

SUNNY the Shark

Remy Lai



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Recommended for: 6 to 9 year olds

Themes: Friendship, animals, climate change, conservation, adventure, survival, science, nature, environment

Applicable to learning areas: English language, literacy and literature

NEW SERIES:

Surviving the Wild

A heartfelt and hopeful early reader graphic novel series featuring adorable animals surviving in the wilderness despite the perils of climate change, from the award-winning creator of *Pawcasso*.

Summary

Hi! I'm Sunny and I'm a shark. I love cruising the ocean with my pilot fish friends, looking for food. But sometimes things in the water are not what they seem ... Now a plastic ring is wrapped around my fin and it's tricky to hunt. Can I break free before winter sets in?

Based on true events, *Sunny the Shark* is the story of a whitetip shark who spends her days cruising the ocean with her chatty friends – a school of helpful pilot fish. But when Sunny mistakes rubbish for food, a plastic ring gets caught around her fin and even her friends can't save her. Eventually Sunny fights her way to the surface, where a surprise awaits her ...

About the author

Remy Lai was born in Indonesia, grew up in Singapore and currently lives in Brisbane, Australia, where she writes and draws stories for kids with her two dogs by her side. She is also the award-winning creator of *Pie in the Sky*, *Fly on the Wall* and *Pawcasso*. www.remylai.com

Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Application

Before Reading

Hold up the cover of *Sunny the Shark*, while masking the book's title with your hand. Now ask the following questions:

- What kind of animal is Sunny? [Reveal the title once it is established that Sunny is a shark.] Where might we find Sunny? What might Sunny eat? What sort of smaller fish often accompanies sharks like Sunny? [Answer: pilot fish]
- Explain to students that this is the third story in a series called *Surviving the Wild*. [Point to the logo in the upper right-hand corner and ask questions, such as] What sort of dangers do you think Sunny might face living in the ocean? What can we do to keep creatures like Sunny safe in the ocean?

Comprehension Questions

- Why did the pilot fish choose to stay with Sunny? (page 5)
- How do pilot fish 'look after' sharks like Sunny? (pp 6-8)
- What do the people who catch Sunny do to her? (pp 12-17)
- Why do they do this? (page 16)
- Why does Sunny mistake the plastic ring as food? (pp 19-20)
- What creatures live on the plastic ring? (page 26)
- How does the plastic ring make it harder for Sunny to hunt for food? (pp 30-33)
- What creatures do 'fearsome predators' like Sunny fear? (page 39)
- Why might it be bad for Sunny if the pilot fish desert her? [Hint: think about the answer to Q2.]
- What are pilot whales expert at hunting? (page 50)
- The squid that Sunny wants to eat is making so much light that it glows in the dark. True or False? (pp 55-56)
- As Sunny grows more and more tired she can't fight off which giant creature? (pp 66-76)
- How do the marine researchers find Sunny again and save her life? (pp 92-96)
- Why did the creator of the book, Remy Lai, make Sunny an Oceanic Whitetip in the story? (page 101)
- Name three facts about Oceanic Whitetips. (pp 102-103)

Visual literacy in graphic novels

- Graphic novels *show* how a character is feeling. Sunny sometimes feels disappointed, fearsome, scared and exhausted in *Sunny the Shark*. Find images of Sunny feeling these emotions and explain what it was in each image that showed how she was feeling?
- Onomatopoeia is when words sound like their meanings – for example words such as *boom*, *crash* or *bounce*. Graphic novels often feature lots of onomatopoeic words – and these are often handwritten in special lettering, so the word also looks like its meaning!

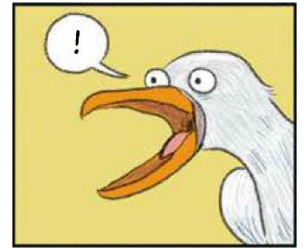


Turn to page 10 of *Sunny the Shark* and look at the word **CHOMP!**. What is it about this word that tells us about the action as well as the sound made by it? And sometimes words aren't necessary at all. Turn to page 38 and discuss how Remy Lai shows the noise that the killer whales are making. What role does colour play in showing that the noise the pilot whales are making on page 47 is less scary?

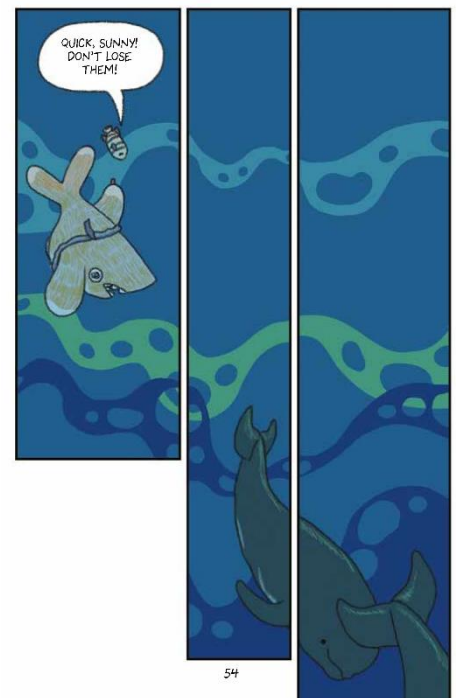
CHOMP!

- The term *panel* is used in graphic novels to describe each sequential image. Panels are often similar in size but can be bigger or smaller at points as a special way to tell the story.

- Turn to the first double-page spread in the story showing the ocean and two small birds sitting atop it. Discuss why Remy Lai decided to include the two smaller panels featuring close-ups of the seagulls in the lower right-hand section of the spread. [Hint: to contrast the enormity of the ocean with the seagulls and to emphasise the fear of the bird when it sees Sunny.]



- Can you find other examples in *Sunny the Shark* where changing the size or shape of panels helped tell the story?
- Most of the panels in this story are squares or horizontal/vertical rectangles. Compare the horizontal frames on pp 52-53 with the vertical ones on page 54 and discuss how the shape of the panel emphasises different aspects of the ocean.



- Panels in comics are often, but not always, framed with a thin, black line. So, *frames* are the borders around panels. They are almost always unbroken lines, so much so that when they are broken they change how we *read* the story. Look at the three horizontal frames on page 11 where Sunny is being pulled up by the line in her mouth. A single image of Sunny is carried through each of the three frames to emphasise the idea of her rapid ascent to the surface from the depths of the ocean.

Turn to pp 52-53 and come up with ideas for why the scuba diver's body is carried across two frames here.

Creative Exercises

- Have you heard of the saying ‘an image is worth a thousand words’? Can you explain what you think this saying might mean? Turn to pp 84-88 and explain everything happening here and what Sunny and the pilot fish might be thinking.
- For older students: Try creating your own short story in a comic format. The story can be about anything you like but it should include simple text and feature at least six panels.



A word from the author and illustrator, Remy Lai

‘I have always loved animals, and as a kid, I devoured fiction and non-fiction books about them. Inadvertently, reading about animals led me to finding out about other issues that I felt were rather dry on their own, such as environmental issues. Because animals are so connected to everything, they became my gateway to the rest of the world.

‘In 2019, Dr James Sulikowski, a professor, was doing research on sharks off the coast of Maine in the United States. He reeled in a shark that had a plastic ring around her neck, which had left her wounded. He removed the plastic and released her. She would not have survived without his help. This inspired my story, *Sunny the Shark*. I chose to use a ribbon ring from a balloon to pin Sunny’s fin back as this made the dangers posed by the plastic more obvious to young readers.

‘Sadly, Sunny’s story is more common than you might think. Humans use a lot of plastic, and large amounts of it end up in the ocean. Marine animals get hurt by these plastics when they become entangled or eat plastics. To protect sharks like Sunny, we need to reduce plastic pollution. Whenever possible, avoid single-use plastics like straws and cutlery and bring your own reusable grocery bag when you go shopping.

‘All of the books in this series have a theme of hopefulness. While humans have contributed to the animals’ plight, in the end, it’s the humans who can (and do) save the animals. It is up to us humans to help. Together, we can protect the earth!’

– Remy Lai

