

SPARK

Creating a Spark with *A River*



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 **BookTrust**
Inspire a love of reading

Introduction

Spark aims to **inspire a love of stories and books** in children and young people with additional needs.

Spark includes two books, two accompanying resources and an introductory letter. The resources provide advice and ideas for engaging students in reading for pleasure by creating meaningful sensory experiences that bring books to life.

This resource uses ***A River* by Marc Martin** as a springboard for a diverse range of activities.

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About *A River*

A River was selected by a panel of specialists for its richness of opportunities to discuss, explore and engage.



A River is about a young girl looking out of her window at the river that winds its way through the bustling city. As we join her on a journey of the imagination, her silver boat travels along the river: meandering calmly through farmlands, negotiating an industrial landscape, exploring the jungle and finally flowing out to sea.

Key themes

- Journeys
- Exploring
- Nature and the environment
- Mindfulness
- Onomatopoeia

Things you may need

These are the key items you need for the activities – though of course you may want to use different items to adapt the activities for your students.

For the sensory project: discovery pouches

- Laminate pouches (ideally A3 size but A4 will do)
- Drawings or images relevant to your chosen page of the book
- Coloured ink or paint
- An iron or hair straighteners
- Baking paper

Optional:

- Glitter
- Green wool or ribbon
- Cooking oil

For the other activities

- A variety of paper, card and other stationery
- Pencils, paints and charcoal
- A large black-out curtain or sheet
- A piece of wide ribbon or fabric, at least 3 metres long
- Fabrics and ribbons, particularly in blues, greens and silvers
- A quilt, or squares of fabric to make into a quilt
- Straw, feathers and fur
- Cotton wool
- Musical instruments
- Access to online music and sound effects
- Grass, leaves and any green items
- Seaside items like shells and seaweed
- A water spray bottle
- A fan
- Clean brushes
- Containers like plastic tubs, bowls, buckets and jugs
- Access to water

Using *A River*

Working with your students

We know that every school, every class and every student is different. We also appreciate that every practitioner has their own needs, priorities and time constraints, which is why we've made sure the ideas in the Spark resources are flexible.

You will know how to engage your students with *A River*, which activities will work best for them and how to adapt them for your setting. Why not use the ideas in this resource as a starting point to build on?

Using fun, inspiring and varied ways to engage your students with *A River* will support them to become immersed in the story, and to experience the pleasure and joy of books.

Approaching the book

When exploring books, some students may need support to help them draw on their background knowledge and experience, and to use this to deepen their enjoyment of the story.

Thinking about the **time** and **context** for introducing *A River* can help to support this. For example:

- Plan a river-themed art or exploration activity before or after reading the story, to give students a 'watery' experience.
- Arrange some outdoor river-themed activities (see page 9), or visit a river or stream.

The book lends itself to being told as a sensory story. Try to condense the narrative into a few key points of sensory interest – too many may be confusing. Repeating a few key points, in a consistent way, will allow students to recognise the activities.



Tip

Ensure that students who use alternative communication methods have their relevant tools to hand so they can ask questions about the story. Allow time for them to do so.

Model how to ask questions by thinking out loud about the story yourself as you go along, perhaps through words mime or doodles.

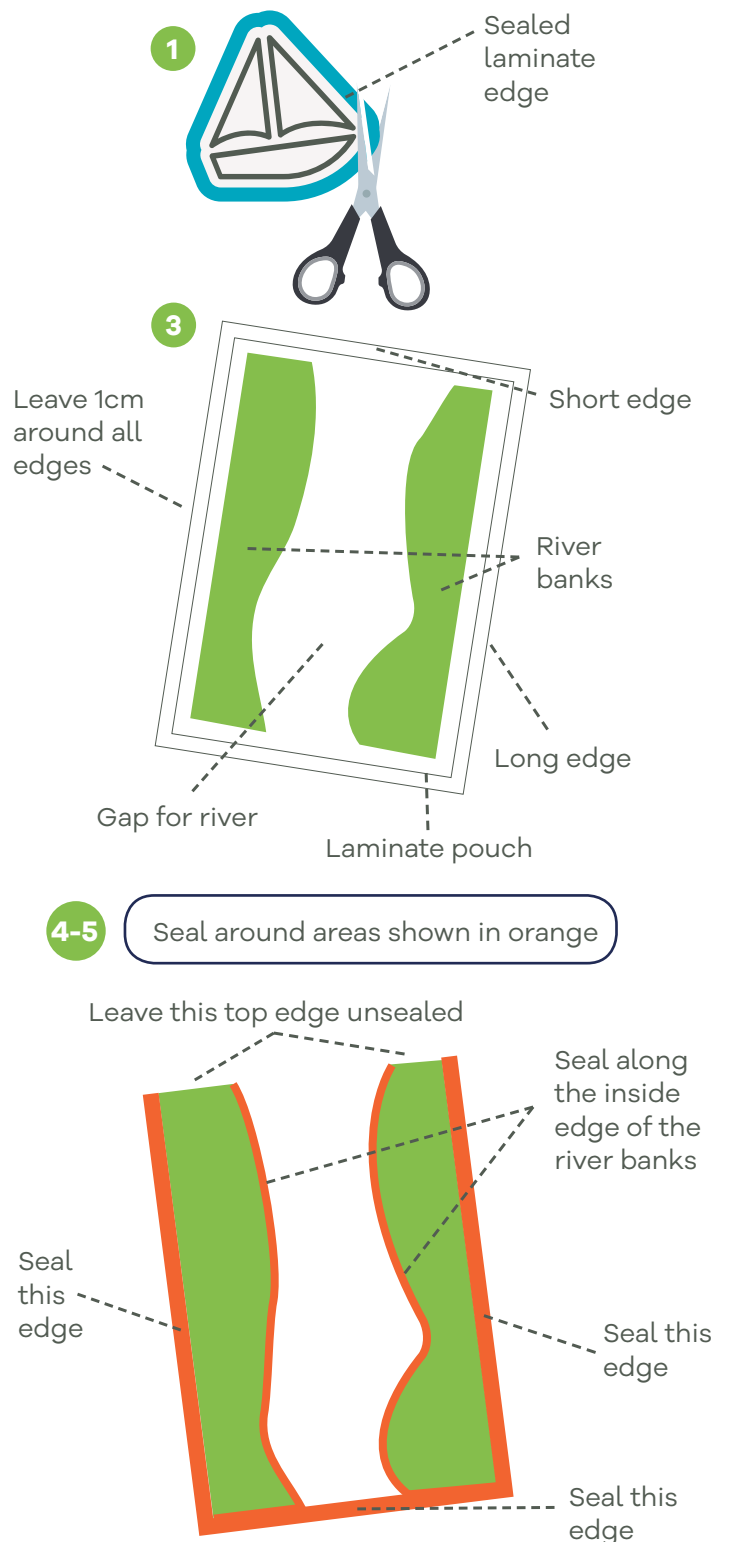
Sensory project: discovery pouches

Creating a laminate pouch – containing a ‘moving’ river and a boat – will help students to engage with the story. Students can use their pouch to follow the journey, retell it, and even take the boat on new journeys to settings they invent themselves.

Remember, the items you need are listed on page 3.

What to do

- 1** Draw a picture of the little boat and laminate it. Cut it out, leaving a bit of clear laminate around the edge, so the boat is enclosed. Your laminated boat should be approximately the size of a two-pence coin. Keep this to one side.
- 2** Choose a scene from the book as inspiration, and take a sheet of card no bigger than your laminate pouch. Draw (or collage) your own river banks based loosely on your chosen scene, leaving lots of white space for where the river would be.
- 3** Cut out the two river banks and place them inside the laminate pouch on opposite sides, leaving a margin of at least 1 cm around the edge of the pouch. Make sure you leave a big gap for your river – it needs to be wider than in the book to ensure your boat fits.
- 4** Now use an iron or hair straighteners, protected by baking paper, to start sealing the laminate pouch. Seal along the bottom edge and the two sides, with each river bank enclosed. Make sure that the laminate doesn't crumple up as this might allow your pouch to leak.
- 5** Continue sealing, leaving only the middle strip (your ‘river’) and the top edge (to pour in your river water).



6 Make your river water by mixing some blue ink or paint with water. A little glitter will give your river an extra sparkle. Adding oil will give it swirls of colour – this can work well if you choose a stormy scene, or the page featuring fish.

7 Hold the pouch open and carefully pour in your river water – filling the bottom third of the pouch is plenty. Be careful not to overfill it.

8 Drop your little boat into the river.

9 Now seal the pouch closed around the top edge. Make sure to squeeze as much air out of the pouch as possible before you close it. If you use an iron, hang the bottom of the pouch over the edge of the ironing board so you can seal the opening. If you use hair straighteners, simply seal the pouch shut along that edge.

10 Check that the edges of the pouch are completely sealed before laying it flat. Use the pouches with your students to explore the girl's adventures on the river.



Tip

If you have one, use a lightbox to make your river pouches look particularly beautiful!

Other ideas

- Make scent boxes or discovery trays using different items relevant to *A River*.
- If you have a sensory garden or a suitable outdoor space, create some river-themed activity stations. You could include a jungle area, using switches with animal noises, or a waterfall area with running water, bubbles and spray, for students to move through.

Page-by-page ideas

You can use and adapt these ideas as you explore *A River* with your students, to support their involvement in the story.

Through the window

- Make window frames and fabric pictures of the river view.
- Drape a curtain or piece of fabric over a frame or smartboard and ask students to help draw the curtains.
- Use a finger or a small toy boat to track the river on the first double-page.
- Make a collage, using block printing, sponge prints or cut-out shapes.
- Wrap a long piece of fabric – the ‘river’ – around the students and help them feel the fabric in their fingers as everyone holds on to it.



Tip

Encourage students to try asking for a turn.

The city and industrial scenes

- Make your own city with towers and roads, using boxes and paper.
- Use cotton wool and net to make smoke pictures.
- Use charcoal to make hazy, smoky pictures. Make horizontal, vertical and swirling strokes in the air and on the page.
- Print out cars using your own designs, or a template.
- Offer a selection of horns for students to squeeze, and beeps to press.
- Use a toy car to follow some of the roads on the city page spread.
- Make a ramp and take turns to roll toy cars down it. Listen to the sounds they make – the bigger the cars, the louder the sound.
- Make paper boats that float on water (there are lots of instructions online) and encourage students to try floating them in a large sink or washing-up bowl. Find ways to move the boat along the river, maybe using a fan.



Tip

Discuss cause and effect, as you move the boats and cars along.

The fields and hills

- Use patchwork quilts with a field theme, or make your own using different coloured and textured fabrics. Encourage students to touch them and lie on them.
- Play animal noises, such as horses, birds and cows.
- Collect grasses and leaves for students to feel.
- Recreate the 'murmuring' noise with running water.
- Find green items like leaves or fabric for students to feel.
- Use green acetate to change the students' view of the world around them.



Tip

Encourage students to vocalise their responses.

The waterfall

- Use water sounds and songs to create the sound of the waterfall. Fill jugs and pour water over students' hands so that they know how it feels.
- Put items like leaves and twigs in the water for students to feel.

The jungle

- Play a range of jungle animal sounds for your students to listen to.
- Make parrots with feathers for students to feel and fly, or monkeys and sloths with fur.
- Make the room dark using a net or fabric canopy overhead and attach fairy lights to it.
- Use big brushes and paper leaves for students to feel as they go through the jungle, holding on to the fabric river as a guide.
- Make paintings or 3D models of fish and crocodiles using paper, fabric, bottles or clay.
- Make a fish display, or create jellyfish using net, fabric and padding, pipe cleaners and ribbons.

Out to sea

- Use a projector to show students video clips of fish or coral reefs.
- Using a spray bottle, spray water to create the rain, and accompany with sound clips.
- Make dramatic thunder sounds with instruments, such as drums, shakers and cymbals.
- Collect items from the beach – such as seaweed, stones and shells – for students to feel.
- Use a fan to create the feeling of wind on students' faces. Create salt water for students to smell and maybe even taste small amounts of.
- Spray the water and swirl the fabric river over students' heads to create the feeling of being in the sea.

The end

- Play car noises and sleepy music to represent the city at night. Turn off the lights, and use a single source of light as the moon.

Other sensory experiences

Try these sensory activities to help support your students' engagement and enjoyment of *A River*.

Tell and retell the story

Record each sentence of the book on a sound button to press at the turn of each page. As students become familiar with the book, encourage them to tell their own version, describing what they see, hear, taste and smell at each stage of the journey.

Use music and sound

There are many useful resources online, such as animal noises, river-themed songs and industrial sound effects.

Use songs such as 'Down in the Jungle', 'Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head' and 'Singing in the Rain' – or try *The Four Seasons*, *Fantasia*, *The Little Mermaid* ('Under the Sea') or *The Jungle Book* soundtrack. *Walking Through the Jungle* (see page 11) also features an audio version.

Create a waterfall arch

Create an arch, perhaps using a garden arch or a play activity arch. Decorate it with a range of different blue materials, such as ribbon, fabric, shiny and glittery paper, and cellophane. Students can sit or lie under the arch, looking up at the waterfall. Wheelchair-users can go through the arch too.

Create a water run

For a big run, find a suitable outdoor space, clip-mount guttering pipes on a board and lean it against a wall. Alternatively, for a small run, collect several empty plastic bottles, cut one in half lengthways and use it as a funnel to pour water from one bottle into another.

Decorate each stage of your water run with sensory materials to match a section of the story. Move the different sections to order the story by unclipping the guttering or moving the bottles.

River ribbon dance

Create a piece of dance or movement in which students interpret the river theme, each using their own 'rivers' – which could be long pieces of fabric or ribbons.



Tip

Change the movement to reflect the speed of the water or the state of the weather, such as heavy stomping for the angry storm.

What's in the river today?

Fill a washing-up bowl or large bucket with water and objects and cover the top, so you can't see the contents, leaving a letterbox-style opening at the top. Students can then put their hand through the opening to feel the objects in the water.

Include new objects each day for students to find or take out, such as blue objects or animals. You may want to change the temperature of the water and ask students: 'Is the river hot or cold today?'



Tip

Ask students to try to remember what was in the river that day. Who went first, second and third, and what did they find?

Create a river

Stretch a wide piece of blue fabric (at least 3 metres long) down the middle of the room to represent the river. Encourage each student to touch the fabric, so everyone is connected. Try holding each end of the fabric and moving it to create ripples or waves.

Or you could decorate carpet tiles to represent each stage of the story. Give each student a length of blue ribbon for them to thread among the tiles to create their own river story through the landscape.



Tip

Connecting the group with the fabric river creates a sense of togetherness and gets everyone moving in the same rhythm or motion. Why not introduce a rowing or swaying motion?

Explore the boat's journey

Fill a series of washing-up bowls with water and choose resources to represent different pages in *A River*. Use building blocks to create tall city buildings for the water to flow between, fill the water with thick green wool and fabric leaf shapes for the jungle, or place toy fish in the water to represent the open ocean.

Give each student a toy boat to use in the different bowls, watch how they play with the boats and interpret their actions as questions. So if they crash into the building blocks you could ask if the river needs more space to flow.



Tip

Families can help support the activities outside school by taking photos, visiting relevant places, or even just talking about the book and the boat's journey when they play in the bath.

More great books

If your students liked *A River*, you may want to try these other great titles:

A Forest by Marc Martin

The River: An Epic Journey to the Sea by Patricia Hegarty and Hanako Clulow

The Rhythm of the Rain by Grahame Baker-Smith

Journey by Aaron Becker

Can You Catch a Mermaid?
by Jane Ray

Walking Through the Jungle (book and CD) by Stella Blackstone and Debbie Harter

Window by Jeannie Baker

The Tin Forest by Helen Ward and Wayne Anderson

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About BookTrust

BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity. We are dedicated to getting children reading. Each year we reach 3.4 million children across the UK with books, resources and support to help them develop a love of reading.

We know that children who read are happier, more empathetic and more creative. Find out more at booktrust.org.uk.

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