

Diary of a Sea Lion

Author: Sally Sutton

Illustrator: Dave Gunson

Synopsis

Sea Lion is not really the sporty type. Even though she is a sea lion, she is afraid of the water, and refuses to swim. She can get away with this for a while because her mother is still around to feed her. But when her mother has her new baby and leaves, the sea lion will be on her own. If she can't swim, she will starve.

Sea Lion is a great story teller and revels in weaving adventurous tales about ship wrecks and castaways. Her heroine Otar is a clever and courageous sea lion who risks her own life to ensure the safety of others. If only the sea lion could be inspired by the fearless Otar and overcome her own fears.

Text Type

Diary of a Sea Lion is the latest in the Scholastic series written by New Zealand author Sally Sutton. These humorous, fictional stories focus on native New Zealand animals. Told in diary form from first person point of view, the books give the reader special insights into the daily lives of these creatures. Specific facts about the species are included at the end of the book.

Suitable for younger readers, *Diary of a Sea Lion* tells the story of a young sea lion that is afraid of the water. She does, however, excel in one area. She is a master storyteller and soon has all the young sea lions in her colony hanging on her every word. The sea lion tells the amazing story of Otar, a brave and fearless sea lion who lived long ago and must survive the invasion of man onto her beach, when a ship wrecks there. Otar is everything that the young sea lion wishes she was. This is a story about overcoming your fears and taking the plunge, literally ...

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: pp. 5–13, pp. 13–37 and pp. 37–50.

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the story. Have them make inferences and predictions about what will happen next. Wherever possible, have students relate the themes and issues raised in the story to their own lives and broader experiences. Most importantly, encourage students to enjoy the humorous story and the delightful illustrations included.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- This story is told in diary form. What do you expect from a story told in this way?
- Who is the main character in the story? How is she different to other sea lions?

Read the information on pages 52–53.

- List three interesting facts about sea lions.
- Why were storage huts built on the Auckland Islands?
- What are one of the biggest threats to Hooker's sea lions?
- Why are Hooker's sea lions so rare?

Teacher reads pp. 5–13 aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension pp. 5–13

- How does the sea lion react when her mother tells her she has to swim? Why does she react like this?
- What does the sea lion do when her mother suggests that they swim in the sea?
- Why do you think all of the mothers disappear into the sea?
- How do the pups feel after their mothers leave? What do they do to alleviate the boredom?
- Why do the sea lion's friends tease her?
- Why is a story the most precious thing that the pups have?
- Why are humans so dangerous to seals?
- Why does Kaki go swimming?

Discussion

- What kind of sea lion is the narrator?
- Where does she live?
- What problems will the sea lion have if she refuses to go swimming?
- Why does the sea lion wish that she was more like Otar?
- What do you think will happen in the story next?

Students read pp. 13–37 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension pp. 13–37

- Why is the sea lion so pleased to see her mum?
- How does the sea lion's mum make her feel better about being a coward?
- Why doesn't Otar tell the other seals about the schooner?
- Why does the sea lion threaten to stop telling the story?
- How does Otar warn the other sea lions that the men are ashore?
- How do the men react when they see Otar? Why does Otar think that it's the end?
- Why does the sea lion think she has hit rock bottom?
- How does Otar escape from the hunters?
- What does the sea lion's mum say to her about the sea to try and convince her to go out further?
- How does Otar know that schooner has wrecked on the rocks?
- What does the sea lion overhear another pup say about her? How does this make her feel?
- What is the sea lion thinking about that enables her to go out deeper than she ever has before?
- How does the sea lion react when she sees the shark? What does Otar whisper in her head?
- Why is the sea lion's mum proud of her?
- Why is the sea lion determined to never go into the water again? Is she over-reacting? Why/why not?
- Why does Otar feel sympathy for the castaway?
- What happens to the sea lion after she has her birthday?
- What problems do the castaways face when they drag themselves ashore? Why does Otar become nervous when she sees the man's knife?
- What does the sea lion discover in the bush? What does her mother tell her about it?
- When do the castaways grow tired of their diet of shellfish, roots and birds?
- Why is Otar convinced that the pups have to leave their home?
- What does Otar find at the end of the arrows? What idea does this give her?

- What does the sea lion find in the ocean that delights her?

Discussion

- Why have humans hunt seals in the past in New Zealand? Was this practice justified? Why/why not?
- What makes the sea lion a good story teller?
- What qualities does Otar possess that the sea lion envies?
- Is the sea lion's mother right about her hiding in her story? Why/why not?
- How do you think Otar will lead the men to the depot?

Students read pp. 37–50 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension pp. 37–50

- Why does the sea lion make the pups agree that there is more than one way to be brave?
- What happens when the castaways realise that Otar is the only seal left on the island?
- Why does Otar find it so hard to get away from the men on land? What happens when she and the men finally reach the depot? Why does Otar think that the man is trying to thank her?
- What does the sea lion see when she looks into the pool? How does this give her strength?
- How does Otar alert the men to the approaching ship? Why is it dangerous for the ship to approach shore?
- How do you think the men feel when they are finally rescued?
- How do the pups celebrate their birthdays?
- How does the sea lion become entangled in the net? How does she feel when she is trapped? How does she know that she shouldn't panic?
- What realisation does the sea lion come to after she escapes from the net?
- What is the first thing the sea lion does when she escapes? What does this suggest about her character?

Discussion

- What lessons can you learn from the sea lion's experience with swimming?
- Should trawl nets be banned? Why/why not?
- In what way does the sea lion change after she escapes from the net?

Activities

Research – Conduct a research assignment on Hooker’s sea lions. Formulate 3 focussing questions to help guide your research. Use a range of oral, visual and written sources to gather your research. Record your research process in a diary and include a bibliography. Present your findings in a report or as a diary.

Story board – Choose 10 important events that occur in the story and illustrate them in a story board. Under each picture write a brief description about what is happening.

Questions – Write 10 discussion questions for the story.

Drama – Choose an exciting event from the story and write a script for it. Include a list of characters and stage directions. Practise your play and present it to your class.

Vocabulary – Identify 5 new words you learned from *Diary of a Sea Lion*. Using a dictionary, write a definition for each word and write out the sentences in which you found them.

Writing – Write a paragraph explaining why you would recommend this book to others.

Writing – Write a letter to the author explaining what you liked about the story.

Poster – Create a poster advertising *Diary of a Sea Lion* that would be suitable to display in your school library.

Writing – Rewrite Otar’s story from a human’s point of view.

Poster – Design a poster encouraging the banning of trawl nets.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd