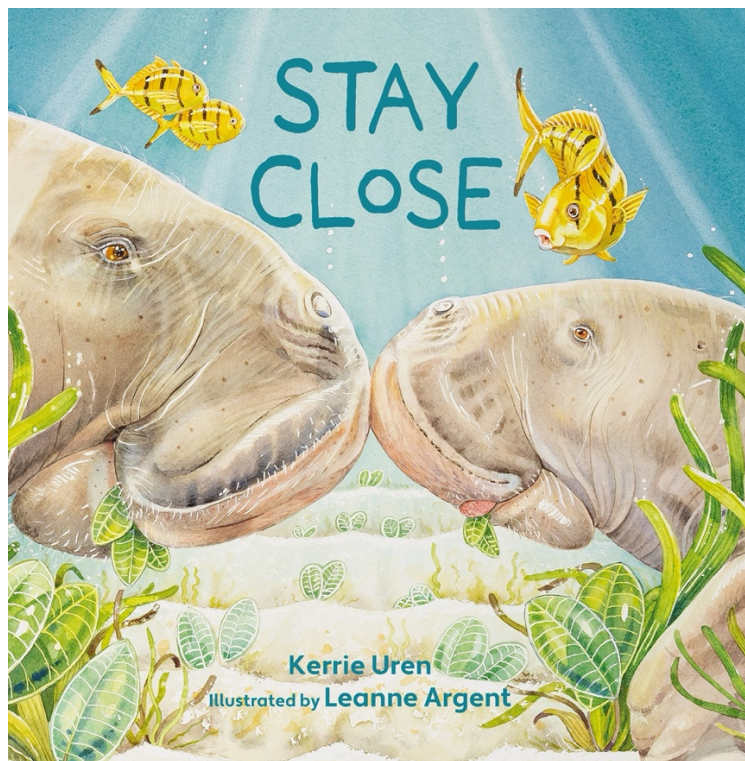


Stay Close

Teaching Notes

Author: Kerrie Uren

Illustrator: Leanne Argent



SYNOPSIS

A secluded bay was once home to herds of dugongs, but now only Roly and his mum remain. Pollution is killing the sea grass, and the herd has moved on. Hungry from lack of food, Mum tells Roly that soon, when he is old enough, they too will leave the bay. Mum knows a place where the water is clean and sea grass meadows are lush and green.

But the journey is fraught with danger. For Roly to survive, he must Stay Close.

Teaching Notes for Stay Close

Written by Kerrie Uren

Illustrated by Leanne Argent

Introduction

Stay Close is a poignant and visually captivating story introducing young readers to themes of environmental conservation, courage, and the importance of family bonds. Roly's journey highlights the real-world challenges faced by marine life, particularly dugongs, due to pollution and habitat loss. Through this narrative, students explore the interconnectedness of humans and the natural world and consider how their actions can contribute to positive environmental change.

The book aligns with curriculum areas such as English (Literacy and Comprehension), Science (Biological and Environmental Studies), Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS: Sustainability), and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Its engaging storytelling and rich illustrations provide a foundation for discussions on marine ecosystems, problem-solving, and the emotional resilience needed to navigate uncertain situations.

Curriculum Connections

English (Language and Literacy) - (ACELT1581, ACELT1582, ACELT1584, ACELY1656)

Aligned with these Year 1 curriculum outcomes, students will:

- Explore how the author uses descriptive language and imagery to develop Roly's character, convey his emotions, and highlight the environmental challenges in the story.
- Discuss Roly's experiences and emotions, encouraging students to share personal responses and relate these to their own feelings about leaving familiar places or confronting challenges.
- Examine the narrative structure and setting, focusing on how the plot and Roly's interactions with his mother help convey themes of courage, family bonds, and environmental stewardship.
- Encourage students to innovate on the text by creating their own stories about marine life or other ecosystems, using descriptive language to convey emotions and highlight environmental messages.
- Participate in group discussions to explore the story's environmental themes and connect these to real-world actions they can take to protect marine life.

HASS (Community and Identity) - (ACHASSK031, ACHASSI023)

Aligned with these Year 1 curriculum outcomes, students will:

- Investigate the natural environment by examining how pollution and human activities, such as urban development and boating, affect habitats like seagrass meadows and marine ecosystems.
- Explore concepts of place by discussing Roly's journey from a degraded habitat to a thriving ecosystem. Compare the features of these two places and reflect on how places meet the needs of animals and people.
- Examine cause-and-effect relationships in Roly's story by linking the decline of seagrass meadows to pollution and murky waters. Discuss actions that could prevent or reverse these effects.
- Engage with personal and community responsibility by brainstorming ways students and their families can help protect marine environments, such as reducing plastic use and supporting clean-up initiatives.

Science (Biological Science) - (ACSSU211, ACSHE021)

Aligned with these Year 1 curriculum outcomes, students will:

- Identify the basic needs of living things and how animals, such as dugongs, rely on specific habitats like seagrass meadows for survival.
- Investigate the effects of human activities on the environment, including how pollution and habitat destruction can harm living things. Discuss how changes in the environment, like polluted waters and disappearing seagrass, affect animal life.
- Explore how to protect environments and how humans can care for the Earth's ecosystems. Brainstorm actions to reduce pollution's impact on marine life, such as using less plastic and cleaning up waterways.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL: Personal and Social Capability - Self-awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills)

Aligned with these Australian Curriculum components, students will:

- Understand the importance of empathy and caring for others by reflecting on Roly's relationship with his mother and the sense of responsibility that comes with caring for the environment. Discuss how caring for animals, like dugongs, is similar to caring for people, fostering a sense of shared responsibility.
- Explore the concept of courage through Roly's journey as he faces the unknown dangers of the polluted bay. Discuss how Roly overcomes his fears and the importance of supporting one another through difficult situations.

- Identify personal and collective responsibilities by exploring how individuals and communities can take action to protect the environment. Work together to brainstorm ways to contribute to protecting marine ecosystems, fostering teamwork and collective responsibility.

Themes & Discussion Points

Environmental Conservation

1. Why is it important to care for the environment?

Discuss the environmental challenges faced by Roly, like pollution and disappearing seagrass. Highlight how these issues affect not just dugongs but other marine life and ecosystems.

Extension: Brainstorm ways students and their families can contribute to protecting the environment, such as reducing plastic use and participating in clean-up activities.

2. How do human actions impact marine habitats?

Explore the cause-and-effect relationship in the story, focusing on how pollution and habitat destruction endanger animals like dugongs. Discuss the ripple effects on the ecosystem.

Extension: Students can create posters encouraging eco-friendly practices, such as "Keep Our Waters Clean" campaigns.

3. What does it mean to take action for the planet?

Reflect on how the story inspires action. What small or big steps can individuals and communities take to protect marine life?

Activity: Create a class pledge where each student commits to one action to help the environment, like recycling or avoiding single-use plastics.

Bravery and Overcoming Challenges

1. What does it mean to be brave?

Discuss Roly's journey through a polluted bay and how he finds courage to navigate uncertain waters. Relate this to moments when students have felt scared but pushed forward.

Extension: Encourage students to share personal stories of bravery and how they overcame challenges.

2. How do we face fears of the unknown?

Highlight Roly's emotional journey and how his mother's guidance gives him strength. Discuss strategies students can use when they feel scared or unsure.

Activity: Have students role-play scenarios where they must “be brave,” like trying something new or helping someone in need.

3. How can we support others during tough times?

Explore how Roly’s mother reassures him and helps him face his fears. Discuss the importance of family, friends, and community support in difficult moments.

Activity: Students can create thank-you notes for someone who has supported them through a challenging time.

Kindness and Empathy

1. What does it mean to show kindness?

Reflect on Roly’s mother’s actions and how she protects and supports him. Discuss how showing care can make a big difference, especially during challenging times.

Extension: Ask students to share examples of kindness they have experienced or offered and how it impacted them or others.

2. How do we understand others’ feelings?

Explore empathy by discussing how Roly’s story mirrors challenges faced by marine life. How can understanding another’s struggles inspire us to help?

Activity: Create an “empathy map” for Roly, identifying his feelings, needs, and how others helped him.

2. Why is kindness important in a community?

Discuss how kindness strengthens relationships, both among people and between humans and the environment.

Activity: Have students write or draw ways to spread kindness in their school or local community.

Coping with Change

1. How do we deal with changes in our lives?

Discuss how Roly adapts to a new environment after leaving his damaged habitat. Relate this to moments in students’ lives when they faced change and how they managed.

Extension: Have students share how they felt during a significant change (eg. moving to a new grade) and what helped them adjust.

2. What role does reassurance play during uncertain times?

Reflect on how Roly’s mother reassures him and provides emotional support. Discuss the importance of having a trusted person to turn to during tough transitions.

Activity: Students can draw or write about someone who reassures them and how it helps.

Building Relationships

1. What makes a strong relationship?

Highlight the bond between Roly and his mother. Discuss how trust, kindness, and support are key to strong relationships.

Activity: Students can create a “relationship recipe” with ingredients like kindness, trust, and fun to illustrate what makes relationships strong.

1. How do we show appreciation for those who support us?

Discuss the importance of gratitude and recognising those who help us.

Activity: Students can create thank-you cards or drawings for someone they appreciate in their lives.

Class Activities:

1. Save the Seagrass Diorama

Objective: Teach students about marine ecosystems and the importance of protecting habitats.

Activity:

- Students create a diorama depicting two versions of a dugong’s habitat: one with healthy seagrass and clean waters, and another with pollution and damaged ecosystems.
- Use recyclable materials like cardboard, paper, and bottle caps to emphasise sustainability.
- Discuss the differences between the two habitats and brainstorm ways to protect marine ecosystems.

Extension: Have students write a short story or draw a comic featuring Roly’s adventure in one of the habitats they created.

2. Courage Compass

Objective: Help students explore bravery and emotional resilience.

Activity:

- Each student creates a "Courage Compass" using craft supplies, with labels like "Family," "Friends," "Kind Words," and "My Strengths" as compass points.
- Discuss moments when students felt brave and how the compass points helped them.
- Encourage students to refer to their compass when facing new or challenging situations.

Extension: Pair students to share how their compass points are meaningful, building empathy and understanding within the class.

3. Eco-Friendly Kindness Challenge

Objective: Encourage kindness and environmental stewardship.

Activity:

- Create a classroom chart titled "Acts of Eco-Kindness." Each time a student does something eco-friendly (eg. using a reusable water bottle or picking up litter), they add a leaf to a classroom "tree."
- Discuss how these small actions help animals like Roly and their environments.

Extension: At the end of the week, reflect on how the acts of kindness have contributed to a collective impact, fostering teamwork and a sense of accomplishment.

Conclusion:

Stay Close is a beautifully illustrated and thoughtfully written story that encourages young readers to explore themes of courage, family bonds, and environmental stewardship. Roly's journey serves as a compelling lens through which children can understand the challenges faced by marine life and consider the role they play in protecting our natural world. By engaging with the narrative, students are inspired to reflect on their emotions, build resilience, and recognise the importance of empathy and kindness in creating meaningful connections.

The accompanying activities offer dynamic ways to reinforce these themes, combining creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. Whether through exploring the needs of marine ecosystems, reflecting on personal acts of bravery, or imagining

ways to care for our planet, students develop essential life skills that extend beyond the classroom.

Ultimately, *Stay Close* is not just a story about a dugong and his journey—it's an invitation for young readers to become courageous, compassionate, and responsible caretakers of their environment and communities. By fostering empathy and a sense of shared responsibility, this story empowers children to make a positive impact in their world.

About the Author:

Working as a Teacher Aide, often reading with students and seeing the joy books brought to the children, Kerrie Uren knew she wanted to write a book of her own for children to enjoy. Kerrie knows the importance of keeping our oceans healthy to ensure the survival of the animals that call it home, and she believes picture books are not only a joy for the reader but a valuable learning tool. With a love of the ocean and a passion for animals, Kerrie feels very lucky to live on the doorstep of Moreton Bay in Queensland, Australia, where wildlife abounds.

About the Illustrator:

Leanne Argent realised her passion for illustration when she created a children's book while at high school. The support, encouragement and excitement that followed has led to Leanne illustrating over 50 children's books, mostly in watercolour. Her love for people and the environment are displayed beautifully within her illustrations.