

# How to SAIL to SOMEWHERE



ASHLEIGH BARTON

TEACHERS RESOURCES



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## Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

Introduction	3
Before & After Reading the Novel	3
Themes & Curriculum Topics	3
<i>Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS)</i>	
<i>Science</i>	
<i>English Language &amp; Literacy</i>	
<i>Visual Literacy</i>	
Further Quotes for Discussion	10
Further Activities	11
Conclusion	11
About the Author	11
Bibliography	12
About the Author of the Notes	12



# INTRODUCTION

*How to Sail to Somewhere* is a beautiful and deeply moving story of lost and found, of friendship, family, hope and the power of the ocean, for middle-grade readers who love a mystery.

Beatrice Glass – Bea – lives in Willow, a tiny fishing village that's sleepy all year until the summertime, when the tourists flock in and most of the locals leave. But summer is also when Bea's favourite person in the entire world, her fun and hilarious Uncle Byron, comes to stay.

On their last day together the previous summer, Byron had given Bea an intriguing antique book containing a map of Somewhere, a mysterious star-shaped island off the coast, and promised that next summer they'd sail to Somewhere together for their best adventure yet.

That was last year. Now summer has arrived, but Byron hasn't. And now it looks like he never will.

Are the book and Byron's disappearance linked? Byron has left some clues for Bea – a scavenger hunt of sorts designed to bring her and her new friend, Arabella, together and give Bea one last magical summer. Could Somewhere hold the key to both Bea's and Arabella's future?

Popular children's author Ashleigh Barton has created a memorable, classic story that is bound to totally engage her readers in both the magic of its prose and in its tantalising narrative.

## BEFORE & AFTER READING THE NOVEL

- Examine the cover of the novel. What does it suggest about the novel's themes?
- After you have read the novel, examine the cover again: what does it suggest to you now?
- After you have read the novel, read about the novel and its author in reviews and articles and use the notes below to examine the text more closely.

## THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes relevant to curriculum topics (Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS), Science, and English Language & Literacy) might be identified in this novel:

### HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

[<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>](https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/)

### COMING OF AGE & RITE OF PASSAGE JOURNEY

**Key Quote:** 'No matter how terribly Bea threw her stones, Byron would find something to celebrate. He was always like that; making Bea feel like she was someone worth celebrating.' (p 45)

**Discussion Point:** The title of the novel refers to the island Somewhere but it is also a metaphorical concept. We are all 'somewhere' and we either wish to stay there or to be somewhere else, or both. The dilemma faced in maturing and dealing with life's challenges is to balance these two opposing impulses. Invite students to discuss the word 'somewhere' as both a personal setting or a personal destination.

*Discussion Point:* How does Bea change in the course of this narrative? What causes those changes?

*Discussion Point:* Uncle Byron was not afraid to show his 'childish' side and encouraged Bea to enjoy adventures and the simple joys of life. Is maintaining connection with one's childhood a necessary part of growing up as well?

## GRIEF AND LONELINESS

*Key Quote:* 'The truth is every inch of this house holds a memory of Byron. Everywhere she looks she can think of a story, something funny he said or did, or even just him having been there.' (p 132)

*Discussion Point:* Both Bea and Arabella are in mourning – for Uncle Byron and for Arabella's mother. Their foolhardy journey to Somewhere is an expression of that grief: ' 'We'll do it,' Bea says. She knows that they have to find a way. Whatever it takes, they have to find a way. For Arabella's mother and for Byron.' ' (p 113) Sometimes grief expresses itself like this, in actions, or quests. How else might grief be expressed or confronted?

*Discussion Point:* The word 'truth' in reference to grief is repeated in this quote: 'She knows, in her heart of hearts, that he was never going to be there. The truth, the truth she hasn't wanted to admit all year, that he is really gone.' (p 255) Discuss the issue of denial in dealing with death or loss.

## TOURISM

*Key Quote:* 'Everyone knew that the tourist trade was what kept the town alive, even back then. Willow needed the tourists as much as the tourists needed a break from their regular lives.' (p 98)

*Discussion Point:* Bea and Arabella have a rather negative view of tourists until they meet Daisy and Henry on the beach. Bea's feelings are expressed here:

'Bea laughs. This is why she's never bothered to make friends with tourists. They don't come in expecting to make friendships that last any longer than a brief moment in time. They're there with their own plans and agendas and things to do that take up all their time, or the very intentional plan of doing nothing at all. Locals aren't meant for that.' (p 161)

However, her views change:

'Bea is surprised to have been sought out. All this time, she assumed tourists didn't want anything to do with her either. Perhaps she's always had that wrong too.' (p 186)

These views reflect the experiences of many inhabitants of coastal towns where the summer influx of tourists disturbs but also benefits the community. Invite students to discuss how this issue is reflected in this novel.

## FRIENDSHIP

*Key Quote:* Reggie laughs. 'Not as good as seeing Arabella with a friend like you,' he says. 'It's all you want as a parent. A good, genuine friend for your kid.' Bea blushes, but is beaming behind her spoon.' (p 155)



*Discussion Point:* The novel refers to school friendship dynamics and how that often differs from friendships discovered elsewhere. Invite students to discuss the insights that the novel offers in how its characters navigate this topic.

*Discussion Point:* What do you think attracted Arabella to Bea, and why did she seek out her friendship?

## FAMILIES

*Discussion Point:* The novel presents two different families to the reader:

– that of Bea, with her parents both working and often away from the house before she wakes and after she returns from school.

‘The next morning, Bea wakes to her alarm, set for the crack of dawn, and races down to the water before even her parents are awake. She wonders for a brief moment if they are going to worry when they find her bed empty and considers leaving a note. But they’ve stopped coming in and saying goodbye before they leave for work, so she decides it’s unlikely that they’ll notice she’s gone.’ (p 177–178)

– And Arabella whose single parent father owns a fish restaurant that they live above.

‘We go alright, don’t we?’ he says, sniffing loudly. ‘Just the two of us.’ (p 251)

Compare these two families and how they work.

*Discussion Point:* Sometimes other relatives can also play a big role in a family unit as Bea’s Uncle Byron does. Discuss with students who in their extended family plays a significant role in their lives.

## HOPE

*Key Quote:* ‘Sometimes saying goodbye is just too hard,’ Ray says. His voice sounds like he is speaking from a place of knowing. ‘And sometimes,’ he goes on, ‘we can’t admit the things we don’t wish to be true, because admitting them means letting go of the one thing that keeps us going: hope.’ (pp 246–7)

*Discussion Point:* Discuss the importance of hope both in the novel, and in our lives.

## SCIENCE

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/science/>

## OCEAN AND COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS

*Key Quote:* ‘Bea wonders now what is down there that they’ll never know about, at least not in her lifetime. She thinks of all the things that they do know about, the sea creatures she’s studied at school and read about in books. Fish and krill and crustaceans and dolphins and sharks and whales. Maybe even her whale. It’s incredible to her that right now, there is so much going on underneath her feet, so much life and activity and a whole other world that she cannot see.’ (p 222)

*Discussion Point:* Bea and Arabella participate in a whale rescue after a whale beaches itself on their coastline, which is not an uncommon occurrence. Later whales and their capacity to hear



and to 'sing' is discussed (pp 196–197). Invite students to research these topics.

*Discussion Point:* Weather is significant in this novel and the storm which the girls experience is frightening. The topography of coastal towns and islands is also a topic canvassed in description. What sort of coastal ecosystem is described in this novel?

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERACY

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>

Study the writing style employed in this narrative, and examine the following sub-topics:

### GENRE

*Discussion Point:* The novel is something of a hybrid in genre; it contains elements of magical realism (in the conversations that Bea has with her missing Uncle Byron. And in her perception that the whale has remembered her and rescues her when the boat capsizes); mystery (the puzzles of the missing Uncle Byron and of Arabella's mother, and the mysterious island of Somewhere), rite of passage (Bea and Arabella overcoming their insecurities and grief to become friends), and adventure (the boat escapade). How would you describe this novel in terms of the genres it represents? Identify examples of the tropes of those genres.

### NARRATIVE PERSON, NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE & TENSE

*Discussion Point:* The narrative is in present tense, third person subjective since it observes the action from Bea's point of view. It is not written in her voice, but it reflects her inner feelings and perspective on the action. What advantage does using the third person offer the writer in constructing this narrative?

### SYMBOLISM

*Discussion Point:* Sailing is symbolic of the personal journey each of the two girls embarks upon. What other symbolism did you notice in this novel?

### LITERARY DEVICES

*Activity:* Find examples of the use of literary devices in this novel, using the table below to identify other examples.

Simile	'she looks like the human equivalent of a rottweiler.' (pp 17–18)



<b>Metaphors</b>	‘Bea looks at the whale, one big eye staring longingly out at the sea. She hopes that, wherever they are, his friends and family know that to be true. She thinks of whale song and how it only works underwater. The whale drifting ashore, to a land not intended for him, has broken the line rendering him unreachable to his family, and them to him. What would he say if they could hear him?’ (p 38)
<b>Personification</b>	‘Out here the sky changes colour so much, Bea often wonders what it’s trying to say. Today, it’s pale blue streaked white by clouds. It feels peaceful and assured, like perhaps it’s telling Bea that everything is going to be okay. Or perhaps it’s too calm. Perhaps it’s a warning that another storm is coming.’ (p 68)
<b>Other</b>	

*Activity:* Arabella introduces Bea to sailing and to nautical sayings such as: ‘Fair winds and following seas,’ (p 217). Invite students to research other nautical sayings that we employ in everyday conversations.

## HUMOUR

*Activity:* Identify techniques by which humour is provoked in this novel, for example, Uncle Byron’s conversations with Bea are full of examples. Add quotes to the following table:

<b>Sarcasm</b>	‘No-one stays in Willow during tourist season unless your work depends on the tourists or you’re Bea and your parents are too busy to migrate south like birds.’ (p 2)
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<b>Irony</b>	
<b>Exaggeration</b>	
<b>Black Humour</b>	
<b>Other</b>	

## STRUCTURE

The structure of the story can be analysed in terms of key narrative features used to engage the reader's attention and to shape the work:

a) *Strong beginnings and endings to chapters* are one way of structuring a narrative, for example:

Beginning: 'What are you doing in here?' (Chapter two, p 17)

Ending: 'Why did he lie?' (Chapter six, p 75)

Which other opening or closing sentence was particularly gripping, in your opinion?

b) *Suspense* is the key to any narrative's structure.

In this novel, the disappearance of Bea's Uncle Byron and of Arabella's mother create suspense as does the rumour that Ray had sabotaged the boat in which a group of tourists had gone missing whilst sailing to Somewhere some years earlier. The writer employs several clues to create suspense:

*Clues:* 'Bea pulled a tattered old book with a faded blue cover from the paper bag. UNCHARTED, the cover said. An Exploration of Places Beyond the Map.' (p 7)

'SOMEWHERE' in big black letters. 'Somewhere? What's that?' 'An island. A mysterious island that only a few people have ever been to, this author,' Byron cocked his head to read the author's name, 'RJ Melville, being one of them.' (p 7)

'A picture she hasn't seen anywhere else, before or since. A map of an island the shape of a star. Somewhere.' (p 16)

The missing key to the room behind Mrs Maguire's cafe.

The message in the bottle: 'What is Byron trying to tell them? What is Marigold?' (p 150)

'She can't help but feel confused about Byron's trail of clues. Had he known? Had he known



all along that he wasn't going to come back? Why hadn't he said something? Why hadn't he said goodbye? Why didn't they sail last summer? Why did he wait until it was too late to tell Bea about this grand adventure? Why did he make the promise at all? Bea's head was starting to hurt from all the questions spinning around in it.' (p 172)

What other tantalising clues did you observe in the plot of this novel?

c) *Using a 'framing story or idea' makes a narrative more cohesive.*

The island of 'Somewhere' is the intriguing premise on which this novel is based. Each of the two key characters views the island of Somewhere as a place to travel to. But the journey proves not to be what either expected. How is this framing narrative a metaphor for the internal journey the characters experience?

## SETTING

*Discussion Point:* Description in setting is evoked via a complex range of literary devices, for example:

*Repetition:* 'Even though Byron had never lived in the rocky seaside town where Bea had spent her entire life, he knew it so much better than she ever would. He knew that the best sherbet wasn't actually at Ms Maple's lolly shop but at the newsagent on the corner. He knew that if you got up before dawn and hiked through the trees to the top of Magenta Mountain, you'd get the best view of the sun rising above the ocean like a blood orange exploding over a mirror. He knew that if you wiggled your feet on the shore, you'd find cockles in the sand that you could boil with garlic and tomatoes to eat with crusty bread for dinner or throw back into the sea.' (pp 5–6)

*Contrast:* 'Avondale looks nothing like Willow, Bea thinks. It's bigger and louder with wider streets and taller buildings painted in bright colours; magenta and turquoise and sunflower-yellow. She wishes they had more time so they could go exploring, taking their time walking down the narrow alleyways laced with rainbow bunting and stopping in the colourful shops and cafes.' (pp 90–91)

*Discussion Point:* How else is setting evoked using what literary devices?

*Activity:* The authenticity of the setting of the coastal town of Willow has also been enhanced by the names given to local businesses, Reggie Bloom's restaurant, Fishbone, Moby's Inn, Samuel's Sundries 'with its display of sand toys and beach balls spilling out onto the cobblestoned footpath' (p 113), and Seafoam, the ice-cream store. Have fun with students dreaming up nautical names for other local businesses likely to be found in a town like Willow.

## CHARACTERS

**Major Characters:** Beatrice (Bea) Glass; her Uncle Byron; her mother and father; her new friend Arabella Bloom; Reggie Bloom, Arabella's father, the owner of Fishbone, the town's only seafood restaurant; Ray (RJ Melville), the mysterious retired and reclusive fisherman.

**Minor Characters:** Mrs Maguire, a café owner; Allie and Dean, Bea's school friends; tourists, Daisy and Henry and their mother.

*Activity:* Draw up a character chart and find key quotes which give a clear picture of any of these characters, and isolate events that demonstrate their natures. Write a brief character study of the person using the quotes and events to illustrate the points made in your summary.



*Discussion Point:* Characters are often contradictory as well. For example, Arabella is described here:

'It's because hanging with Arabella is like hanging with royalty. Arabella is pretty and rich and confident. She's also somehow stony, like nothing bothers her, like nothing anyone could say about her could penetrate beneath the surface. This makes her untouchable, alluring, and being her friend is an instant ticket to being popular. And Bea can't understand it, but popular is all anyone seems to want to be. They're not concerned about being nice or smart or clever – which is an entirely different thing to being smart – or resourceful or creative or pioneering or anything like that. They just want to be liked, without really being anyone at all.' (pp 49–50)

But this description is later refuted when Bea discovers who Arabella really is.

Which character was most intriguing and why? Which character would you like to have heard more about?

## WRITING TASKS

*Activity:* Write an acrostic poem using the letters in 'Somewhere'.

*Activity:* Write a diary entry by Uncle Byron explaining why he chose to set Bea such a challenge.

*Activity:* Write a letter as if written by Arabella to her missing mother describing her feelings about her absence in her life.

## VISUAL LITERACY

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/>

*Activity:* Create a graphic novel interpretation of an incident in the novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

*Activity:* Design a new cover for this book.

*Activity:* Create a book trailer for this novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

## FURTHER QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

1. 'She can hear doors slamming and things falling and breaking, children crying and people yelling. She wonders what the tourists think, the people who aren't used to life like this.' (p 30)

2. 'It's just not where I thought you lived,' Bea blurts. 'Everyone at school says you live in a—' 'I don't,' Arabella interrupts, blinking. 'It's just me and my dad. This is all we need.' (p 53)

3. 'Yes,' Arabella says. 'I used to go there with my mum. She loved books. She said they were the adventure you could have when you couldn't have an adventure. Whatever that means.' (p 90)

4. 'When they found out Byron wasn't going to be coming back this summer, that he'd never be coming back, Bea's mother had spent half a day putting all the things Byron had left behind into a cardboard box.' (pp 128–9)

5. 'Bea's dad collects them, bringing so many home that they'd run out of shelves and books lie



piled on the floor. Bea has spent so much time in this room that even though she hasn't read every book, she knows the details on every spine almost by heart: its colour, the title and the author's name, the little shapes and icons that represent each publishing house. Her father, the least haphazard person she knows, keeps them organised in a specific order, even the ones on the floor.' (p 142)

6. 'Bea realises that Byron gave her more than just one last magical summer. He'd given her the greatest gift of all. A friend.' (p 264)

## FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1. Compare this novel to other middle grade novels that deal with islands and sailing adventures as metaphors for growth and change. [See **Bibliography**.]

2. Design a poster to advertise this book.

3. The **title of this book** refers to an island named Somewhere. What other title might the book have had?

4. Debate any of the topics covered in these notes, or suggested by the novel.

5. Locate and study **poetry** which deals with the themes in this novel.

See: '12 Poems your Middle Schoolers will Love' *Just Ask Students* <https://justaddstudents.com/12-poems/>

## CONCLUSION

*How to Sail to Somewhere* is a charming and very moving novel that employs elements of mystery to deal with themes of grief and loss, family, friendship and growing up. The island of Somewhere and the small town of Willow form a backdrop to this tale of Bea and Arabella's friendship and how they learn to deal with their losses.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ashleigh Barton** is a children's author and copywriter. Before writing full time, she pursued her love of books (children's books especially) by working in some of Australia's biggest publishing houses, running marketing and publicity campaigns for globally renowned authors and illustrators. Ashleigh has previously published six successful and highly acclaimed picture books and two junior fiction series and has been recognised on the CBCA Notables and/or Shortlist in 2021, 2022 and 2023. She lives in Sydney with her husband, three children and their dog.

See also: <https://www.ashleighbarton.com>



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM** operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. Her publications include *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005* (co-edited with Craig Munro) (UQP, 2006). In 2011 she was recipient of the CBCA (Qld) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award, in 2012, of the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. She was appointed a member of the Order of Australia in 2021.