

Puggle  
Catriona Hoy / Andrew Plant

TEACHERS' NOTES  
By Janet McLean

**Title:** Puggle  
**Author:** Catriona Hoy  
**Illustrator:** Andrew Plant

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**Author:** **Catriona Hoy** was born in Dumbarton, Scotland. She emigrated to Australia with her family when she was 7 years old. She always loved reading. She says, "*I escaped to imaginary places because we moved around a lot and we'd left all of our extended family back in Scotland*". Catriona studied science, and after working for a while as a lab technician, she became a secondary science teacher. Now she combines teaching with writing for children. Her books include *The Magic Tree*, *My Grandad Marched on Anzac Day*, *Daddies and Mummies Are Amazing*. The idea for Puggle came to Catriona when she visited the home of two wild life rescuers. She writes,

*These women looked after injured, ill or orphaned animals, at their own expense and looked after them until they were rehabilitated and could be returned to the wild.... One of the highlights was the baby echidna, which looked to me like a chicken fillet with a snout. When I found out a baby echidna was called a puggle, I fell in love with the name. I looked at my husband and he saw that 'look' in my eye and he said, 'What a good name for a book!'*

**Illustrator:** **Andrew Plant** is a scientific artist, or an artistic scientist, or maybe both. He trained as a zoologist at Melbourne University. He is now an author/illustrator, specialising in natural history, especially dinosaurs. Andrew has illustrated over 130 books in Australia, the USA, the UK, New Zealand and South Korea. He has written more than a dozen books, and has also directed, choreographed and designed 60 children's theatre productions, and created murals for schools and museums. Andrew found that illustrating 'Puggle' was more difficult than he anticipated. He had painted echidnas before, for education books, and thought that, apart from the rather tedious painting of spines, it should be fairly easy. He writes about the dilemma he had with Catriona's story.

*"The appeal of Catriona's text lay in Puggle's personality coming through. A prickly ball shows very little personality. Echidna faces, likewise, are somewhat lacking in a*

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*variety of expressions, dominated by an only slightly flexible nose, with a pair of very small, deeply set, essentially blank eyes nearly buried in spines on either side'.*

Andrew didn't want to anthropomorphise the animals in any way with overly human expressions because he thinks it lessens and cheapens our appreciation of them. He says, '*As an artist, I also think it is the lazy way to approach an animal subject*'.

**SYNOPSIS** *Puggle* is a passage-of-time story about a baby echidna, born and living safe and warm in his mother's pouch, until the day she is hit by a car. *Puggle* is found and taken to an animal rescue centre where, along with a number of other animals, he is cared for until he is big enough to be returned to the bush. Interesting details about the lifecycle and habits of echidnas are woven through the story. Facts about echidnas, included on the endpapers, add interest.

**WRITING STYLE** Catriona Hoy has created a text that blends accurate information with a warm and creative narrative style. The setting and the main character, Puggle, are introduced in the first three pages. Then the story backtracks to Puggle's birth and his early life within his mother's pouch. There is then an abrupt change of pace when Puggle's mother dies. (*One day there was a loud noise and Puggle stopped swaying.*'). From this point the story focuses on Puggle's life in the rescue centre. The passing of time is marked in a number of different ways. Puggle grows and his features change. Other animals in the rescue centre return to their own habitats. New animals arrive at the centre. Catriona's uses different language forms throughout the story. The beginning echoes a familiar rhyme ("In a dark, dark house..."): '*In a tall house on a hill... there's a box. In the box there's a towel. And curled up in the towel is Puggle*'. Words and phrases evoke meaning and emotion through alliteration (*...a small wriggly wet thing...*); repetition: things smell and taste *very, very good*; poetic language: *Puggle swayed gently to and fro as his mother shuffled through the forest*; and the use of expressive words and phrases: '*Puggle*', '*shuffled*', '*waddled*', '*shurps and slurps*', '*snuffles*', '*puggle porridge*'.

**ILLUSTRATIONS** Andrew Plant used acrylic paints on 300 gsm watercolour paper. He says he prefers '*acrylics to watercolours as they give much bolder colours, are flexible –*

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*they can be used as a thin wash if desired – and mistakes can be corrected!*'. Puggles moods are captured through body language rather than facial expression - the tilt of the head, the position of the limbs, the shape of the body. Andrew says,

*'All in all, Puggle was a prickly subject - figuratively, as well as literally. Even when prickle-less, he was a pink, then grey, blob. Puggles are cute in the literal sense of the word – ugly, but appealing. There is something very comical and engaging about those helplessly wriggling little bean-bags. Likewise, as adults, that single – and simple-minded, determined waddle is irresistible.*

On most pages single illustrations intimately focus on an incident from the text - Puggle hatching from the egg inside his mother's pouch; Puggle eating 'puggle porridge'; Puggle being held in a hand (clearly showing how Puggle is growing). Two double page spreads bleed from the edges of the page. These contrast the spaciousness of the bush with the warm safety of the mother echidna's pouch, and the careful hand-rearing of the orphaned and injured animals in the shelter. Andrew uses two other double page spreads in the book. Each of these spreads is a series of small vignettes on a white background. One introduces the different animals in the shelter. The other one shows Puggle gradually growing bigger.

### **DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES**

- When introducing the story refer to the brief commentary on the imprint page about what can be done if a mother echidna is hit by a car.
- Read the story, allowing time to talk with the children about how the author uses particular forms of language, and how the illustrator uses the pictures to create and infer meaning. For example: Look at the opening pages.
- The events and theme of the story are set up in the first three pages, with a simple rhythmic text and single pictures on each page.
  - Talk about why Puggle is in a box in a rescue centre, and what the pictures show.
  - Look at the picture of the house. Does it look welcoming? Why? Talk about why Puggle is wrapped in a towel and tucked in a box.
  - The story backtracks to show how Puggle came to be in the rescue centre. Talk about the words the author used to indicate this time shift (*'Not so long ago...*).

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- Talk about the single pictures on these pages: how the enclosing warm brown and red tones focus attention on Puggle's snug, safe world.
- In the next part of the story a double page spread which bleeds off the page depicts the vastness of the outside world. We cannot see Puggle but the words on the left hand page tell us that he is safely inside the pouch he. Then, on the right hand page, there is a change of pace and mood when Puggle's mother is hit by a car. Here we can infer what has happened although it is not spelt out in the text, nor shown in the picture.
- On the next pages Puggle is found and picked up by '*something warm*'. However the reader is aware of Puggle's fear through both the words: '*There were... strange smells and frightening noises*'; and the illustration: Puggle's stiff body.
- Use this kind of discussion throughout the book to show how the author and illustrator have used language and pictures to create the story.
- Look for the different words and phrases Catriona uses to show that the story is taking place over a period of time: Puggle grows and his body changes: '*Puggle is a baby echidna*', '*Puggle grows too big for his box*'. Events happen in a time sequence: '*Later*', '*Not so long ago...*', '*Summer comes...*'. Changes occur in the environment: '*One day (the magpie) warbles at the sky and then flies away*'. Talk about how and why these words and phrases work in the story. Find others.
- Andrew's illustrations also indicate the passing of time: Puggle's skin changes colour from pink to grey. Bumps and hair and spines begin to grow. Puggle gradually grows bigger (the two pictures of Puggle in a hand clearly show how he is getting bigger).
- Ask the children to draw pictures of Puggle at different stages of his life. Use Andrew's pictures as a model. Find pictures by other artists, to show how everyone draws in her or his own way.
- From the information provided in the story and on the endpapers make posters or friezes about echidnas. Include words and pictures. Write the words in different colours.
- Find out if other baby native animals have interesting names, like a puggle.
- Find out more about native animal rescue centres.
- Visit Catriona Hoy and Andrew Plant at their websites.

Catriona: <http://www.catrionahoy.com.au/>; Andrew: <http://www.andrewplant.com/>