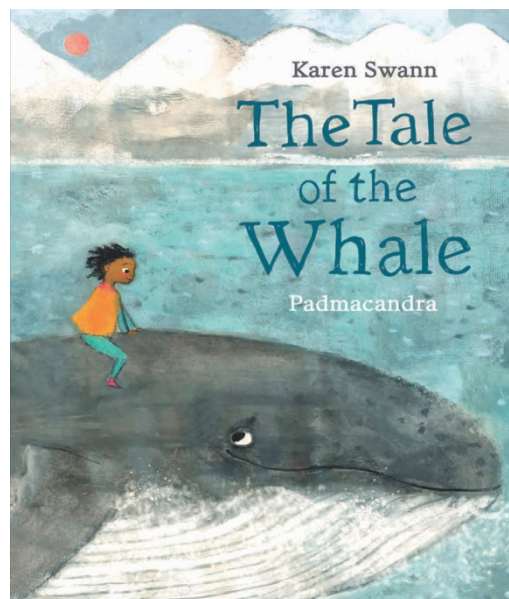


UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

THE TALE OF THE WHALE

Written by Karen Swann,
illustrated by Padmacandra



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

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SYNOPSIS

When a whale invites a young child to go swimming with him, they embark on a wonderful journey of awe and discovery. The whale, however, has something important to share – something that needs careful understanding and action.

This poetic tale of friendship reveals the perils of plastic pollution to the ocean and the power of working together to create change.

THEMES

- Oceans
- Plastic – pollution
- Action
- Friendship
- Lyrical verse
- Whales

WRITING STYLE

The Tale of the Whale is written in first person, present tense. The beautifully lyrical text takes readers on a journey to the depths of the ocean, the illustrations evoking a sense of absolute wonder at the world beneath the sea. When the devastating impact of plastic pollution on ocean life is revealed, it is done so without preaching or politicising; rather, it allows readers to draw their own conclusions, encouraging agency and genuine action. Figurative language and poetic verses give the book a literary quality that is perfectly accompanied by the stunning artwork. Given its content and relevance to the curriculum, it is well-suited to middle primary children, however, audiences of all ages will engage openly with this text.

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STUDY NOTES

- Before reading, use the title, cover and endpapers to activate prior knowledge about whales and ocean life. Make predictions about what you may encounter in the story, including vocabulary and story structure.
- Look carefully at the title page. What do you notice about the headland that the lighthouse is built upon? What does this tell us about the important interaction between oceanic systems and humans?
- Why are there music notes on the first few page openings? How do these relate to the written text?
- Discuss the use of figurative language in the text and the contribution this has to the mood and meaning of the story. Examples include:
 - ... high on the breeze came his sweet-sounding song (Discuss the use of alliteration and personification.)
 - I scrambled aboard in the silvery light (Why is the light described as silvery?)
 - We floated away on the rocking-horse sea (Why is comparing the sea to a rocking horse effective? What else could it be likened to?)
 - ... tail-splashed the seagulls (Explain what this phrase means to a friend.)
 - We danced with the dolphins that waltzed through the sea (Discuss the use of alliteration and the dancing imagery.)
 - We swam over mountains, through valleys of sand,/An ocean in motion, a bright busy land,/With carpets of colours that breathed with the sea (What is your favourite part of this extract? How has the author used language features to make this such a descriptive and effective piece of writing?)
 - The soup of the ocean; ... the plastic soup sea (Why is it referred to as a 'soup'?)
- How can we tell that the child and the whale are friends? How do the words and illustrations show different elements to their friendship?
- The seagull follows the pair on their journey, however, is unable to go beneath the water. In the role of the child, write a letter to the seagull to describe what it was like.
- What is the main message being shared in *The Tale of the Whale*? How has it shared this message so effectively?
- Create your own page openings suitable for inclusion in *The Tale of the Whale*, using rhyme and figurative language to describe the journey.
- Create a poster to promote the child's plea: 'Please, change it with me.'
- Research the causes and effects of plastic pollution further. Write an information report to share your findings. Use the link below to access *National Geographic Kids*.

<https://www.natgeokids.com/au/kids-club/cool-kids/general-kids-club/plastic-in-the-ocean/>

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- Create a story map to retell what happens in *The Tale of the Whale*.
- As a class, perform *The Tale of the Whale* at a school assembly.
- Using recycled materials, create a collage depicting ocean life. Display around the classroom.
- Draw a line diagonally on an A3 sheet of paper. Use a range of words, colours and images to contrast the ocean before and after action has occurred.
- Read Samantha Wheeler's *Turtle Trackers* as a companion novel to *The Tale of the Whale*.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

Around 12 million tonnes of plastic are entering our oceans every year, killing over one million sea birds and 100,000 marine mammals. I wanted to write something that touched on issues of sharing our world and caring for one another in the way we exist in it. I hope *The Tale of the Whale* will open the way for discussion that could empower our future generations to make a difference.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Swann won the *Writing Magazine* Picture Book Prize in 2018. She grew up in the UK where she trained as a physiotherapist in a small town by the sea. Always a writer and a storyteller, she now lives with her family in Nottingham and, when she's not halfway up a climbing wall, she loves to write lyrical rhyming stories at an old Victorian scrub-top table. *The Tale of the Whale* is her debut picture book. www.karenswann.com

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Padmacandra grew up in Scotland, lives in Norfolk and graduated from the Cambridge School of Art. She is a Buddhist, poet and artist and currently works part-time as a carer. www.padmacandra.com