

Title: Whisper on the Wind
Author: Claire Saxby, Illustrated by Jess Racklyeft
Publisher: Allen & Unwin
Price: \$24.99
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Audience: 3-6
Reader: Carolyn Walsh, Allen & Unwin

Synopsis:

This is the wind that carries the whisper from Ren's dream.

This is the sailor, long at sea, who catches it.

With its lyrical, cumulative text and whimsical, richly imagined artwork, *Whisper on the Wind* is a celebration of the wonders of the ocean and the power of love to find us – wherever we are.

A Word from the Author:

‘This story began as an accidental finding in a newspaper. When I visit a new place, I often look up Trove newspaper articles for the town/region. I then include in presentations the information I find there. On one occasion, I discovered that a bottle containing a message was found at the water’s edge by a boy in 1915. The message was detailed and came from a merchant sailor who dropped it into the water when he was on watch off Gabo Island. The bottle floated to the west of Victoria, to Warrnambool. The sailor included lots of information about who he was, where he was going, and where he was from. I was hooked! I knew I had to use this idea of a message in a bottle, and it was perfect for *Whisper on the Wind*.’

Claire Saxby

A Word from the Illustrator:

‘It was a real honour to illustrate Claire’s words again. Unlike our previous collaboration *Iceberg*, which was a nonfiction text, this fictional tale allowed a great deal of experimentation with the way it was put together. To get the textures of the ocean and spray, I enticed my children to help me create big alcohol-ink watery sheets, which I scanned in, as well as spraying toothbrushes with ink onto pages, and smearing sponges to create the movement of waves.

Finally bringing everything together in Photoshop, the most fun part was working on the magical elements like little glowing stars and big purple mists. These elements of light felt like icing on the cake and were a lot of fun to sprinkle on towards the end of the process.’

Jess Racklyeft

Author’s Background:

Claire Saxby was born in Melbourne, moved to Newcastle as a toddler and to Bougainville Island in PNG when she was ten. She attended many schools around Australia before studying in Melbourne to become a podiatrist. For several years Claire worked in community health while simultaneously writing for children. Her books fall into three main categories: animals and the worlds they live in, history and rhythmic stories for the very young. Claire’s work has won several awards including CBCA Honour Book, a NSW Premier’s Literary Award, a SCBWI Crystal Kite Award, an Environment Award for Children’s Literature, an Educational Publishing Award and the Whitley Award multiple times. She is widely curious about just about everything and passionate about encouraging curiosity and wonder. Claire works part-time in a bookshop.

Illustrator’s Background:

Jess Racklyeft creates a variety of illustrated things – picture books, paintings, prints, pins and cards – mainly in watercolours. She works from her Melbourne home studio with her cat and dog at her feet, and occasionally one of her kids joins in too. Her work often combines collage – either on paper or digitally assembled – and lots of ink, and for every book she tries to use a new technique or process to continue to challenge and grow, book by book. Jess worked in publishing sales for almost a decade before making the leap to full-time illustration work, and since then has won several illustration accolades including two CBCA Notable Picture Book of the Year awards. Her work can now be found in bookshops and libraries across Australia, and her days are happily spent in a messy studio or visiting local storytimes with her two young kids. Find Jess's work at www.jessesmess.com

Suggestions for classroom discussion and application:

- **Cover Discussion:**

Before opening *Whisper on the Wind*, look at the title and cover design and ask *where*, *when*, *who* and *what* questions:

- Where do you think the story will be set – near the ocean or far, far away from it? Which elements on the cover helped you guess?
- Will it be set at night or during the daytime? Which elements on the cover helped you guess?
- Who do you think the story might be about? Think about the title, *Whisper on the Wind*, and guess who might be whispering and to whom? Which element or elements on the cover helped you guess?
- What do you think might happen in the story ahead?

- **Comprehension:**

Open the book and read the story through once, allowing plenty of time for students to explore each of the double-page spreads. Once finished, ask students the following questions:

- Who is Ren?
- What do you think Ren was ‘whispering’ in the dream?
- Where did Ren’s whisper travel on the wind?
- Who is the sailor?
- What did the sailor do when she caught the whisper from Ren’s dream?
- Why did she do that after she caught the whisper?
- How do Ren and the sailor feel about each other?

- **Match the Visual Elements:**

Explain to young students that almost everything they saw in the ocean scenes was imagined/dreamed by Ren and that we know this because each can be found in Ren’s bedroom in the very first page, featuring the words, ‘*This is the whisper in Ren’s dream.*’

Ask students to find on this page:

- the bottle containing the whispered dream [on the chest of drawers]
- the whale [the toy being clutched by Ren]
- the fish and the mermaid [a poster on the wall and the book on the bed]
- the octopus [poster on the wall]
- the dolphin [sticker on the wall]
- the moon [the light globe]
- the stars at night [the fairy lights above Ren’s bed]
- the sailor [the photo of the mother holding the baby on the wall]

- **Real versus Fantasy**

Encourage students to nominate which elements in Ren's dream can really be found in an ocean and which are entirely imaginary. [The most obvious are the mermaid and merman, as well as the kraken (giant red sea monster).]

- **Imagery for Love/Sharing**

Turn to the page where the sailor/Ren's mother opens the bottle to release Ren's whispered dream. Point out that this is the only double-page spread that doesn't feature words, meaning that the reader can find out what is happening by 'reading' the pictures. Help them to 'read' the imagery by recapping that we know that the whispered dream is about Ren's love for the sailor/mother and the yearning for her to return home. With this in mind, ask students to suggest what flowers, books, teapots, music, the dining table and chairs, and the lighthouse might mean to Ren and why they feature in the dream.

- **Language**

Explain to students that just as the illustrator in the book has used an array of techniques to communicate feelings, so too does the writer, Claire Saxby. In *Whisper on the Wind* she uses very poetic language to make the story flow like music, as well as tell us a lot about Ren and the sailor/mother in a small number of words. Firstly, ask students what words and phrases they liked and remembered from the story. Once finished, ask them why these particularly stood out. Point out examples of rhythm and repetition (older students might recognise similarities with the cumulative poem, 'This is the House that Jack Built', while younger students might recognise that most pages end with the words '*Ren's dream*'). Point out the use of action words (verbs) such as waves that *dance*, fish that *glint*, dolphins that

chase, and ask students how these words make them feel when they hear them. Discuss how some words appeal to our senses more than others and why. Talk about examples of adjectives that create a mood such as ‘*starlit* dolphins’ and ‘*flit-tail* fish’.

- **Visual Arts**

Jess Racklyeft flicked paint from toothbrushes to create the sea spray in the story and smeared paint-soaked sponges on paper for the ‘dancing’ waves. Try creating your own ocean image in class using these techniques. You’ll also need blue and white washable paints, some cut-out paper fishes, glitter, glue and, of course, paint smocks!