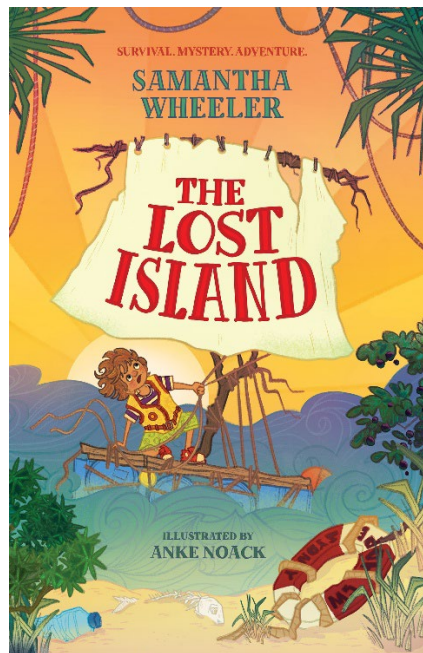


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# ***THE LOST ISLAND***

Samantha Wheeler,  
illustrated by Anke Noack



## Teachers' Notes

Prepared by Christina Wheeler, who is a practising teacher librarian  
with a background in the Australian curriculum (English)

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**SYNOPSIS**

Able to recite fast facts in any situation, Theo is an overthinker with a tendency to worry. Now that his dad has married Lyn, Theo's anxieties are even more heightened, especially as his annoying new stepsister, Mozzie, seems to ooze courage and talent from every pore. The last thing Theo needs is to be stuck on a yacht playing happy family in the middle of the Pacific Ocean where disaster could strike at any moment.

When a wild storm hits the cruise, Theo is swept overboard and washes up on a desert island with only his backpack and Cub Scout skills to guide him. How will he get the attention of the rescue crews? Is there anyone else on the island who can help him? And what on Earth are those strange sounds?

In a story about family, survival and acceptance, Theo must learn to work with nature, not against it, and turn his burgeoning knowledge into wisdom.

**THEMES**

- Adventure
- Nature
- Courage
- Confidence
- Families
- Wisdom
- Anxiety
- Ghosts
- Conservation

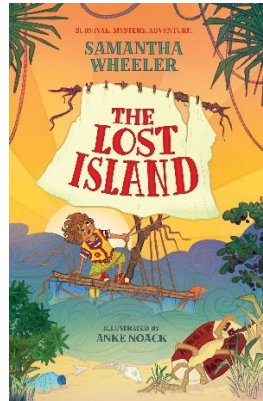
**WRITING STYLE**

Written in the first person, past tense, *The Lost Island* is a page-turning adventure for middle readers filled with fascinating facts and the remarkable symbioses of the natural world. After losing his mother in a car accident two years earlier, eleven-year-old Theo has grown used to life with just him and his dad, so when Lyn and Mozzie enter their lives, he can't help but feel inadequate and overlooked. When Lyn suggests they go on a cruise together, Theo is filled with dread at everything that could go wrong. Like any well-prepared Cub Scout, he packs his backpack with essential supplies, unaware of just how important they will soon become. Amid the chaos, Theo encounters some peculiar and unforgettable counterparts: Edith, a cantankerous dodo; her chick, Gerry; Freckles the donkey; and the wise yet elusive Professor Staggered, who repeatedly evades Theo's questions about escaping the island. As Theo navigates this strange new world, he struggles to come to terms with the changing shape of his family, particularly the attention his father now gives to Mozzie. Through his interactions on the island – especially with the eccentric and deeply knowledgeable Professor Staggered – Theo begins to understand the responsibility that comes with caring for others, as well as the profound connection between humans and the natural world. Exploring themes of courage, survival and family, *The Lost Island* is both a captivating adventure and a heartfelt tribute to nature. Its original and evocative figurative language invites readers to lose themselves in Theo's extraordinary journey.

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**STUDY NOTES**

- Before reading, use the front cover and blurb to make predictions about this story. What are you wondering? Return to this discussion after reading *The Lost Island*. How did your initial ideas change as you continued reading? How close were your original predictions?



- As you read, refer to the map of Lost Island at the start of the text to help visualise this setting. Discuss the use of language features that help readers picture the island.



- How is the complication of this story introduced? How is Theo positioned as a 'fish out of water'?
- Describe Theo's voice. Why is he so relatable? How does he feel about the excursion from the yacht? How do we know?

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- How are Lyn and Mozzie used to create tension in this story? How would this story be different if Theo immediately took to his new family members?
- Why is Theo such a worrier? How do we know he gets anxious?
- Create Character Profiles of both Theo and Mozzie. How are they similar to and different from one another? How does their relationship change as the story progresses?
- Throughout *The Lost Island*, Theo reminds himself to '*Breathe in, one two three. Breathe out, one two three*'. How do you calm yourself when feeling anxious? Why, later in the text, does this change to '*Work with nature, not against her*'? How does this show Theo's character growth?
- Theo is jealous of Mozzie and thinks his dad is more interested in her. In the role of Dad, write a letter to Theo to tell him exactly how you feel.
- How does Theo prepare for potential emergencies that could arise on this trip? How are the items he's packed used on his journey? If you were to pack a survival kit, what would you include? Give reasons for your list.
- *Fast Facts* are used throughout *The Lost Island*? What do they reveal about Theo's obsessions and state of mind? Compile these *Fast Facts* into a class book, adding to these as you read the text. Add your own *Fast Facts* to this collection as well.
- Discuss how Samantha Wheeler hooks readers at the end of each chapter. Why is this important in narratives?
- Early in the novel, Theo says, 'Why couldn't I be more adventurous? More fun? More like Mozzie?' (p. 15). How does he prove to himself that he is all these things?
- Explain why Dad says, 'You can't spend your life worrying about what *might* happen [...] To be honest, I think researching your fast facts is making you *more* anxious, not less' (p. 21). Do you agree with Dad? Why?
- Why isn't Theo finding this holiday fun? What is it about Mozzie that threatens him so much? What advice would you give both Theo and Mozzie about their new family?
- In the role of Theo, write a series of journal entries based on the illustrations below:



- When Theo is washed up on Sandy Island, he sees baby turtles making their way toward the ocean. How does this help him to find the courage to take his next steps?

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- What role does Freckles play in *The Lost Island*? Why is he a necessary inclusion?
- Discuss the character of the lavender lady, later known as Professor Staggered. What clues do we get that she is a ghost? How does this help create an intriguing and original story?
- Even though Theo wonders if it's a waste of time, why is remembering things he and his dad have done together helpful (see p. 69)?
- When he finally finds fresh water, Theo says it is, 'better than popcorn at the movies, icy poles at the beach or chocolates at Easter' (p. 71). Add to this list of 'better thans'.
- Create a survival guide for Theo's adventures in *The Lost Island*.
- With reference to the description on p. 74, sketch Theo's shelter.
- In the role of Theo, write a reflection about finding the hut, including meeting the lavender lady and Edith.
- Reread the description of Trash Beach on pp. 99–100. How does this make you feel? Why has it been included in the text?
- At what point do you think Theo realises he misses not just Dad, but Lyn and Mozzie as well? Why has the author included this in the story?
- Why does Theo chuckle to himself when 'imagining Mozzie's face when I arrived back at the yacht, on a raft I'd built *myself*' (p. 118)?
- In the role of a reporter, retell part of this story in either a newspaper article or television/radio interview:
  - *LOST BOY SURVIVES AGAINST THE ODDS ON A (NEARLY) DESERT ISLAND*
  - *SPORTS CHAMPION SAVES LOST STEPBROTHER*
- Professor Staggered teaches Theo that 'nature provides her own solution' (p. 122). What examples of this are shared in *The Lost Island*?
- Explain how 'Knowing how to read the clouds can save your life' (see p. 123). Using this information, identify the clouds in the sky outside. Sketch and label these clouds.
- In what ways is 'everything in nature [...] connected' (p. 125)? As a class, create an illustrated guide that shares such connections with younger audiences.
- Reread Chapter 19 (pp. 121–130) in which the professor teaches Theo about the moon and the night sky. How does this knowledge help Theo to be reunited with his family later in the story?
- In a reflection, explain what Professor Staggered means when she says, 'Sometimes the best tool is the one between your ears' (p. 132). Share a time when this was true for you.
- What does Theo learn about 'fatherhood' after Gerry hatches? How might this help him better understand his dad?
- In what ways can Theo relate to Gerry? Why does he become so attached to the little chick?
- Although Theo previously believed 'Cub Scouts taught me everything there was to know about nature', how is 'being on the island [...] like living inside an encyclopedia'? Why does Theo say, 'The more I looked, the more I saw. The more I listened, the more I heard' (p. 143)?

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- When Theo sees his reflection in a mirror, he barely recognises himself. How has he changed (see p. 147)?
- In the role of Theo, write about finding Mozzie on Lost Island.
- Why, when the Professor discovers Theo wants to take Gerry with him, does she say, 'Oh, Theo [...] surely you wouldn't really pluck a creature from its home' (p. 195)?
- In the role of Theo, prepare and perform a short monologue based on the following excerpt:
 

I'd been so wrong when I'd first arrived, thinking the kit was all I needed to survive. Everything useful was right here. Around me. As long as I worked with nature, not against her, I had all the tools I needed. (p. 197)
- Why, as his adventure intensifies, does Theo think less about his *Fast Facts*? What does he learn about himself in this story?
- With reference to the following excerpt, discuss what the future will be like for Theo and Mozzie:
 

Mozzie and I exchanged a look. A secretive roll of our eyes. We'd been doing that a lot lately. Rolling our eyes, like a proper brother and sister. (p. 207)
- Plan and write the next adventure for Theo and his family.
- Write a part of this story from the point of view of Professor Staggered.
- What is your favourite *Fast Fact* from *The Lost Island*? Why is this your favourite? If you could add one *Fast Fact* to this novel to help Theo, what would it be? Why?
- In what ways would Theo's dad be proud of his son?
- In the role of either Theo or Mozzie, write a postcard home to a grandparent about your holiday (see template below).
- Theo experiences anxiety. What strategies does he use to manage this? How will his experiences on Lost Island help him to manage his anxieties differently in the future?
- With a partner, create your own desert island. Design a map, labelling its features and landmarks. Using this map, create characters, settings and events for a potential story. Write the first chapter of this story.
- Using the map of Lost Island below, create a boardgame that reflects your understanding of the main characters, settings and events of *The Lost Island*.
- Time permitting, read one of the adventure stories that Theo mentions, such as *Nim's Island* by Wendy Orr (Allen & Unwin) or *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell (Houghton Mifflin/Puffin). How is Theo like Nim and/or Karana?
- Discuss the contribution of figurative language to *The Lost Island*. Identify the types of devices used, and experiment with these in your own writing. Examples include:
  - my mind buzzing (p. 2)
  - I peered into the clear ankle-deep water. Tiny see-through fish zipped past her feet, all sparkles and wriggles, like they were playing hide-and-seek with the sun (p. 3)
  - dark clouds billowed on the horizon, lit up by bright bolts of lightning (p. 16)
  - Mozzie and some of the others crowded around, circling the octopus like hyenas (p. 16)
  - The octopus's arms looked like eight carpet snakes dancing in the water (p. 17)

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- with her wet hair sticking out in all directions, she looked more like a sea urchin than a new stepmum (p. 22)
- a threatening rumble of thunder growled in the distance (p. 22)
- dark clouds bulged above and the yacht groaned and rattled (p. 25)
- Fat plops of rain slammed the deck (p. 27)
- sea spray needled my face (p. 30)
- the sound, so loud and shrill in my ears, was whisked away by the wind (p. 30)
- the bow wave flung me to one side, away and behind the yacht, like a piece of unwanted trash (p. 32)
- Terror gripped me like a python (p. 33)
- Now the sun was coming up again, only just peeking above the pale-pink horizon (pp. 33–34)
- I'd tipped backwards and grazed my elbow on the coral's knife-sharp edges. Trails of blood seeped from my wound. (p. 35)
- a current so strong it was like riding a water ride at a theme park (pp. 35–36)
- my tongue was fat from thirst (p. 44)
- the silky soft sand squeaking under my feet (p. 45)
- A couple flew directly overhead, their wings stuck out like hang-gliders by their sides (p. 45)
- Sea water swished around my feet. Seabirds squealed overhead. (p. 50)
- I gripped the trunk like a life raft (p. 52)
- the bushes on this island croaked and cackled with life (p. 56)
- Its tail swished and its enormous ears flicked, like antennae checking for danger (p. 58)
- it stood like an ancient grandad of the forest, with smooth bark and hundreds of roots hanging from its branches (p. 61)
- My insides fizzed like shaken lemonade (p. 64)
- Dragonflies, bees and butterflies flitted between the shrubs. Cicadas screeched from the trees and skinny-legged birds foraged among the leaves (p. 65)
- The shadows were growing longer (p. 70)
- squirming like a platypus (p. 80)
- as quick as a seagull stealing chips, the donkey snatched the lolly from the bandage (p. 82)
- their oily smell hitting me like prawns in a wheelie bin (p. 86)
- there was a heartbeat of silence (p. 86)
- her bird-like eyes darting between me and the clearing behind me (p. 88)
- Plastic bottles, pieces of wood, car tyres and large blue drums lay abandoned, like a long-forgotten dump (p. 100)
- You're pinker than a flamingo! (p. 102)
- I could still feel the water swallowing me up (p. 105)

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- What if my skin peeled off entirely, like a sweaty sock on a hot summer's day? (p. 119)
- I was as useless as a newborn kitten (p. 119)
- it was like a thousand pieces of sandpaper were scratching at my throat (p. 121)
- Edith's baby tapped, poked and jabbed like a woodpecker on fast forward until its shell fell apart (p. 136)
- He'd skitter around the hut like a wound-up wallaby (p. 142)
- Its scales shone like diamonds (p. 158)
- She just lay like a soggy bag of potting mix, her eyes unfocused, her mouth slack (p. 168)
- My hands, feet and nails were caked in dirt (p. 168)
- her face glowed beetroot red (p. 183)
- You look like you've swallowed a toad (p. 194)
- The professor's eyes glinted like daggers while her grey hair billowed around her face (p. 194)
- My eyes prickled (p. 195)
- Mozzie lay slumped against the mast, her face waxen, her lips cracked and swollen (p. 202)
- Curious eyes, a dinosaur-like beaky nose, a body built for the water and, best of all, a wide smiley mouth (p. 203)



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**AUTHOR MOTIVATION**

I was inspired to write this novel by so many things, but mostly by everything I love. Like birds and donkeys, shipwrecks and castaways, plus all the amazing species that no longer walk our planet. I've always wondered if we might find an extinct animal in an unexplored part of the world one day. If animals previously thought extinct might still be out there somewhere. Surely humans haven't been *everywhere* on Earth?! But why did I choose dodos? Why not woolly mammoths? Tasmanian tigers? The idea for including a dodo in the story came from the school students I visit each year. When I asked which animal they wished wasn't extinct, they unanimously shouted, 'Dodos!'

I was also intrigued by the concept of shipwrecks – there have been more than a whopping 7000 ships wrecked along the Australian coastlines, and, while some of these have been located, many still haven't been found. Pots, vases, anchors from the 1500s and pottery from the Roman era have all been recovered from ancient wrecks, as well as the bones of some domestic animals like cows, sheep, pigs and chickens. Among the most interesting creatures found in a shipwreck is the skin of a giant sturgeon (a rare fish) found in a 500-year-old shipwreck off the Swedish Coast.

Where did the character of Theo come from? There are so many famous castaways both in fiction and in reality, but the ones who helped inspire Theo's experiences include the Tongan castaways, a group of six teenage boys who drifted to an uninhabited island in Tonga in 1965 their boat was wrecked in a storm. Luckily, they were found safe and well fifteen months later. Also Ada Blackjack, who became stranded on an island near Siberia in 1921 and had to survive in freezing conditions by hunting seals, arctic foxes and polar bears after rations from the ship ran out. Ada is sometimes known as the female Robinson Crusoe. And José Salvador Alvarenga, a fisherman who became adrift in 2012 and holds the record for the longest solo survival at sea, having been adrift for 438 days, relying on the currents to carry him over 10,000 kilometres to safety.

Professor Staggered was inspired by real-life biologists and naturalists, including: Charles Darwin, who took a fantastic five-year voyage around the world to study and collect animal, plant and rock samples on a famous ship called the *HMS Beagle*; Maria Sibylla Merian, who was fascinated with watching caterpillars turn into butterflies and created a magical book of paintings called *Metamorphosis insectorum Surinamensium*; Beatrix Potter, who wrote and illustrated beautiful books like *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and was a keen naturalist intrigued by mushrooms; and Mary Anning, who discovered and excavated the first complete skeleton of a Plesiosaurus.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Samantha Wheeler fell in love with animals at the age of six when she received a tortoise. She went on to study agriculture, work with dairy farmers and teach science, until writing her first children's book, inspired by koalas, in 2011. Her books, which include *Smooch & Rose*, *Spud & Charli*, *Mister Cassowary*, *Wombat Warriors*, *Turtle Trackers*, *Devils in Danger* and *Everything I've Never Said*, have been shortlisted for the Queensland Literary Awards, the Readings Children's Prize, the Wilderness Society's Environment Award for Children's Literature and the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales Whitley Awards. Samantha hopes her books will encourage everyone to make a difference. [www.samanthawheeler.com.au](http://www.samanthawheeler.com.au)