is an artist working across a wide range of mediums, including printmaking, painting and performance. His work references folktales, family history and funny jokes. Sometimes it includes imagery from comics, cartoons and Chan paintings. Jason is a four-time Archibald Prize finalist and won the Sulman Prize in 2015.