**Nature Storybooks: Emu**

Author: Claire Saxby  
Illustrator: Graham Byrne  
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**Outline:**

In the open forest, Emu gathers granite-green eggs under soft feathers. Emu will care for the eggs and protect the stripy chicks once they hatch. There are many hazards in the forest for this unusual family.

**Author/Illustrator Information:**

Claire Saxby was born in Melbourne and grew up in Newcastle. She’s lived in more houses than she can remember, and attended many schools. Claire is the author of many books including *There Was an Old Sailor*, illustrated by Cassandra Allen, which won the Crystal Kite Member Choice Award, Australia and New Zealand Division, Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators, 2011.

Born in Sydney sometime last century, Graham Byrne did the usual school and university time, worked as an electrical engineer for years, then went into building houses and structures. The old back injury put paid to hard physical work. An interest in art as a creative adjunct to the practical nature of building led to formal education, work installing artworks at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, and wonderings about other roads to explore. Wanting his art to have some “practical” useful purpose, to be illuminating, pointed Graham to illustration and design pathways. Explorations of drawing, painting, filling sketchbooks, making books for his grandchildren and illustrating short stories have combined to prompt his journey as a book illustrator. *Big Red Kangaroo* (2013) was Graham’s first picture book and was short-listed for the Children’s Book Council of Australia Chrichton Award for New Illustrators.

**How to use these notes:**

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

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### National Curriculum Focus:

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*NB this book is a useful resource for studies of biological sciences throughout the F-6 Australian Curriculum.*

*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.*
Physical characteristics
Draw a picture of Emu and label the parts of his body as described in the book. Also write a brief description of what each part is for.

Natural Habitat
In small groups, create a diorama in a cardboard box to represent the emu’s habitat. Try to incorporate materials from the natural environment into your display. Use the text and illustrations as a guide as to which colours and materials to use.

Literature and Context
Find other books about emus in your school library. How do the authors deal with the subject of emus differently to Claire Saxby and Graham Byrne?

Is Emu an imaginative, informative or persuasive text? Is it a combination of more than one of these types of texts? How can you tell? Who do you think the book was created for?

Emu includes an index at the back of the book. What is the purpose of an index? How do you use it? In what kind of books would you normally find an index?

Examining Literature
The text in this book is presented in two styles. Identify the formats. Why do you think the author did this? Read the book using each format separately and then discuss how the different formats change the purpose and alter the perception of Emu.

Identify the events in an emu’s life as described in this book. Have students work in small groups to present this as a Keynote/PowerPoint presentation.

Which writing style do you prefer: the descriptive storytelling style or the informative factual style? In what types of texts would each of these writing styles usually be used? For example, novels, short stories, newspaper articles and reference books.

The author uses descriptive language, or imagery, on many occasions in the book. For example, “... where eucalyptus fringe tufty grasslands, honey-pale sunshine seeps to where Emu sits on a nest.” (Page 6.) What other examples can you find? How does this description help bring the world of the emu to life? Write some sentences using descriptive language about items or places around you in a similar style.

There are also many examples of simile (“... hair-like feathers ...” page 8) and alliteration (“... granite-green eggs” page 6) in this book. List other examples of these literary devices that the author has used throughout.

Look at the colours the illustrator has used in Emu. Why do you think he chose to use these colours? Do they accurately represent the environment that emus live in?

Examine the page where the emus are zigzagging away from the eagle. Whose perspective has the illustrator drawn this illustration from? Why do you think he has chosen to do this? How does this angle affect the reader’s perception of the emus?

Responding to Literature
Before beginning a study of this title, use an online or IWB polling tool conduct a survey to ascertain students’ knowledge of emus. Ask participants questions like:

- What do emus eat?
- When do emus eat?
- What predators threaten emus?

Redo the poll after reading Emu and discuss results.

Do you think an emu is a good animal for a pet? Why or why not? Hold a class discussion.

Emu chicks are camouflaged to help protect themselves from predators. What does camouflage mean? What other animals are camouflaged?

How would you feel if you encountered an emu with his young in the bush? Write a diary or blog entry.

Write a story from the goanna’s perspective about him wanting to eat Emu’s eggs. Why does he want to eat them?

Write a book review on Emu. Write what you liked about the book and if you think the author and illustrator did a good job of conveying information in an interesting way. Mention any books that are similar to Emu and make a recommendation as to who you think will like this book.