



RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary and lower secondary
(ages 10–14; years 5 to 9)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Intercultural Understanding; Ethical Understanding; Literacy; Critical and Creative Thinking
- **Cross-curriculum priorities:** Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia; Sustainability

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- A gripping adventure story from an award-winning Australian author that meets the Australian Curriculum perfectly

THEMES

- Whether Izzy belongs in Australia or the islands of Papua New Guinea (Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia)
- Whether Izzy will choose to uphold the traditions and customs of her people and how those traditions are changing (Intercultural understanding)
- How logging and other practices are damaging the land and marine environment of the islands (Sustainability)
- Plus: fantasy; grief; marine life; sharks; poetry; Tok Pisin language

PREPARED BY

Dianne Wolfer and Penguin Random House

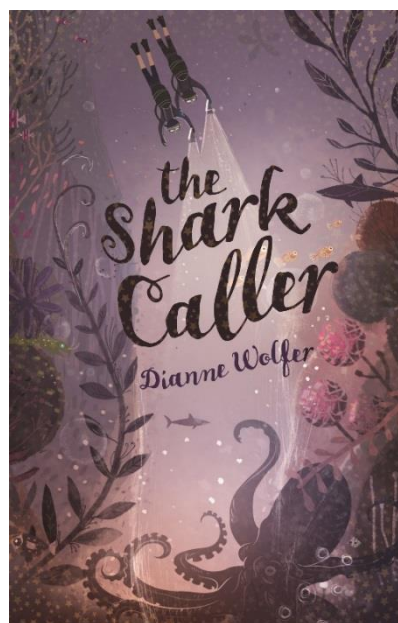
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The Shark Caller

Dianne Wolfer

PLOT SUMMARY

Isabel is on a plane heading back to her island birthplace in Papua New Guinea. Izzy is looking forward to seeing her family again, but there's another tragic reason for the trip. Izzy's twin brother, Ray, died in a freak diving accident, and Izzy and her mum are taking his ashes home for traditional death ceremonies.

After they arrive, Izzy realises things have changed since their last visit. Logging threatens the community's way of life and sharks no longer answer the song of the shark callers. Izzy's cousin Noah explains that the clan needs someone to undertake a traditional diving ritual. The person must be a twin from the shark calling lineage. The dive will be perilous. And Izzy is the last twin.

Will she have the courage to attempt the dive? And what deep, dark secrets will the ocean reveal if she does?

The Shark Caller weaves reality with fantastical possibilities, encouraging readers to explore the intersection between traditional beliefs and the modern world. The manuscript has environmental themes and was inspired by the ancient practice of shark calling. Aimed at readers around 10 to 14 years, it may also appeal to a cross-section of ages.

'The Shark Caller breaks new ground in junior YA fiction. [I]ssues of conservation and identity, as told from Izzy's dual-cultural perspective, with a scattering of creole Tok Pisin words, will intrigue readers aged 11 and up.' Joy Lawn, *Australian Bookseller + Publisher*

SYNOPSIS

The Shark Caller weaves fantasy with real life.

Izzy and Ray are fourteen-year-old twins. Their mother comes from a shark-calling family in the New Ireland Province of Papua New Guinea. Their father is from a Broome pearl farming family. When the story opens, the twins' parents have been separated for three years.

In the opening scene, Izzy learns that Ray has died in a freak accident on the south coast. Izzy and her mother take Ray's ashes back to PNG for traditional funeral ceremonies. After they arrive, Izzy realises things have changed during the four years since their last visit. Dire environmental issues threaten the community's way of life and sharks no longer answer the song of the shark callers. Izzy's cousin Noah explains that the clan needs someone to undertake a traditional diving ritual.

The person must be a twin from the shark calling lineage. Izzy is the last twin.

Before Ray died, he found a strange cave on the south coast and thought he heard sea creatures calling. Since Ray's death, Izzy has nightmares suggesting that her brother isn't settled. His accident appears to be linked to the problems in the community and Izzy is desperate to help him.

The diving custom involves taking a sliver of obsidian through a cave sprinkled with air pockets and chambers to a hydrothermal vent in the ocean floor. The obsidian is given as an offering to a rough-hewn statue of shark god, Mano, then a second piece of black glass is brought back to reinforce the community's customary link to sharks. This dangerous journey is complicated by the clan's belief that an embittered ancestor, one who mastered the ancient skill of shape-changing, remains in the deep waters.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dianne Wolfer is the author of fifteen books for teenagers and young readers. *Light Horse Boy* was a Children's Book Council of Australia Honour Book and won the 2014 Western Australian Premier's

Book Award for Children's Books. *Granny Grommet and Me*, inspired by surfing grandmas, was also on the CBCA shortlist. *Lighthouse Girl*, winner of a West Australian Young Readers' Book Award, explores the story of Fay Howe, the Albany lighthouse keeper's daughter who signalled to soldiers in 1914. It inspired the hugely popular Royal de Luxe performance of *The Giants* at Perth Festival (2015).

Dianne wrote her latest book, *The Shark Caller*, as part of the PhD she is currently completing at UWA, but she has been dreaming about this story for ten years.

Find out more about Dianne Wolfer, including how to book a school visit, at: diannewolfer.com

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Dianne says:

The idea for *The Shark Caller* was sparked by family holidays to Marovo Lagoon (Solomon Islands) and dive resorts in Papua New Guinea (Walindi, Loloata). My sister and brother-in-law lived in PNG for many years and the underwater beauty around these Pacific communities triggered my imagination.

I love swimming, snorkelling, beach-combing and diving. My home is on the south coast of Western Australia and the seeds of several books have been sown during beach walks. Sheltered PNG reefs have a different splendour to the dramatic south coast but marine creatures, including several shark species, are capable of travelling great distances. Our stories are linked.

As I learnt more about the traditional cultural practice of the New Ireland and New Britain Provinces of PNG, I also became aware of factors threatening these beautiful ecosystems: logging, dynamite fishing, climate change, over-development and tourism. This conflict stayed in my mind.

The writing of *The Shark Caller* began around 2005, however the manuscript went into the 'revise one day' drawer. Then in 2012, I was fortunate to receive Creative Writing PhD scholarship funding from the University of Western Australia to research and write a Creative Work and create an exegesis on a linked topic (Anthropomorphism in Australian Children's Literature). I wanted to write for YA readers, so negotiated writing two shorter titles for the Creative Work – one of which has become *The Shark Caller*.

Stories involving sharks occur in many Pacific communities, including New Ireland, where shark calling has long been culturally significant. While my

story was inspired by these fascinating practices, it is not based on the beliefs of any particular nation or community.

The settings in my story are fictitious, but have been inspired by real places. 'Abalone Cove' shares many attributes of WA's William Bay, a place dear to my family, whilst 'Finsch Island' holds land and reef characteristics of Marovo Lagoon and Walindi Plantation (near Rabaul). My characters are all fictitious.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Environmental factors

- The story has strong environmental threads and touches on issues of ecological concern, including: logging (unsustainable practices, corruption, chemical runoff); rising acidity levels in the ocean (and its effects on marine creatures); coral bleaching; unsustainable fishing practice (using dynamite). Choose one of these areas to research further and suggest strategies to help. Select an environmental issue to debate with fellow class members.
- Environmental concerns are explored from both a human and marine perspective. Discuss this technique, giving examples where you feel an animal/fish/other anthropomorphic perspective gives a more powerful impact or different insight into the story (eg. the poem 'MAKO 1').
- Find examples of other contemporary novels that use anthropomorphism as a literary technique. Compare them with traditional or classic anthropomorphic stories. Have styles changed?

Cultural factors

- What traditions or customs can you identify in *The Shark Caller* that are different to those that you have grown up with? Think of myths and stories, ceremonies, religious or spiritual beliefs, totems, the way the society is organised and run, men's and women's roles, etc. What is important to this island community? Why might sharks, obsidian and birds inform their spiritual beliefs so strongly?
- What does it mean for a society to be matriarchal or patriarchal? Research examples of both. Which would you rather live in? Are there alternatives?

- Traditions bind communities. Is it fair for us to impose our western values on practices which we disagree with? Choose examples from across the world to discuss, such as traditional hunting rights of endangered animals (dugong/turtles in northern Australia); arranged marriages; female circumcision; one child policy; sexual dress codes; how the elderly are treated. Find stories that explore some of these traditions which we may find challenging.

Setting/Geography

- Find New Ireland on a map. Which story landmarks are real and which are fictitious? Why do you think the author has done this?
- Where do volcanic vents occur? Locate ocean trenches and tectonic fault lines. List countries that make up the Pacific Rim. In what ways does the Pacific Ocean differ to other oceans?
- Research Pacific cultures in which sharks play a role in dances and customary practice.
- Compare sharks with important spirit animals from other cultures. Do apex predators (those at the top of the food chain) feature more heavily? If yes, why?

Sharks

- Sharks have evolved in a variety of interesting ways. Select a species to research and suggest reasons for these adaptations. Some interesting sharks include: hammerhead, cookie-cutter, saw shark, megamouth, frilled shark, wobbegong, megalodon, goblin, angel, lantern, and pygmy.
- Find out about the unusual skin of sharks, their electric fields, buoyancy techniques and incredible sense of smell.
- Research oviparity, viviparity and ovoviviparity.
- List some of the fishing threats facing sharks (finning, ghost nets, purse seine, super trawlers).
- Search for YouTube clips of shark calling. Write two paragraphs about one scene from the clip: one from a human and one from a shark point of view. Does the language style differ? Try writing the shark version in a style similar to the Mako scenes in the story.
- Write a new paragraph from the point of view of one of the other sharks circling the cave as Izzy dives.



Fantasy quests

- Do you think *The Shark Caller* should be classified as a fantasy novel? Outline an argument for and against.
- Acting for the greater good is a recurring theme in 'quest' stories. Can you think of other novels that explore this theme? (Or other fantasy quest themes such as bravery, heroism and courage through adversity.)
- Do you think Izzy has succeeded in her quest? Why/why not?
- Fantasy novels often contain certain tropes, archetypes and conventions. Which character, event or plot point in *The Shark Caller* would you associate with the following fantasy conventions? Can you think of any other similarities to fantasy stories you have read?
 - Hero/heroine
 - Villain
 - Task or test
 - Special powers invested in a tool or object
 - Mentor or guardian
 - Quest or journey
 - Sacred place
 - Trial or imprisonment
 - Threshold between worlds

Fact or fiction

- *The Shark Caller* includes strange facts about marine creatures which sometimes seem fantastical. Find an example (an octopus has three hearts, cuttlefish have green blood and rippling, and sharks have a stereophonic sense of smell). Do you think the inclusion of these weird facts enhances the fantasy aspects of the novel? Why?

Obsidian

- Research gemstones and list their claimed healing and spiritual properties. Do you believe this is possible? Choose one of these cultures (Mayan, Aztec, Chinese, Native American Indian, Egyptian) and find out which gems they valued. Can you see a link to other spiritual beliefs such as the use of holy water, prayer flags and amulets?

Tok Pisin

- Tok Pisin is a creole language spoken throughout Papua New Guinea. Do you feel the inclusion of words in another language adds to the story? Why might the author have done this?
- Was the understanding clear or did you use the Glossary at the back of the book to find the meanings of words? Which words were similar to Australian English, and which were different?
- Language can provide deeper insight into a culture, mirroring beliefs, history and values. Use the Tok Pisin link <http://www.tok-pisin.com/search-tokpin.php?s=0&q=as> to find examples.
- Write a scene using dialogue between two characters in Tok Pisin.

Poetry

- The story is interspersed with poems written from the perspective of the Mako sharks. Why did the author choose to include these poems? What extra depth do they add to the story and its themes?
- These Mako poems are full of powerful and concrete imagery, written in a simple form. What are the most evocative lines in the Mako poems? What are some of the made-up or compound words the author uses to evoke the sharks' world, such as 'inside-belly-pups' or 'light-flash-jetty'?
- What did you learn about the life of a shark from reading the Mako poems?
- Research an animal of your choosing, and write a poem from that animal's perspective, in a similar poetry style, with short lines and powerful descriptive words.
- Go on a poetry walk to an interesting place such as a park or bushland, and use all five senses to find inspiration for a poem.

Extension

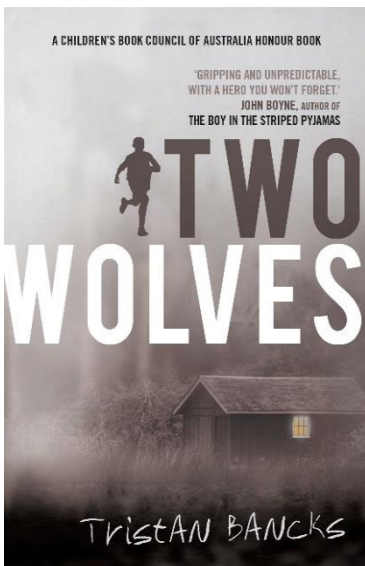
- Read Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* or watch *The Big Blue*.
- Research the quotations which start each chapter and find out more about the poets/authors. Why do you think the author has included these? Can you think of alternative quotes that might have suited the themes? Write a short story or poem inspired by your favourite quotation.
- Visit an aquarium or marine park.

DIANNE WOLFER'S PHOTO INSPIRATION

Dianne loves swimming, snorkelling and diving, and the idea for *The Shark Caller* was sparked by her visits to the amazing underwater reefs, drop-offs and wrecks of Papua New Guinea. Here are some of Dianne's photos of the places that triggered her imagination.



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



Two Wolves
by Tristan Bancks

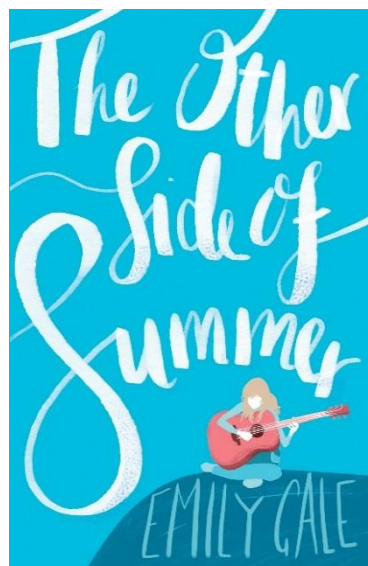
Why this story? A CBCA Honour Book about survival and family.

One afternoon, police officers show up at Ben Silver's front door. Minutes after they leave, his parents arrive home. Ben and his little sister Olive are bundled into the car and told they're going on a holiday. But are they?

It doesn't take long for Ben to realise that his parents are in trouble. Ben's always dreamt of becoming a detective – his dad even calls him 'Cop'. Now Ben gathers evidence and tries to uncover what his parents have done.

The problem is, if he figures it out, what does he do? Tell someone? Or keep the secret and live life on the run?

[Teachers' resources available.](#)

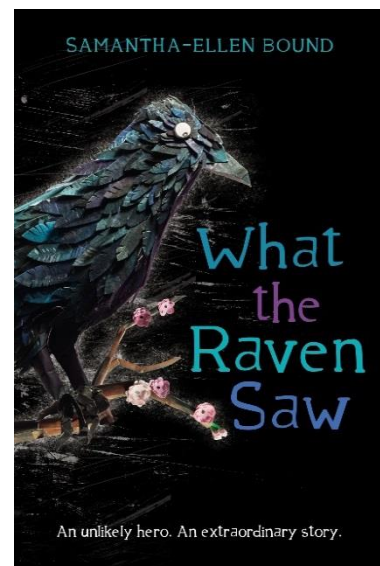


The Other Side of Summer
by Emily Gale

Why this story? Compare with *The Shark Caller* – both use magical realism in very different ways to explore a brother's death.

Summer is trying to recover from a tragedy, but it seems impossible when her family is falling apart. Having an extraordinary best friend like Mal helps, but Summer's secret source of happiness is a link to the past: one very special guitar. Now her dad's plan to save them is turning Summer's life upside down. The next thing she knows, they've moved to the other side of the world. In Australia, Summer makes an unlikely friend, who seems to be magically connected to her guitar. Is this for real? Has a mysterious boy been sent to help Summer? Or could it be the other way around?

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



What the Raven Saw
by Samantha-Elle Bound

Why this story? Like *The Shark Caller*, it also features talking animal characters who help to convey a powerful message.

The raven doesn't want you to read his story. What if you find out the location of his treasure? Or worse, what if you learn his secret – that ravens can talk?

But you should read it, even though the raven wants to be left alone. A pesky pigeon, a beady-eyed weatherhen, a ghost boy and a lovestruck scarecrow will make sure this story isn't just about one grumpy raven. With their help, the raven will uncover a thief, sing his own song, and discover there's more to life than being magnificent.

[Teachers' resources available.](#)

ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QUANTITY	TOTAL
The Shark Caller	Dianne Wolfer	9780143780557	5-9	\$17.99		
Two Wolves	Tristan Bancks	9780857982032	6-9	\$16.99		
The Other Side of Summer	Emily Gale	9780143780113	6-9	\$16.99		
What the Raven Saw	Samantha -Ellen Bound	9781742757353	6-8	\$16.99		
TOTAL						

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