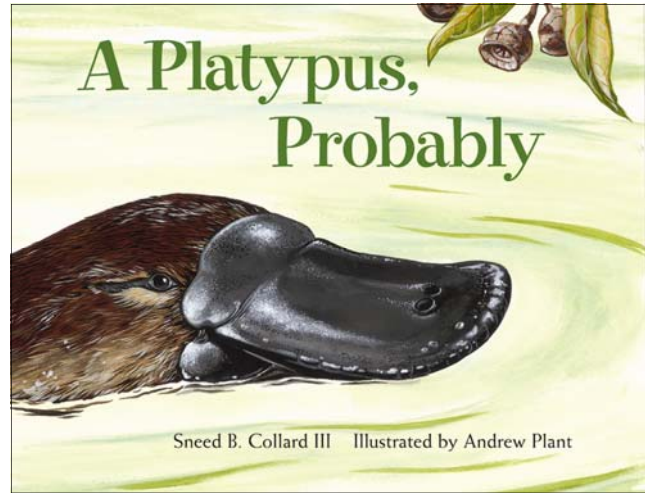


A Platypus, Probably

Discussion & Activity Guide

For Grades K–3

Developed by Charlesbridge
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What mammal, known as a monotreme, swims in the streams of Australia just as its ancestors have done for 110 million years? What is this mammal that lays eggs? What kind of animal has a furry body like a beaver, a bill like a duck, and webbed feet?

A platypus, probably.

Acclaimed science writer Sneed B. Collard III invites readers to dive into the murky rivers and streams of Australia to learn fascinating facts about one of the most unique animals on earth—the platypus. Lyrical text celebrates the platypus’s uniqueness, while detailed sidebars give information about its history and biology.

Rich, detailed paintings by Andrew Plant capture the solitary life of this extraordinary animal and its lush environment Down Under.

Share this book with your young readers and explore the life and habitat of the platypus further with these questions and activities.



Before reading the book:

- Show students the cover of the book and ask them what they think this book is about. The cover wraps from the front to the back, so students can get a greater idea of the scene if you open the book to show the whole cover.
 - Ask students if they have ever seen a platypus, either in the zoo or in the wild. Chances are they have not—there are no platypuses in U.S. zoos, and they only live in Australia.
 - Ask students where they think platypuses live and what their habitat is like.
- Now read the book with your students either aloud or chorally, or assign passages to students to read aloud. You may want to read the detailed sidebars while the students read the more lyrical text.

After reading the book:

Reading Comprehension

- The platypus is a unique and very unusual animal. Have students study the illustrations in the book and then ask them what animal, or animals, they think the platypus is most like. From the reading, what do scientists think?
- How does a platypus detect prey or danger?
- Is a platypus nocturnal or diurnal?
- Platypuses are solitary creatures. How much space does a platypus require?
- What is different about the way platypuses have babies from the way other mammals do?
- What are platypus babies called? What do platypus babies look like? How do platypus babies eat? When do the pups move out on their own?
- The title *A Platypus, Probably* uses a grammatical concept called ‘alliteration.’ Ask students if they know what that word means. Have fun as a class creating other alliterative phrases.



Math

- A platypus is warm-blooded, but its body temperature is nine degrees cooler than most mammals. If its body temperature is nine degrees cooler than a human’s, what is the platypus’s temperature?
- A platypus, on average, weighs five pounds. If a platypus eats 30 percent of its body weight each day, how many pounds of food does it eat? How many pounds of food does it eat in a week? A month? A year?
- Platypuses live in eastern Australia. If a platypus is hunting prey in a river in Tasmania at midnight, what are you likely doing in the U.S? Have students research the time zones of the world and calculate the time difference between eastern Australia and their hometown.

Activities

- On a bulletin board, have the class create an Australian river scene by finding or drawing pictures of platypuses and their prey. Where would each creature live? Then add platypus predators to the scene.
- Platypus ancestors lived with dinosaurs 110 million years ago. Have students research what sorts of dinosaurs lived with them. Find or draw pictures of some of these dinosaurs and add them to the Australian river scene the class created.
- Using an atlas or globe as a reference point, have students draw a picture of Gondwanaland.

Conservation Discussion

- Platypus territory is endangered. Have students research and report on conservation efforts and platypus facts at the website of the Australian Platypus Conservancy at www.platypus.asn.au. For further discussion, ask students what they could do to help conservation efforts. Make a list on the chalkboard.
- Discuss the meaning of conservation. Ask students if they know of any conservation efforts that they engage in at home (i.e., composting for the garden, turning the lights off, recycling, etc.).
- Ask students if they know of any animals in their area that have anything in common with the platypus. Are these animals in danger? Are there efforts in the community to help the animals? Ask students what they can do to help.

Match the Vocabulary Words

1. Incubate _____
 2. Predator _____
 3. Nocturnal _____
 4. Gondwanaland _____
 5. Warm-blooded _____
 6. Echidna _____
 7. Hemisphere _____
 8. Larva _____
 9. Diurnal _____
 10. Mammal _____
 11. Supercontinent _____
 12. Monotremes _____
 13. Venomous _____
- A. The ancient supercontinent that consisted of present-day Africa, South America, Antarctica, Australia, and India joined together.
 - B. Able to inject poison into another animal.
 - C. Active during the day.
 - D. A large continent consisting of several smaller continents or landmasses joined together.
 - E. To keep eggs in a favorable environment for hatching or developing.
 - F. Any of a large class of warm-blooded vertebrates whose offspring are fed with milk secreted by the female mammary glands.
 - G. Active during the night.
 - H. A creature that lives by capturing and feeding upon other animals.
 - I. An ancient group of mammals that lay eggs. Today only the platypus and echidna remain.
 - J. A small toothless monotreme that lives in Australia and Papua New Guinea.
 - K. The young or early stage of some animals. Caterpillars, for instance, are the larvae of butterflies and moths.
 - L. Able to generate one's own body heat.
 - M. Any of the halves of the earth: north and south of the equator, or east and west of the prime meridian.





Sneed B. Collard III

“... there are so many incredible things to write about. There are more great ideas than I can ever get to.”

Sneed B. Collard III has been a biologist, computer scientist, and author. He began writing after graduating with honors in marine biology from the University of California, Berkeley. After earning his master's in scientific instrumentation at the University of California, Santa Barbara, he continued to hone his craft while serving as a computer consultant for biologists.

The main focus of Sneed's work has always been nature, science, and the environment. His writing has drawn from his formal education as well as his extensive travels to the Middle East, Asia, Australia, Central America, and other parts of the world. His articles have appeared in *The Humanist*, *Environmental Action*, *Florida Wildlife*, *Islands*, *Cricket*, *Highlights for Children*, and many other publications.

Sneed is also the author of several children's books for Charlesbridge, including *Creepy Creatures*, *Our Wet World*, *The Forest in the Clouds*, and *One Night in the Coral Sea*. Other books include *Sea Snakes* (Boyd's Mills Press), *Smart Survivors* (NorthWord Press), *Animal Dads* (Houghton Mifflin), and *Monteverde* (Franklin Watts). These books have won a number of awards and honors from organizations such as the American Library Association, New York Public Library, National Council of Teachers of English, and Reading Rainbow.



In his work Sneed seeks not only to educate, entertain, and inspire children, but also to empower them to effect positive change. In addition to his writing activities, he is an active speaker. He has won many speaking awards, and addresses thousands of students and educators each year about writing and the environment.

Sneed lives in Montana where he writes books, articles, and stories for young people.