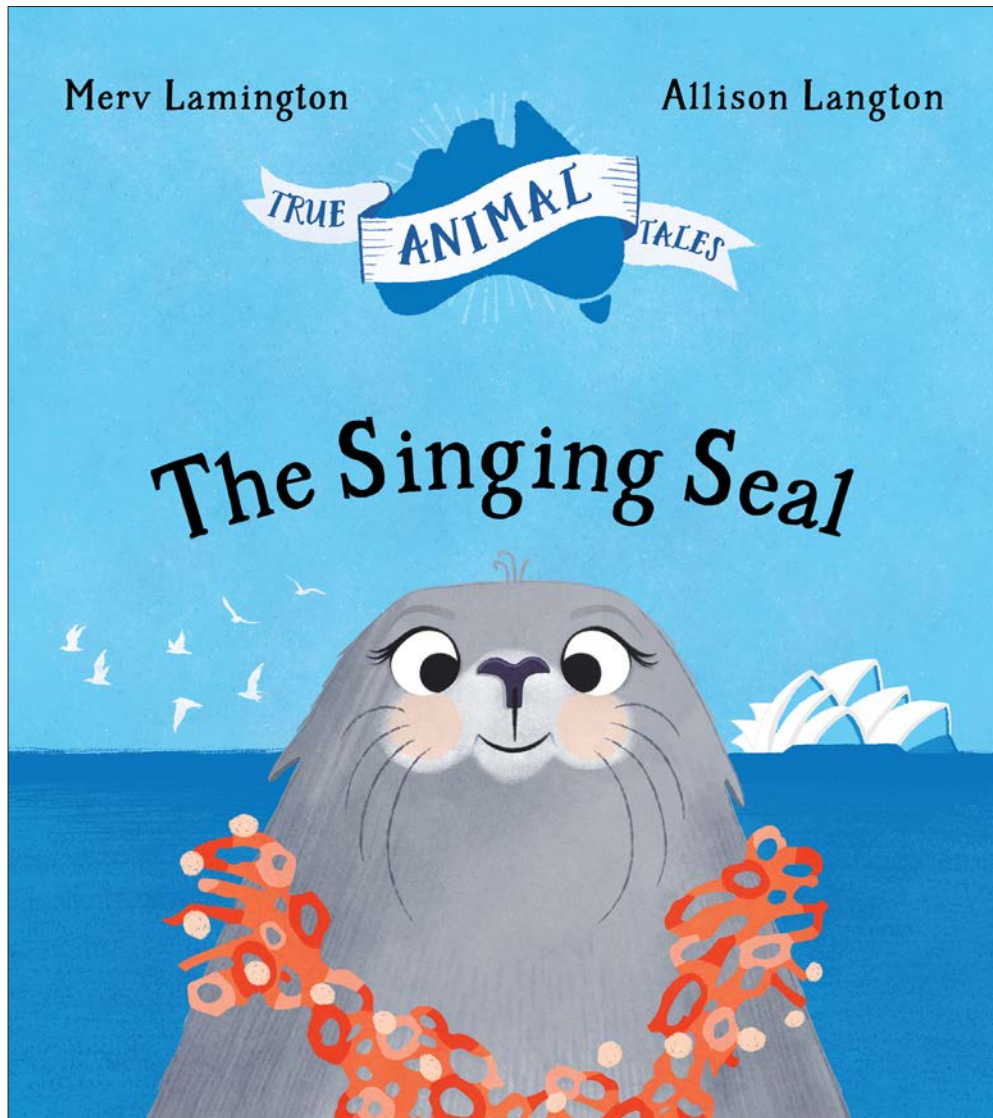


# TEACHERS NOTES

## The Singing Seal



Written by Merv Lamington  
Illustrated by Allison Langton

### THEMES

- Individuality
- Following your dreams
- Perseverance
- Environmental preservation

### SUITABLE FOR

Age 3-7: Pre-school to Grade 1

## DESCRIPTION

Meet Florence, a flamboyant fur seal who lives on the steps of the Sydney Opera House.

Unlike the other seals, Florence has plans. Big plans. She's going to be a world-famous singer.

But does Florence have what it takes to become a real SEALPRANO?

Based on a true story, *The Singing Seal* is for anyone who has ever felt small but dreamt BIG!

Bright, warm, accessible and fun, the **True Animal Tales** books are based on (mostly) true stories about all our favourite Australian animals.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Merv Lamington is an Australian author, although you wouldn't know it from his name. He was born in Nuriootpa in the Year of the Cake and raised to respect the sausage roll. His **True Animal Tales** series is inspired by a deep love of all things Australian, in particular Hugh Jackman's quads, smashed avo and sunsets in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Allison is an illustrator, a collector of rare Russian Blue whiskers and a Tawny Frogmouth fancier. Her long-term goals include finishing things she starts, starting things at the beginning, and getting to the bottom of Merv Lamington's obsession with pastries. A perfect day would include tiramisu, peppermint-tea, and an endless supply of Palomino pencils. Housemate to Babs. Fit-tracker nemesis to Tyler. Total house-lackey to Socksookie and Rum Tum.

*The Singing Seal* is Allison's first picture book.

## **AUTHOR INSPIRATION BY MERV LAMINGTON (AKA AFFIRM PRESS)**

After reading *A Wombat in my Drawer*, an anthology of Australian animal tales, we saw what larrikins our native fauna are, and felt the stories had great scope to be reimagined for children in picture-book form. Exaggerating stories of friendly seals, changeling kangaroos and delinquent koalas has been an absolute joy because the truth behind these stories makes them somewhat easier to write as well as (we hope) being more engaging to read.



## **THEMES**

### **Individuality**

As this book tells us from the first page, Florence is no ordinary seal. She doesn't quite fit in with the other seals to start with, and her goals drive her even further away. *The Singing Seal* explores the idea of embracing who you truly are, gently suggesting that while there might be hurdles along the way, the result is worth the effort.

### **Following your dreams**

When Florence spots an opera singer performing on the steps of the Sydney Opera House, it inspires her to become an opera singer herself. The book looks at what it means to discover a dream, and encourages readers to follow their own.

### **Perseverance**

Florence's pursuit of her dream of being an opera singer isn't easy. She encounters obstacles along the way, she has to work very hard and she receives little encouragement. But Florence never gives up, and eventually finds a unique way to achieve her goals. The book introduces readers to the concepts of perseverance and persistence.

### **Environmental preservation**

The environment theme comes into this story at the very end, when you consider the true story behind the seal living on the steps of the Sydney Opera House. More than just a cute draw card for tourists, the seals living in Sydney Harbour prove that preservation efforts have been successful. It's a great example of positive environmental change.

## ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

- Before you start reading, have a look at the cover of this book and read the blurb on the back. Discuss as a class what you think this story might be about. Also take a moment to discuss what it is about a book that makes you want to read it. Is it the cover? The description? Are you interested in this book based on these details?
- After reading the book, discuss as a class if the book has lived up to expectations. Draw your own version of the cover and write your own blurb, now that you have read the book.
- In this book, Florence the seal decides to become an opera singer. Have you ever listened to opera music? Listen to a piece of music as a class, and discuss. Can you understand the music? How does it make you feel? Do you think you could be an opera singer?



- If you don't want to be an opera singer, do you have a grand dream, like Florence? What is it? Discuss as a class, or draw a picture of what it might look like to achieve your dreams.
- There are things that get in the way of Florence achieving her dream. What are they? How does she get past them? What things do you think might get in the way of you achieving your dreams, and how can you get past them?
- Why do you think people are mean to Florence about wanting to be a singer? What does she do in response? What do you do when people are mean to you? Make a list of all the things you can do when you feel like someone is being mean to you.

- Why does Florence feel like she doesn't fit in? Do you ever feel like you don't fit in? Do you think Florence's story shows that it is good to be different? Draw a picture about all the things that make you different.
- Take a look at the last page of the story. There isn't much text, but the illustrations tell you a lot about Florence's future after the book. What do you think it means? What do you think happens to Florence next? If you could make a page like this about what happens next in your life, what do you think it would look like? Draw it and discuss with the class.
- What is your favourite animal? Do you think they could be the star of their own story, just like Florence? Write and draw a story about your favourite animal following their dreams, using *The Singing Seal* as inspiration.
- At the very end of this book, there is a page about the real life fur seals living in Sydney Harbour. Read through this as a class and discuss why it is so important to protect endangered animals. Research other endangered animals, and discuss what people need to do to help them survive.
- Organise a rubbish collection session at school or at a local park to help keep rubbish out of the waterways.
- The author of this book has a bit of a funny name. Do you think it is their real name? When someone makes up a fake name to write a book, that name is called a pseudonym. If you were to write a story under a fake name, what would yours be? Brainstorm as a class and come up with a list. Vote for your favourite, and as a class make a book cover with this author's name on it.

