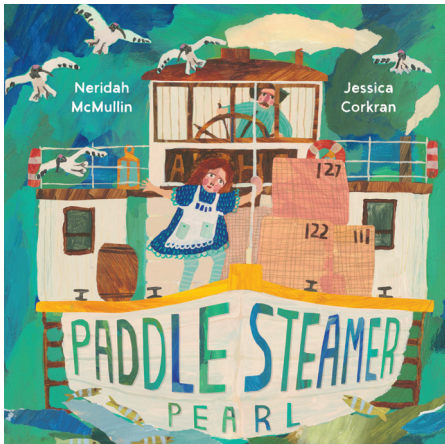




Author: Neridah McMullin
Illustrator: Jessica Corkran
ISBN: 9781922507921
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Blurb

Pearl and her family live on the paddle steamer *Alpha*. All day long, they paddle up and down the Darling and Murray rivers, trading everything from flour and tea to jewellery and wood. As summer arrives, the water levels suddenly drop.

The *Alpha* is stranded!

How will the family survive months on the dry riverbed? What can Pearl do to help? Will it ever rain?

Based on the true story of Pearl Wallace, Australia's first female river boat captain!

About the author

Neridah McMullin is an award-winning author of 12 books for children, including *Shearer*, *Drover*, and *Tearawat Coach*. Her book have been shortlisted and Notables for the CBCA Book of the Year and have won the Australian Speech Pathology Book of the Year for Young Readers. She is passionate about writing true stories.

About the illustrator

Jess Corkran loves to create playful, messy art on paper and in her sketchbooks using acrylic and collage to create her scenes. *Paddle Steamer Pearl* is her first picture book.

PADDLE STEAMER PEARL

Teachers' Notes

Recommended for: Years 1–4 (lower to mid-primary)

Australian Curriculum Content

Learning Areas

- English
- Science/STEM
- HASS

General Capabilities

- Creative and Critical Thinking
- Literacy

Cross Curriculum priorities

- Sustainability
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

Before You Read

Cover

Invite students to examine the front cover closely using the 'See, Think, Wonder' routine. Encourage students to identify what details they notice in the illustrations, discussing what they think is happening. Who might the people on the boat be? What clues suggest where and when the story is taking place? What type of boat are the characters on and what could its purpose be? Record students' questions and observations about the characters, setting and plot. Revisit these ideas after reading, to compare how students' knowledge and thinking has changed.

After You Read

English

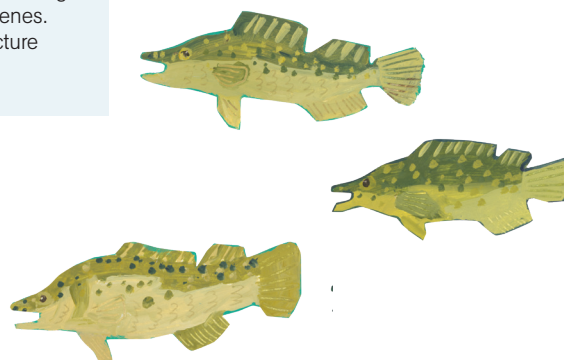
Creating connections

Encourage students to make connections between their own experiences and the story. Have they travelled by boat or visited a river? How do food, mail and other goods reach their community today? Discuss how transport has changed over time. Why were waterways once important travel routes for many Australians?

Comprehension and meaning

As you read with students, encourage them to use both the text and illustrations to deepen their understanding of the story. Discuss how the illustrations provide clues about the setting, the characters, their roles and the challenges of travelling and living on a paddle steamer. What do the clothing, equipment and towns reveal about the time in which this book is set?

Explore unfamiliar vocabulary terms such as 'skipper', 'engineer' and 'deckhand'. Use contextual clues and the glossary at the end of the book to help determine meanings. Create a class word wall, adding new words as you define them. Encourage students to use this language in any related stories.



Diary entry response

Imagine you are also living on the *Alpha* with Pearl. Invite students to write a diary entry from the perspective of a child travelling on the river. They might describe daily life on board, the excitement of arriving at a town, or the challenges faced during an event such as the stranding due to low river levels.



Narrative non-fiction

Invite students to share an experience or connection they have with a local body of water. Use these discussions and ideas to encourage students to explore the concept of narrative non-fiction by creating their own short story or picture book based on these experiences.

Playing with language

The sound of the *Alpha* going full steam ahead—CHUFF CHUFF CHUFF—features strongly in the story. Explore other examples of onomatopoeia, creating a list of sounds you could hear while travelling down a river. Incorporate these examples into creative responses such as the diary entry, short story, a poem or a descriptive paragraph.

Science/STEM

Design a paddle steamer

Paddle steamers travelled along the Darling and Murray river systems, carrying people, animals and supplies. They navigated changing river conditions including sandbars, droughts, floods and fluctuating water levels.

Use [Trove](#) to search old photographs and images of paddle steamers. Guide student research into the various features such a

paddle wheel placement, hull size, deck size and sleeping quarters. Discuss why these features were important, considering the function and use of these boats. Students can sketch and label these features, using the image at the end of the book as a guide.

Using simple classroom craft materials, challenge students to design and build a model paddle steamer, capable of carrying the greatest amount of weight without sinking. Test each design and share observations on how shape, balance and buoyancy help with performance. For a greater challenge, encourage students to create a design using paddle pop sticks and elastic bands to create paddles that move the boat along the surface of the water.

Extension: Allocate a price to each construction resource, and a budget for each team. Challenge students to design the most effective paddle steamer while staying within the budget. Students can compare compromises between cost, strength and performance.

Growing food on the river

In the story, Pearl and her family were stranded for six months in the waterhole. During this time, they planted potatoes and traded goods with the closest town. Students can investigate how potatoes grow by planting seed potatoes in containers or a school garden. Observe and record growth over several weeks. Consider why reliable food sources were important for families living and working along Australia's rivers.

HASS

Pearl Wallace

Pearl Wallace was the first woman in Australia to become a river boat captain. Explore the endmatter as a springboard into a guided inquiry into Captain Pearl Wallace's life. Encourage students to create an informative 'one-pager' about Pearl Wallace and her importance.

Why were paddle steamers significant to Australia's development?

Paddle steamers played a significant role in connecting communities along the Murray–Darling river system in the 1800s and early 1900s.

With students, identify goods depicted in the illustrations and text. Discuss why these items needed to be transported. Explore how paddle steamers moved timber, wool, food and other supplies between inland communities and larger settlements.

Discuss how rivers acted as important transport routes before extensive road and rail networks were developed. How did paddle steamers help the development of Australia, especially growing inland communities? What other challenges could river travellers and communities face?

Investigating the Murray–Darling river systems

Using maps or digital atlases, locate the Murray–Darling river system. Trace major rivers and identify key towns along the routes, identifying the built and natural features of the river. Compare the past and present river systems to identify how the use of this waterway has changed over time.

The Murray–Darling river system is part of the Murray–Darling Basin. Divided into two parts, water in the northern Basin runs into the Darling River. Water in the southern Basin runs into the River Murray. Use the [Murray–Darling Basin Authority website](#) to help research this area further.



What is a catchment?

A catchment is an area of land, usually surrounded by mountains or hills, over which water flows and is collected. Within a catchment, water runs by gravity to the lowest point. As a class, identify the mountains and waterways that form your local catchment area and any major local landmarks.

Create a 3D model of a catchment using paper or aluminium foil. Start by scrunching the paper or foil tightly and then open it back up to create ridges and valleys. Use green marker to colour along the raised ridges to mark the mountains. Use blue marker to highlight the creases and low points to mark the lakes and waterways. Lightly spray the model with water, watching how the catchment system works.

Environmental conditions affected river travel along the Murray–Darling due to the large size of the catchment area. Using the model and resources such as sand, water and twigs, guide students to investigate how droughts, floods, snags and sandbars affect the water levels of the Murray–Darling and the movement of paddle steamers. Discuss how captains and crews may have confronted and adapted to these challenges.

Cross Curriculum Priority - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

First Nations Peoples hold a deep connection to Country and share an ancestral connection to Australia's river systems. Support students to explore how waterways provide food, transport routes, meeting places and connections between First Nations communities. Discuss how rivers of the Murray–Darling Basin have been places of cultural, spiritual and practical importance for the 50+ First Nations peoples in the Basin area.

Use the Murray–Darling Basin Authority web page on '[Water for First Nations](#)' to explore how the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) and Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) continue to care for and advocate for the health of river systems today.

Encourage students to reflect on the shared responsibility of caring for these environments for future generations, beginning with how to care for local waterways.

