



Tiddalik

An Australian Dreamtime Story

Thousands and thousands of years ago in Australia lived an enormous frog called Tiddalik. One day he was so thirsty that he drank a billabong . . . and a stream . . . and a lake . . . and a river. He drank and drank until his body was swollen with water and he couldn't move, so he fell asleep. There was no water left—anywhere. The lakes, rivers and streams were dry and cracked, and the trees and plants withered and died in the hot sun. There was nothing for the animals to eat, and they were hot and thirsty, so they held a meeting and wondered what to do. Wise old Wombat had a cunning plan: He thought they should make Tiddalik laugh so that the water would spill from his mouth.

The animals (lizards, snakes, spiders, wombats, koalas, emus, dingos, bats, budgies, parrots, kookaburras, kangaroos and crocodiles, to name a few) told animal jokes, sang silly songs and pulled funny faces, but Tiddalik did not even smile. So they decided to make up some silly dances—they slithered, hopped, swooped, bounced, scampered, strutted and flitted until it grew dark, but still Tiddalik did not smile. Deep below them in a burrow in the riverbank a strange creature was awakened by all the noise. She was very angry to be awakened, and she stomped up the tunnel to where all the animals had gathered. She marched straight up to Tiddalik and told him off for making so much noise.

Tiddalik couldn't believe his eyes. He had never seen such a strange creature before. Platypus had fur like a wombat, a beak like a duck and a tail like a beaver. She swam like a fish and laid eggs like a turtle. Tiddalik started to smile . . . he giggled . . . and chuckled . . . and chortled and laughed and laughed and laughed. Water started to dribble and trickle and flow and pour from his mouth. Out gushed all the streams, ponds, lakes and rivers that Tiddalik had drunk. The animals were so pleased with Platypus because the grass, flowers, plants and trees started to grow again and there was plenty of water for everyone.

There are other versions of this myth. In one version the frog laughs when he sees the eel dance, but a version by Joanna Troughton in *What Made Tiddalik Laugh*, published in 1977 by Puffin Books, in which the duckbilled platypus is the heroine, is my favourite.