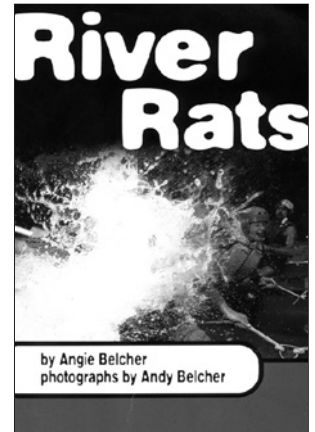


River Rats

by Angie Belcher

photographs by Andy Belcher



Book Summary

This action-packed, first-person narrative takes readers on an emotional roller-coaster ride as two girls roll, dip, and dive their way down white-water rapids.

Features of the Book

- Colloquial language – *go hard, easy stuff, take a break, hang in there*
- The metaphors – *river rats, chicken seats, spaghetti rafting, Meat Grinder*
- Enlarged text integrated with photographs
- The use of verbs – *roll, dip, dive, bounce, race, rock, spin, jam, slide, sweep, whip*
- The prologue in italics
- Personification of the raft, the river, and the trees
- The blurred and curved images to create a sense of movement
- Present tense to convey immediate events
- Internal and external dialogue

Purpose

River Rats can be used to introduce and reinforce the following skills:

- S** exploring the features of a personal narrative;
- S** discussing the use of figurative language such as metaphors;
- S** identifying the use of personification;
- S** discussing the impact of visual techniques;
- S** exploring the emotions of the characters.

The Guided Reading Lesson

- S** Exploring the features of a personal narrative
- S** Discussing the use of figurative language such as metaphors

Introducing the text

Show the students the cover of the book and discuss the photograph on it. Focus on the expressions on the people's faces and discuss how they might be feeling.

- *What words could you use to describe the feelings shown on their faces?*
- *Why do you think the author chose this title?*
- *What do you think is happening in the photograph?*

The clues in the photograph include the part of the raft that is visible, the helmets and life jackets, and the large splash of water.

Look at the back cover and read the blurb together.

- *What information can you gather from this?*
- *Why do you think the raft is tipping over in such calm water?*
- *Can you make any predictions about what might happen in the story from the text and the photograph on the back cover?*

Ask the students to look at the photographs in the book and to discuss the emotions the characters are showing. Encourage them to share their own feelings about white-water rafting or similar sports, such as skydiving.

- *Why do you think people do this kind of thing? Would you like to?*

Reading and discussing the text

Read pages 3 (the prologue) and 4 together. These set the scene for the story and help to explain why the girls undertake their adventure.

- *Why do you think Mom says what she does?*
- *Why do you think she changes her mind about letting Fleur and Laura go rafting?*

You could also identify the visual and written language techniques used to heighten the realism for the reader (action photographs, present tense).

Ask the students to read chapter 1 independently.

- *How is white-water rafting made safe?*

When the students have finished reading, discuss the purpose-setting question. List the equipment and precautions that are discussed with the rafting guide.

Introduce and discuss the concept of metaphors. Look at some examples of metaphorical language and then ask the students to brainstorm familiar metaphors.

- *Look at the last sentence on page nine. What do you think “spaghetti rafting” is?*
- *What kind of picture does this expression paint in your mind?*

Revisit the concept of a metaphor, which suggests a comparison without stating it directly, in contrast to a simile. For comparison, you could look at the example of a simile on page 26: “bouncing over the rapids like a cork.” Ask the students to look out for other examples of metaphorical language as they read the rest of the story. They could note any metaphors they find with sticky notes (white-knuckle death grip, chicken seats, Meat Grinder).

When the students have finished reading, discuss the metaphors they have found and the images or messages they give the reader. If there were any metaphors that the students did not recognize, draw their attention to them and ask:

- *Why do you think the author chose these words?*
What do the words make you think of?

Revisiting the Text

The suggested activities below can be used immediately after the guided reading lesson if appropriate or could be taken as a mini-lesson at a later time.

S Identifying the use of personification


In this book, the author has used personification to intensify the imagery of the raft, the river, and the trees. Revisit chapters 3 and 4 to find examples of how the author gives the impression that these things are in control of their actions.

- *What do these sentences make you think about the raft?*
- *What do you think the author is trying to do by writing in this way?*

S Discussing the impact of visual techniques

An impression of movement has been achieved by the use of blurred images, unusual camera angles, action shots of people caught in the midst of something exciting, close-ups, and curved edges.

- *Where do these action images begin? (in chapter 3, when the raft is on the river)*

 Ask the students to identify five action words or statements in the text and use the blackline master on page 84 to record their own creative word shapes, like those on pages 15 and 24, to add emphasis and movement to the words.

S Exploring the emotions of the characters

Model the use of an emotion graph for the story. First, create a flow diagram showing the story’s sequence of events and transfer these events to the horizontal axis of the graph.

Brainstorm the emotions that the students feel might accompany the events. Rank these in order of intensity for the vertical axis and then transfer these to the graph. Next to each plot on the graph, encourage the students to note written and visual language features from the text that support their rating.