

Teacher's notes

Title: Tatiara

Author/Illustrator: Jo Oliver

Synopsis

Tatiara is set at Tathra on the far south coast of NSW. The name Tatiara is an alternate Aboriginal name for this place meaning beautiful country. The book tells the story of girl and a seal who become friends in a sheltered bay and how in time healing comes to each of them.

The girl is not able to swim because she wears a back brace and so she catches fish for the seal she calls Tatiara. They see each other each day through changing seasons. During this time humpback whales come to the bay and some of the past history of the bay and wharf becomes part of the story. When the girl's brace is removed she is able to swim and meets Tatiara in the water and they swim together.

Tatiara is about the possibility of healing in personal life and in the wider environment. The book has a message of hope for young generations.

Illustration Medium

The illustrations for Tatiara are a form of printmaking. Dry-point etching involves scratching into the surface of a plate, in this case acetate sheets, with a sharp tool. Ink is then rubbed onto the plate and the surface is wiped back. The print is then made from the ink left in the indentations on the plate.

The prints are then painted with vibrant watercolour washes in the colours of the sea. The pages which concern the history of the area are painted in sepia tones.

Author/ Illustrator Background

Jo has worked as a children's librarian for many years and feels privileged to have shared hundreds of books with children. She lives on the outskirts of Sydney with her husband and three sons.

Jo was awarded the biannual Australian Library and Information Association Marjorie Cotton Award in 2004 for recognition of outstanding contribution to children and youth library services.

Jo's first book 'Pilgrim' was released in 2008. It is also set on the south coast of NSW. The Children's Book Council of Australia has made Pilgrim a Notable Book and Jo was shortlisted for their Crichton Award for new illustrators in 2009. Pilgrim is also on the Premier's Reading Challenge and received great reviews.

Jo writes and envisages images at the same time. She enjoys the unexpected nature of printmaking and the clarity and tones of watercolour for her stories about the sea.

Educational Applicability

Tatiara supports themes of personal development, relationships, history and the environment.

The text can be used with children to complement units on families, disabilities, the sea or environment.

Tatiara can be used in discussions about change and dealing with issues and difficulties on a personal or environmental level.

Background information

Australian fur seals have a number of haul out points around the coast of Australia. They have been known as sea dogs because of the resemblance of their faces to dogs. Seals were hunted in the early days of Australian colonies but when numbers depleted it was discontinued. There are now a number of healthy colonies. Seals are excellent swimmers and show curiosity toward humans.

Whales were hunted for their oil at many locations around the coast of Australia from the early 1800s until the 1960s. Some species were hunted close to extinction. All whaling stations are now closed and Australia is actively working to stop whaling worldwide. Numbers of whales in Australian waters have been steadily increasing and sightings of humpbacks and other species during their yearly migrations are becoming common.

Cargo and passengers were taken by boat around the Australian coast before coastal roads were built. Loading took place at sea wharfs. Most have now been demolished but Tathra Wharf was saved through community action and is now listed by the National Trust. It is the last remaining sea wharf on the east coast of Australia.

Scoliosis or curvature of the spine is a common developmental disability in childhood. Severe cases require surgery but less pronounced curves are braced to prevent further deterioration of the curve. Braces are restrictive but successful and full movement is possible after treatment.

Discussion Questions

- Have you ever seen a whale or seal in the wild? What beautiful places have you visited? Talk or write about your experiences.
- Do you have a disability or know someone who does? Perhaps you have broken a bone and not been able to participate in your favourite sport. How does it feel to be restricted in this way?
- Imagine you are travelling by boat along the coast as people did before road travel. What would it be like?
- Whales and seals have come back since hunting has been stopped. What other things can we do to help heal our environment?
- Sometimes things take time to heal. What can we learn from experiences of difficulty in our lives? How can people who love us help? How can we help others who are experiencing something difficult?

Art, craft & design

- Printmaking forms could be explored including potato printing, foam or linocut and etching or collograph. Prints can be made using water-based ink without a press.
- Drawing exercises where children are encouraged to draw the shape of spaces between objects can help develop observation skills and right brain drawing.
- Watercolour, wax resist and washes can be used to make artwork based on the sea and its creatures.
- Children could make cards for people who they love or who need support in difficulty.