



Author: Cassy Polimeni
Illustrator: Evie Barrow
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Blurb

When I grow up I want to be a marine biologist, just like my Aunty Isobel.

The ocean can be a place of wonder, with coral rainbows and breaching whales!

It can also be dark and scary.

But if you venture out under the light of a pancake moon, you might discover something wonderful. Something that makes anything seem possible.

Inspired by the adventurous life of marine biologist Isobel Bennett!

About the author

Cassy Polimeni is a children's/YA author and freelance editor living on Bunurong Country in south-east Melbourne, who has always loved words and faraway places. *The Garden at the End of the World* is her first picture book. In 2022, she was awarded an Australian Society of Authors/Copyright Australia Mentorship to develop a middle grade novel, also set in Norway, which she worked on with Kristina Schulz. She has been published in print and online, including *The Guardian* and *Destinations Australia* magazine. She has also been a bookseller, travel writer, magazine editor, TV book reviewer and airport chauffeur.

About the illustrator

Evie Barrow is an award-winning artist and illustrator specialising in children's picture books with humour and heart. Her work celebrates the unique warmth, texture and imperfection of hand-crafted art. In 2026, *My Mum is a Bird* received a CBCA Notable and was Highly Commended in the Victorian Premier Literary Awards.

SWIMMING WITH AUNTY ISOBEL

Teachers' Notes

Recommended for: Preschool and lower primary

Australian Curriculum Content

Learning Areas

- English
- Science
- Health and Physical Education

General Capabilities

- Creative and critical thinking
- Digital literacy
- Personal and social capability

Cross Curriculum priorities

- Sustainability

Before You Read

Examine the front and back covers as a class. Using the images and texts as clues, invite students to predict:

- Who the main characters may be;
- Where the story will take place; and
- What problems or adventures may occur.

Activate students' prior knowledge about the ocean through a 'pair-share' activity. Students can discuss a personal experience of going to a coastal environment.

Build further background knowledge by encouraging students to make connections between their personal experiences and their predictions of the text.

After You Read

Language features

Read the story aloud. Encourage students to observe the illustrations closely while listening for descriptive language used throughout the story.

As a class, identify and discuss language features such as assonance, alliteration and similes, recording examples from the text. Prompt students to reflect on their emotional responses to the story and how the use of descriptive language influenced those feelings.

Illustrations

Guide students through a comparison of two images in the text:

- Aunty Isobel in the water—'we'll glide through underwater worlds among coral rainbows and angelfish'; and
- The main character looking underwater—'it's scary down there'.

Facilitate discussion around how the illustrator uses colour and perspective to create a contrasting mood. Encourage students to consider how colour might contribute to feelings of calm, wonder, and fear. How does the positioning of the characters reinforce the idea of feeling small or welcomed?

Conclude this discussion by asking students to explain how the author and illustrator work together to communicate different emotions and deepen the reader's understanding of the text.



Theme of resilience and bravery

As a class, identify moments in the story that a character faces a challenge. Facilitate discussion about how resilience is developed through perseverance, support from others and learning from new experiences. Invite students to make text-to-text connections by reflecting on how the baby turtle helped the main character overcome her fear of the water.

Encourage students to think about a time they needed to show bravery or overcome a challenge. What sorts of things helped them? Students can draw or write a response on a small paper square, which can be displayed on a wall, creating a class 'courage quilt', showing how any action, big or small, can help contribute to personal growth.

Life cycle of a sea turtle

Provide students with images and descriptions of the different stages of a sea turtle's life cycle. Working in small groups, students can sequence the stages in the correct order. They can then discuss the physical changes, habitats and challenges encountered at each stage. Encourage students to use scientific vocabulary such as 'life cycle', 'hatchling', 'migrate' and 'predator' as they share their discussions.

Each group can create an information report, poster or a life cycle wheel demonstrating their learning. Students might also include challenges sea turtles face at each stage and suggest ways people can help to protect marine life.

For further information on different species of sea turtles and habitat distribution, students can explore real-world conservation data through an online, interactive turtle map such as the Queensland Government Department of Environment, Science, & Innovation and Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) website, TurtleNet.

Additional Resources

Aunty Isobel in this story is based on real-life marine biologist Isobel Bennett. The National Library of Australia holds material relating to her life and work, including:

- An oral history interview: *Isobel Bennett interviewed by Ros Bowden in the Australian Antarctic Division oral history collection*, 1987, nla.gov.au/nla.obj-399830669
- A collection of almost 600 photographic transparencies of sea life: Isobel Bennett, *Illustrations for W.J. Dakin's classic study Australian seashores*, 1946–1989, nla.gov.au/nla.obj-140463235

