Raffy and Arlo’s Amazing Workshop

By James Shang



Raffy slid down the muddy bank and landed beside a fallen twig.

Sliiiide.

Hop!

He cleared it with room to spare.

Raffy looked back, then nudged one end onto a little stone.

He slid again.

Hop!

His tail brushed the twig. It rolled off the stone and landed flat in the mud.

Raffy wriggled over and pushed it back.

By the time he reached the top of his slide, it had fallen down again.

Keely was watching from the shallow water, her seahorse tail curled around a stem of seagrass.

“What are you making?”

“Something to jump over,” said Raffy. “But I want to make it higher.”

He looked at the twig lying in the mud.

“And sometimes lower.”

“You should meet Arlo,” said Keely. “He can fix or build anything.”

Raffy’s eyes widened.

“Anything?”

Keely uncurled her tail.

“Come and ask him.”



They swam along the mangrove edge and out towards a rocky patch beneath the clear water.

Beyond it, coral rose in coloured humps and branches. A sandy passage led between the rocks, where a small wheel turned gently in the current.

Raffy slowed to watch.

Then he saw the workshop.

Smooth stones sat in shallow trays. Straight sticks lay beside pointed shells and little brushes. On one shelf stood an empty shell in a cradle that could turn all the way around.

There were things that tilted, things that spun and several things Raffy couldn’t begin to explain.

In the middle of it all was an octopus.

“Arlo!” called Keely.

Arlo looked up.

“Hello, Keely. Who have you brought?”

“This is Raffy.”

“Come in, Raffy.”

Raffy opened his mouth to say hello.

Then he forgot.



One of Arlo’s arms held an empty shell steady in its cradle. Another brushed loose sand from inside it. A third turned the stand while a fourth gently rubbed a rough place near the opening with a smooth stone.

Another arm reached for a tool.

Another put one away.

Raffy tried to follow them.

He looked left.

He looked right.

He looked back to the shell.

Arlo had already turned it again.

“How do you do that?” Raffy asked.

“Do what?”

“All of it!”

Arlo paused with the brush just inside the shell.

“This one needs a little attention around the entrance.”

“I meant your arms,” said Raffy.

He counted as Arlo carefully set his tools down.

“Eight!”

“Yes,” said Arlo. “They’re useful.”

“Do they ever get in the way?”

Arlo lifted the shell from its cradle and settled it on a tray.

“Not when I take my time.”

Raffy looked at Keely.

Take his time?

He’d never seen anyone do so many things at once.



“What brings you here?” asked Arlo.

“Oh! My jump.”

Raffy told him about the muddy slide, the twig and the stone.

“I can jump over it when it stays down. But when I put it up, it falls down before I get there.”

“How high would you like it?” asked Arlo.

Raffy lifted his eyes.

Then a little higher.

Keely smiled.

“Could it start low?”

“And go up,” Raffy added quickly.

Arlo drew two lines in the sand with a pointed shell.

“Two supports,” he said. “With places for a light bar to rest.”

He drew a line between them.

“We can move the bar higher or lower.”

“Will it stay up?”

“Until something knocks it off,” said Arlo. “Then we can put it back.”

Raffy studied the drawing.

“That’s much better than my stone.”



Arlo chose two sturdy pieces of driftwood and laid them side by side.

His arms went quietly to work.

One measured while another held. Two steadied the wood as he shaped little resting places at matching heights. A brush swept the loose bits into a tray.

Raffy watched the careful movements.

This time, he began to see what each arm was doing.

“Those two have to be the same,” he said.

“They do,” Arlo replied. “Otherwise our bar will lean.”

His measuring stick rolled off its little support.

An arm caught it before it reached the sand.

Arlo looked at the support.

“Still need a better stand for that.”

Keely had drifted beside a shallow tray near the shelf.

“Raffy. Look at this.”

Among the pebbles lay an empty shell, deep blue on the outside. Light slipped across its curves as Keely moved above it.

Raffy swam closer.

“That’s beautiful.”

Arlo placed it carefully on the shelf.

“A lovely find.”

Then he lifted the finished supports.

“Shall we try your jump?”



Back at the mangroves, Raffy showed Arlo the firm, wet patch beside his muddy slide.

“Here!”

Arlo stayed in the shallow pool while his long arms reached onto the wet edge. He settled the supports firmly, checked that they stood level and rested the light bar across the lowest pair of notches.

Keely watched from the water.

Raffy climbed his bank.

He planted his fins, gave a wriggle and slid.

Sliiiide.

Hop!

He landed beyond the bar.

It was still standing.

Raffy turned.

“It stayed up!”

Arlo checked the supports once more.

“Would you like to try the next height?”

“Yes!”

A rustle came from the branch above them.

“What’s all this?”

Clancy leaned down, his kookaburra head tipped to one side.

“My new jump!” called Raffy. “Arlo built it.”

Clancy looked from the bar to Raffy.

“You’re going over that?”

“Watch.”



Arlo moved the bar up one notch.

Raffy wriggled to the top of his muddy slide. Below him, the bar stretched between its two supports.

Clancy shuffled along his branch for a better view.

Raffy slid.

He pushed hard with his fins.

Hop!

Up went Raffy.

Over went his head.

Over went his middle.

His tail gave the bar a little tap.

Plop.

Clancy looked down.

“Oh!”

Raffy landed and turned towards the fallen bar.

“Nearly.”

“Your tail was still coming,” said Clancy.

“I noticed,” Raffy replied.



Arlo put the bar back in the same place.

Raffy looked at it for a moment, then climbed his bank again.

This time, he gathered himself before the bottom of the slide.

A push.

A jump.

His whole body sailed over.

Raffy landed in the soft mud beyond, and Clancy sprang upright on his branch.

“You went right over!”

Raffy turned to look.

The bar was still there.

He looked at Arlo.

Then Keely.

Then up at Clancy.

“Mud is good!”

Clancy leaned forward.

“Can you do it again?”

Raffy was already halfway up the bank.

A little more about Arlo and his friends

Eight busy arms

Arlo uses his eight arms to hold, turn, steady and work. His workshop and tools are storybook inventions. Which little invention caught your eye?

A hidden visitor



Someone else was visiting Arlo’s workshop. Did you spot Hermie? Look again at picture 2. What is he looking at?

Try a little design

Draw something you would like to make. How could you change its height or shape? Share your idea with someone, or enjoy looking at their drawing.

Oceanese

Raffy and his friends invented Oceanese so different animals could talk to one another. It spread from their ocean friends to land animals too. They use sounds, movements and expressions, with time for each friend to reply. Oceanese is make-believe.

Care for their home

Arlo’s workshop is make-believe. When exploring the real coast with a grown-up, leave shells, coral, plants and animals where they are. Take your belongings and rubbish home.

Our ocean. Our planet. Our friends.

Let’s look after them together.

Raffy’s Ocean Friends is a fictional series created by James Shang. Raffy and his friends were developed for this series, inspired by the animals and waterways of Australia. In their world, they invented Oceanese so different animals could talk to one another. Story and characters by James Shang. Illustrations created with generative AI and developed through author-directed revisions. © 2026 James Shang. All rights reserved.

Thank you for reading!

We hope you enjoyed Raffy and Arlo’s story and your reading time together.

Visit raffysoceanfriends.com for songs, games and colouring in. There’s more fun to share with Raffy and his friends!



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