

**Teacher Notes**

**Seahorse**

**written by Bruce Pascoe**

Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler

**OVERVIEW**

Jack and his family love camping and diving at Seahorse Bay, a pristine and quiet getaway with much to explore. When Jack finds an abandoned boat lying at the bottom of the bay, the adventure really begins. Whose boat is it, why did it sink and who is the mysterious man watching from afar?

*Seahorse* is an adventure about family, traditions and being truly appreciative for the luck and opportunities that come along the way.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR**

Bruce Pascoe is a Bunurong, Tasmanian and Yuin man who grew up on a remote island in Bass Strait and had a joey and a dog as pets. He lives in a secret bay called Gipsy Point in Victoria, and has two children, three grandchildren and two dogs. Bruce has always been a nature boy and still loves to go out on his boat fishing and diving.

A member of the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative of southern Victoria, Bruce has been the director of the Australian Studies Project for the Commonwealth Schools Commission and has had a varied career as a teacher, farmer, fisherman, barman, fencing contractor, lecturer, Aboriginal language researcher, archaeological site worker and editor.

Bruce has written 28 books including short story collections *Night Animals* (1986), *Nightjar* (2000); novels *Ruby Eyed Coucal* (1996), *Ribcage* (1999), *Shark* (1999), *Earth* (2001), *Ocean* (2002); historical works *Cape Otway: Coast of Secrets* (1997), *Convincing Ground* (2007); and the critically acclaimed *Dark Emu* (2014). His previous book for young people, *Fog a Dox* won the 2013 Prime Minister's Literary Award (YA Fiction).

## THEMES

### *Indigenous culture*

- Jack's dad, Vince, teaches his family traditional ways of cooking and preparing fires to help keep these skills alive, just as his father taught him.

### *Aboriginal histories*

- The mistreatment of Aboriginal people during the early settlement of Australia is mentioned in the text.

### *Family*

- Jack and his family are close; they learn from and protect one another.

### *The sea*

- Aspects of the sea and diving in the ocean underpin the novel.
- Seahorses feature in the text.

### *Shipwrecks*

- Jack is intrigued by the many shipwrecks that occurred off the Victorian coast during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### *Convict history*

- Jack recounts the story of an escaped convict who built a house on Preservation Island.

## WRITING STYLE

*Seahorse* is an adventure story told in third person, past tense. The writing style is easily accessible to middle-readers, and its fast-paced structure will engage audiences of wide-ranging reading abilities.

## LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

These notes have been written in context with the Australian Curriculum. The appendix highlights relevant cross-curriculum priorities and content descriptors across a range of year levels that the following activities address.

## CLASSROOM IDEAS

- The opening pages of *Seahorse* create a vivid visual image of Seahorse Bay. Discuss the descriptive techniques used by the author to create this scene. Sketch Seahorse Bay using this description as a guide.
- Escaping to Seahorse Bay is the perfect getaway for Jack and his family. What is your idea of the perfect getaway? Write a description using imagery and language features similar to those used by Bruce Pascoe in *Seahorse*.
- Create character profiles for Jack, Tanya, Vince and Carla. For each character, use examples from the text to support your ideas.

- Why does Vince see any difficulties 'as a challenge' rather than as a problem? (p5). What can we learn from Vince in the way we approach difficulties in our own lives?
- Re-read the description as Jack snorkels on the reef. Highlight the vocabulary and phrases that help to make this passage so descriptive. Use some of these techniques in your own writing.
- Discuss the amount of responsibility that is placed on Jack's shoulders, particularly when taking Tanya out swimming and snorkelling. Why does Jack comment, 'I'm only twelve...who looks out for me?' (p10). Have you ever felt like Jack? Share in a journal entry.
- Discuss Bruce Pascoe's use of figurative language and the way in which this contributes to the text. Some examples include:
  - Seahorse Bay is...skirted by a crescent of golden sand (p5)
  - Wrinkled like the roof of your mouth (p8)
  - Whiting darted like arrows in the swathes of seagrass (p8)
  - Chrome-coloured fish...whisked away in a flight pattern like fighter planes (p8)
  - Kelp grew from the bottom and reached up to the surface like a forest of thin straggly trees (p8)
  - The light was dim and tan like strong tea (p8)
  - Out on the reef it was like a very wild garden (p8)
  - Its wings flapping slowly like a sea vampire (p9)
  - It was cold and slippery and felt like eels (p12)
  - Sprawled in the sun-warmed sand and roasted their sides by the flames (p12)
  - It was a tiny jewel set into the giant cliffs of the rugged southern coast (p30)
- Why does Jack describe Tanya as not having any 'respectable caution' (p9)? What is he concerned about?
- Describe the relationship that Jack has with his family members? How are these relationships different from one another?
- Vince's father taught him how to do things 'blackfella way' (p15), such as starting fires and cooking fish. Why is it so important to Vince that he continues these traditions? Find out more about traditional Aboriginal ways of living.
- Jack often wonders about the shipwrecks that took place around Seahorse Bay. Research shipwrecks such as Eric the Red from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Take notes and choose an effective way in which to present your findings to the class.
- Jack talks about the mistreatment of Aboriginal people by white people during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in particular many whom were killed. Find out more about this part of Australian history. Discuss your feelings upon learning about this mistreatment.
- Research more about the convict era, in particular the story of the convict who allegedly escaped and built himself a house on Preservation Island. Locate Preservation Island on a map.

- The author gives clues to help the reader speculate on the mystery surrounding the sunken boat. Discuss these clues as you read the text. Share your predictions.
- The country in which Seahorse Bay is located belongs to the Indigenous sea tribes. Find out more about the sea tribes of the Indigenous culture, both ancient and modern.
- Why does Vince offer Benjamin a job? Why do Carla and Vince feel sorry for him? How has Benjamin been wronged in his life?
- What does the author mean when he says 'people need dogs; they know when you are upset' (p42)?
- Reread and discuss the last paragraph on p44 in which Jack ponders 'luck' – how some people get it and others don't. What is he getting at? How does this relate to Benjamin?
- Jack becomes very aware of being grateful for what he has and the importance of having goals, dreams and ambitions. Write a journal entry reflecting on things that you are grateful for and sharing your dreams, goals and ambitions.
- Create a brochure for Seahorse Bay, using ideas from the text to show your understanding of this setting.
- Select one of the sea creatures mentioned in the text such as abalone, seahorses or albatrosses on which to create an information report.
- Read other texts that feature seahorses such as *The Sign of the Seahorse* by Graeme Base and *Neptune's Nursery* by Kim Michelle Toft. Create a table that shows what you have learnt about seahorses from these texts.

### Appendix – Links to the Australian Curriculum

<b>Cross-Curriculum Priorities</b>			
<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture</b>			
<p>Across the Australian Curriculum, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures priority provides opportunities for all learners to deepen their knowledge of Australia by engaging with the world's oldest continuous living cultures. Students will understand that contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities are strong, resilient, rich and diverse.</p> <p>The Australian Curriculum: English values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives. It articulates relevant aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, literatures and literacies.</p> <p>All students will develop an awareness and appreciation of, and respect for the literature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples including storytelling traditions (oral narrative) as well as contemporary literature.</p>			
Year Level	<b>English – Literature</b>	<b>English - Literacy</b>	<b>History</b>
4	Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and	Use <a href="#">comprehension strategies</a> to build literal and inferred meaning to expand	The nature of contact between Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders

	absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension ( <a href="#">ACELT1605</a> )	content knowledge, integrating and linking ideas and analysing and evaluating texts ( <a href="#">ACELY1692</a> )	Peoples and others, for example, the Macassans and the Europeans, and the effects of these interactions on, for example families and the environment ( <a href="#">ACHHK080</a> ) Locate relevant information from sources provided ( <a href="#">ACHHS084</a> )
5	Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details or information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts ( <a href="#">ACELT1608</a> ) <a href="#">Create</a> literary texts that experiment with structures, ideas and <a href="#">stylistic features</a> of selected authors ( <a href="#">ACELT1798</a> )	Identify and explain characteristic <a href="#">text</a> structures and <a href="#">language features</a> used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the <a href="#">text</a> ( <a href="#">ACELY1701</a> )	Identify and locate a range of relevant sources ( <a href="#">ACHHS101</a> )
6	Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts ( <a href="#">ACELT1613</a> ) <a href="#">Create</a> literary texts that adapt or combine aspects of texts students have experienced in innovative ways ( <a href="#">ACELT1618</a> )	Use <a href="#">comprehension strategies</a> to interpret and analyse information and ideas, comparing content from a variety of textual sources including media and <a href="#">digital texts</a> ( <a href="#">ACELY1713</a> )	Locate relevant information from sources provided ( <a href="#">ACHHS084</a> )