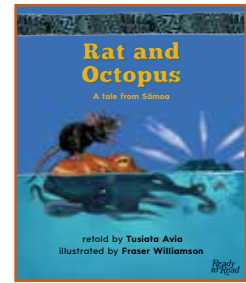


# Rat and Octopus

A tale from Sāmoa

retold by Tusiata Avia  
illustrated by Fraser Williamson

This text is levelled at Orange 2.



## Overview

*Rat and Octopus*, a tale common to many Pacific cultures, is retold here by Samoan writer Tusiata Avia. Students will enjoy finding out why Octopus has black markings on his head and why Rat and Octopus remain enemies to this day.

This book provides opportunities for students to “flexibly use the sources of information in text, in combination with their prior knowledge, to make meaning and consider new ideas” and to “draw on a wider range of comprehension strategies to help them think more deeply about what they read” (*The Literacy Learning Progressions*, page 13).

There is an audio version of the text as an MP3 file at [www.readytoread.tki.org.nz](http://www.readytoread.tki.org.nz)

## Related texts

Texts about octopuses: “Octopus” (poem card); *Mum’s Octopus* (Orange 2)

Other animal tales: *A Good Idea, Dragons! Dragons!*, *Dragons!*, *A Safe Place*, *I’m the King of the Mountain* (shared); *Purr-fect!* (Yellow 3); *Crow Tales*, *Skipper’s Happy Tail* (Blue 1), *I Want to Fly* (Blue 2); *The Little Red Hen* (Green 1); *Two Tiger Tales* (Purple 1)

Other tales that explain why things are as they are: *How Kiwi Saved the Forest* (shared); *Two Tiger Tales* (Purple 1); *Just So Stories* by Rudyard Kipling

Stories and poems with Pacific settings or contexts: “Mālo e lelei” (poem card); *A Safe Place* (shared); *Simi Helps* (Yellow 3); *My Name is Laloifi* (Orange 1), *Mum’s Octopus* (Orange 2); *White Sunday in Sāmoa* (Turquoise 2); *That’s the Way* (Purple 1); *A Quilt for Kiri* (Purple 2)

## Text characteristics

*Rat and Octopus* has the following text characteristics that help develop the reading behaviours expected of students reading at Orange.

The familiar context of a traditional tale

The story within a story (a grandfather retelling a favourite story to his grandchildren) with the two stories distinguished by the use of different fonts and a patterned border

A mix of explicit and implicit content that provides opportunities for students to make predictions and inferences

Illustrations that support and extend the meaning and may suggest new ideas or viewpoints

Literary phrasing (for example, “Once there was”, “set off”, “screached with fear”, “And to this day”)

“What story would you like tonight?” asked Pa.

“The one about Rat and Octopus,” said the children.

Pa smiled. “OK, then I’ll begin,” he said.



2



Once there was a rat who lived on a small island. Rat wanted to go to the big island that she could see far across the water. Rat asked her friends Snail and Pigeon to come with her. It was too far to swim, so they made a raft of coconut branches to take them to the island.

3

Frequent use of dialogue and more than one character speaking on a page, requiring students to use speech marks, line spaces, and attributions to track who is speaking

A variety of sentence structures so that students are required to notice and use linking words (such as “who”, “that”, “so”, “when”, “and”, “to”, “but”, “like”, “Then”, “for”, “If”) and punctuation as a guide to phrasing and meaning.

Mostly familiar words, but also some new interest vocabulary (for example, “island”, “Snail”, “Pigeon”, “raft”, “coconut branches”, “sink”, “screached with fear”, “bottom”, “safe”, “sank”, “tired”, “save”, “Climb”, “present”, “cheeky”, “droppings”, “angry”, “waved”, “searching”, “markings”) that is strongly supported by the context, the sentence structure, and/or the illustrations

Reading standard: After two years at school

The Literacy Learning Progressions

## Suggested reading purpose

(What can the students expect to find out or think about as a result of reading this text?)

To find out what happens when Rat meets Octopus

## Possible learning goals

(What opportunities does this text provide for students to learn more about how to “read, respond to, and think critically” about texts?)

The behaviours listed below link to *The Literacy Learning Progressions*. **Select from and adapt** them according to your students’ strengths, needs, and experiences – their culture, language, and identity (*Reading and Writing Standards for years 1–8*, Knowledge of the learner, page 6).

This text provides opportunities for students, over several readings, to:

- **make connections** between their own experiences and information in the story to **make predictions and inferences**
- **ask questions** and think about or look for possible answers
- identify the main elements in the story (**summarise**)
- **make meaning** by searching for and using multiple sources of information rather than one source
- **monitor** their reading and self-correct where necessary, for example, by rerunning text or checking further sources of information.

## Introducing the story

- A short video on the importance of introducing the text is available at <https://vimeo.com/142446572>
- Use your knowledge of your students to ensure that the introduction to the story activates their prior knowledge and supports them for a successful first reading.

For English language learners, you could talk through the cover illustration and the first few pages before the whole-group session to build confidence with vocabulary. You can find useful guidance about supporting English language learners at <http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Planning-for-my-students-needs/Resources-for-planning/Supporting-English-Language-Learning-in-Primary-School-SELLIPS>

- A few days before reading this story, you could read the shared book *The Safe Place* (which has a Pacific setting) and/or the poem card “Octopus” with the students. (You could use *Mum’s Octopus*, which is at the same level as *Rat and Octopus*, either as an introduction or a follow-up to this story.)
- Read the title and subtitle together, and use the illustration to clarify the main characters and the Pacific setting. Prompt the students to predict (or ask questions about) what Rat and Octopus are doing. Encourage students who are familiar with the tale to share what they know.
- Support the students to infer from the title page illustration that Rat is in trouble. Encourage them to make predictions about how Rat has got into this predicament.
- Expect the students to notice that the illustrations on page 2 look quite different from those they have seen so far. Draw out the idea that the grandfather is telling the tale of Rat and Octopus to his grandchildren.
- On page 3, draw attention to Rat looking at the island in the distance. Prompt the students to make connections to the title page illustration, which shows Rat struggling to swim to the island. As you discuss the story, draw out or feed in some of the interest vocabulary, including the names of the new characters on this page. Model your thinking: *I wonder what Rat and her friends are doing with the coconut branches.*
- Have the students talk with a partner about one question or prediction they have about the story based on the illustrations and discussion so far.
- At this point, you could share the reading purpose and have the students start reading. If you think they need more support, you could discuss the illustrations on pages 4–5, which show that the characters have made a raft (and that there is now a problem with it).

## Monitoring the reading

- Observe the students as they read the story quietly to themselves. Increasingly, the processing that students do at this level is “inside their heads” and may not be obvious until after they have read the text and you are rereading and discussing it as a group. Note their confidence and perseverance, their attempts to solve unknown words, and any instances of self-monitoring, cross-checking, and self-correction. Only intervene on the first reading if it’s clear that a student needs help. There will be opportunities to provide further support with word solving and comprehension on subsequent readings.

- If students are making errors without noticing, wait until the end of the sentence or page before intervening, unless they stop reading. Waiting gives them the opportunity to notice the error and fix it themselves. Use appropriate prompts to draw their attention to the error. For example:

Text in book	Student reads	Teacher prompt
Rat asked her friends Snail and Pigeon to come with her.	Rat asked her friends Snail and <b>Pig</b> - (student stops reading)	<i>Yes, the first part of the word looks like "pig", but the "g" has a different sound. Read the sentence aloud, articulating the first syllable of "Pigeon", pausing for the student to come in with the rest of the word. If they have forgotten the name, tell them.</i>
Pigeon screeched with fear and flew off into the sky.	Pigeon screeched with <b>f</b> - (student stops reading)	<i>Pigeon screeched because she was frightened. Remind the student of the similar phrase in <i>I'm the King of the Mountain</i>. What did all the creatures do in that story when they were frightened ...? That's right, "They shook with fear." In this story, Pigeon "screeched with f__".</i>
The raft sank into the water	The raft <b>sinked</b> into the water	<i>Yes, it did sink, but we don't say "sinking". The word is "sank".</i> Note this as a teaching point to follow up on later.
"If you ever see an octopus, you will still see the markings from the rat on its head."	"If you ever see an octopus, you will still see the <b>makings</b> from the rat on its head."	<i>Write "makings" and "markings" and draw the student's attention to the difference in the words. Cover up "ings" in "markings". What is this word? ... Yes, that's "mark". Now read the whole word.</i>

- Other prompts that you could use include: *Does that look right and sound right?; Can we say it that way?; Look at the beginning of the word; Were you right?; Look for something you know in that word; What else could you check?; Can you find your mistake and fix it?; What can you see that will help you?; Say the first part, then the next part ...; Read the sentence again.*
- Remember to base these prompts on what you know about the students' prior knowledge. For example, asking an English language learner if a word sounds right may not be useful if they are not familiar enough with English phonemes and vocabulary to know the answer. In this case, an explanation and further examples would be more effective.
- Reinforce the students' attempts to problem-solve, whether they are successful or not.
- For further suggestions about ways to support students to self-monitor (to cross-check, confirm, and self-correct), see *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1–4*, page 130.

## Discussing and rereading the story

- You and the students can revisit this story several times, focusing on different aspects and providing opportunities for the students to build comprehension and fluency. Many of the discussion points listed here also lead naturally into "After reading" activities.
- Encourage the students to share their responses to the tale: *Is that what you thought would happen? How did your ideas about Rat change as you read the story?*
- Ask the students to share any questions they had as they were reading and any answers they found. If necessary, clarify what "droppings" and "markings" are.
- Remind the students of their purpose for reading and have them summarise what happened. *What did Pa say at the end of the story? Do you think it's true that octopuses hate rats?*
- Encourage them to think critically:
  - Why do you think this is the children's favourite story?*
  - Why did Rat treat Octopus like that when he had helped him?*
- Have the students reread the story, stopping to discuss points of interest. You can explore such features as:
  - the characters' thoughts and feelings. Ask the students to share their inferences about the characters on two or three pages and the evidence for their thinking. You could begin recording their ideas on a chart such as the one shown below and have the students build on this as an "After reading" activity.

Page	Our ideas	Our evidence
3	Rat is feeling adventurous happy friendly	Rat wanted to go to the big island. She looks happy in the picture. She has friends. Rat asked her friends to go with her, and they are helping her.
4	Rat and Pigeon are scared and worried.  Snail might not be scared.	The raft is sinking. Pigeon screeched with fear. Rat looks worried in the picture. Snail can live under the sea.
5	Rat is scared and desperate.	She can't fly, and she can't live under water. All she can do is swim, but the island is far away.

- the problems Rat had and how she solved them.
- the many sentences that flow over more than one line. Practise reading them together. Point out words such as "who", "that", "so", "to", which connect ideas.
- how the author uses language to make the story sound interesting and exciting. Support

the students to read the tale as if they are “storytellers”. Draw attention to such aspects as:

- the “storytelling” phrases, such as “Once there was”, “far across the water”, “set off”, “screeched with fear”, “And to this day”
- the word “suddenly” and the exclamation mark after “sink” on page 4 to add drama
- the repeated use of “but” and “not” on page 5 to show how much danger Rat is in
- the dramatic dialogue on page 7.  
The students could choose a favourite sentence to read aloud.
- how the students worked out (or tried to work out) unfamiliar words or phrases, for example, by thinking about what made sense, looking for the biggest known part of a word, noticing inflected endings, reading on to the next word, or rereading.
- words with unusual or unexpected features, for example:
  - the silent “s” in island and the silent “b” in “climb”
  - verbs that are irregular in the past tense.  
Read and discuss the sentences in the story where these verbs occur. Explain that some words can’t have “ed” added (for example, “saw” not “seed”, “flew” not “flied”, “sank” not “singed”, “began” not “beginned”).

## After reading: practice and reinforcement

After-reading tasks should arise from your monitoring of the students’ needs during the lesson and provide purposeful practice and reinforcement. Where possible, make links to other texts, including texts generated from language experience and shared writing, and to the wider literacy programme (oral language, writing, handwriting, and word games and activities) and other curriculum areas.

**Select from and adapt** these suggestions according to the needs of your students.

- Ask students to reread the story with a partner. They could read alternate pages to each other. Listen in, noting their ability to use punctuation to support phrasing and expression. You could also use this time to do a quick Running Record with a student to provide more information.

- The students can build their comprehension and fluency by rereading the story while listening to the audio version. Audio versions also provide English language learners with good models of pronunciation, intonation, and expression.
- Provide opportunities for students to reread this story and read other animal tales (see Related texts).
- The students, either working in pairs or individually, could complete the table started when discussing the story. They could use the table as a reference for drawing and writing about Rat and Octopus at two different points in the story. Alternatively, they could add thought bubbles for the characters on one or two pages.
- The students could write and illustrate an alternative ending to the story (how might it have ended if Rat had not left droppings on Octopus’s head).
- The students could explore the storytelling language by innovating on sentences from the story, as in the examples shown below. Model how to create a new sentence by changing a few words or phrases, then work with the students on further examples. You can expand this idea to write sentences that are not about the story of Rat and Octopus.

Who		Where		What or who	Did what
They	were	far out at sea	when, suddenly,	the raft	began to sink.
Rat	was	on the small island	when, suddenly,	she	decided to build a raft.
Octopus	was	in the sea	when, suddenly,	he	saw Rat in trouble.
The children	were	at the disco	when, suddenly,	the lights	went out.

Who	Did what		Did what	Where
Pigeon	screeched with fear	and	flew off	into the sky.
Rat	laughed with delight	and	ran off	onto the island.
Octopus	shouted with rage	and	waved his arms.	
Josh	yelled with excitement	and	carried Nibbles	into the classroom.