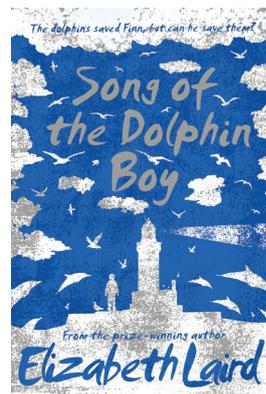


TEACHING NOTES

Song of the Dolphin Boy

Elizabeth Laird



“People often ask me where I get my ideas from. 'They come from the same place as my dreams,' I say. So where do we get our dreams from? They come from the people we meet, the places we know, the things that have happened to us, and, above all, the feelings we experience. *Song of the Dolphin Boy* was born out of that mixture of people and places and events. It just needed a flash of inspiration to tie it all together into a story...” - Elizabeth Laird

About Song of the Dolphin Boy

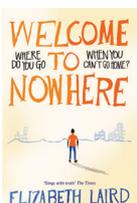
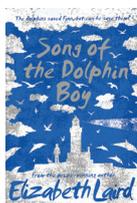
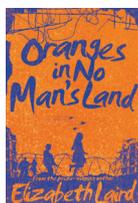
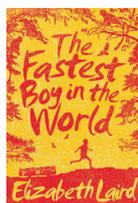
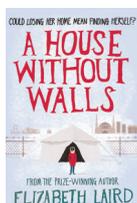
Song of the Dolphin Boy is a moving adventure about the impact of plastic pollution on our seas, and the campaigning power of friendship. Finn has always been different, and in the tiny fishing village of Stromhead he sticks out like a sore thumb. Always told to keep away from the water, he's felt that something was missing until one day he dives in and finds that, swimming with the dolphins, he feels completely at home.

But his new friends are in danger of being injured by the rubbish that floats out into the water - and now a supermarket is going to release thousands of balloons that could drift out to sea and cause even more damage. Desperate to help the dolphins, Finn goes to the Lighthouse Crew, a group of kids who have always left Finn out. Will they be able to set aside their differences to save the dolphins? And what will Finn discover about his past along the way?

About Me

Here's a picture of me, just in case you're wondering what I look like. I've been writing novels for more than 30 years now. A lot of them are still in print, and you can find out more about them on my website www.elizabethlaird.co.uk.

I've travelled all over the world in pursuit of adventures and stories, so take a look at my other books if you'd like to know more.

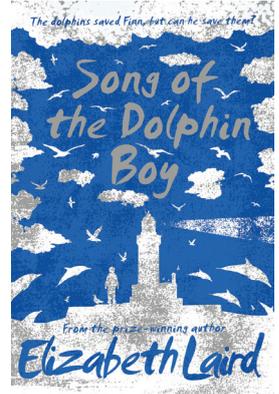



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TEACHING NOTES

Song of the Dolphin Boy Elizabeth Laird



How I Came to Write Song of the Dolphin Boy

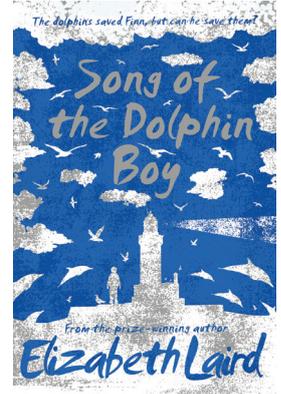
A few years ago, I met an adventurous undersea cameraman who lived in Borneo and made amazing films of the creatures in the tropical seas. He told me how distressed he was by the amount of rubbish he encountered in the sea, in areas which had been pristine a few years ago. I didn't know much about ocean pollution and this was shocking news to me, as David Attenborough's wonderful Blue Planet 2 films hadn't yet been screened on TV.

"You're a writer," the cameraman said. "Can't you write something? The world needs a wake-up call!"

I didn't sleep that night while stories raced through my head, and the next day the character of Finn had come into being. Now I needed a setting for him where he could discover his magical self.

TEACHING NOTES

Song of the Dolphin Boy Elizabeth Laird

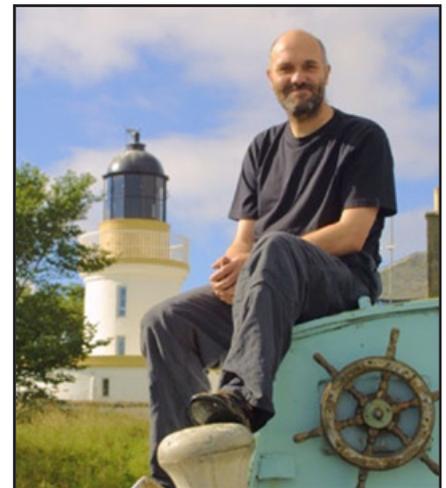


Cromarty Lighthouse

I got in touch with Professor Paul Thompson, the Director of Aberdeen University's Lighthouse Field Station in Cromarty; this is a place where scientists study marine animals and how to look after them. It's such a cool place! The lighthouse overlooks the beautiful Cromarty Firth where a pod of dolphins live, hunt for fish, and, every now and then, leap out of the water in a spectacular show of acrobatics.

Professor Thompson is worried about plastic pollution. "Plastic bags and bottles aren't the only problem," he said. "People don't realise that balloons are deadly too. Dolphins and seabirds think the balloons are jellyfish, but when they eat them the balloons fill their stomachs and they can starve."

I had no idea that the fun of releasing balloons into the air and watching them float away could have such deadly consequences.



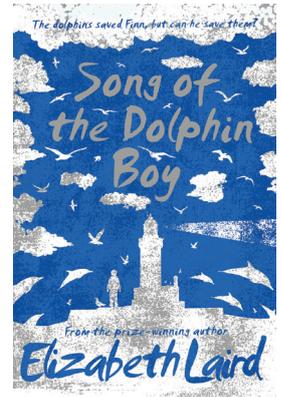
Professor Thompson at the Cromarty Lighthouse



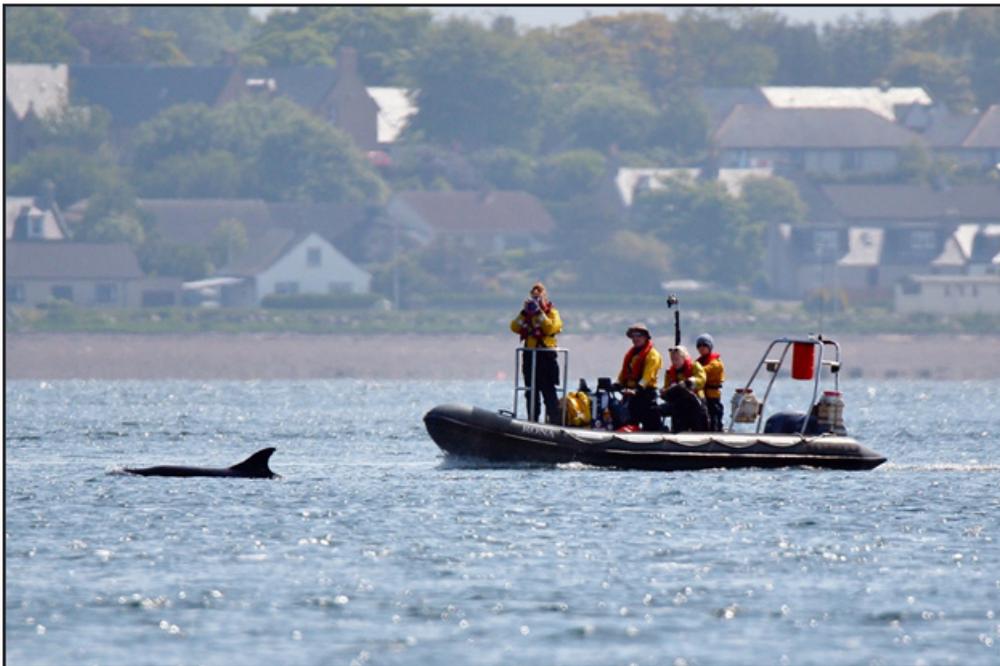
A mass balloon release; Balloons can be deadly to wildlife

TEACHING NOTES

Song of the Dolphin Boy Elizabeth Laird



The Moray Firth Dolphin Study



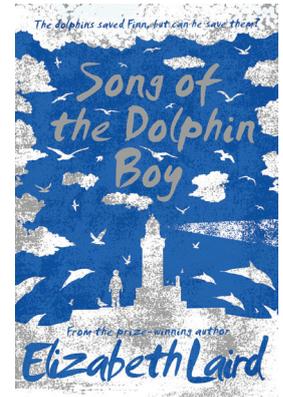
Dr Barbara Cheney, the dolphin expert at the Lighthouse, is studying the dolphins in the Moray Firth. What a great job! She and her team go out regularly on *Rona*, the Field Station's boat, to study the dolphins and photograph them.

The team knows every dolphin in the Firth individually, and can tell which one is which by the nicks and tooth rakes (scratches) on their dorsal fins.

TEACHING NOTES

Song of the Dolphin Boy

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Barbara has been studying how dolphins communicate with each other. She told me some remarkable facts about them:

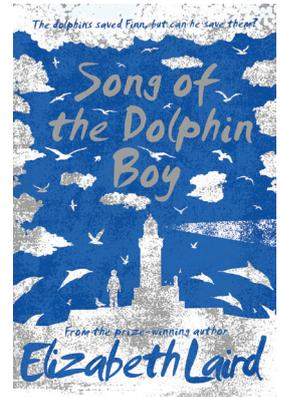
- Every dolphin has its own signature whistle. They can recognise and find each other over long distances underwater.
- Dolphins also make clicks, which they use to find fish. As they get closer, the clicks get faster, making a buzzing noise. Although they have ears, dolphins hear sounds underwater through the jelly-like material in their lower jaws.
- Dolphins show anger like other mammals do. They do this by opening their mouths wide to show their teeth, and by biting and chasing. They can also slap their tails on the water, leap right out of the sea and ‘belly flop’, or even land on top of another dolphin.
- Dolphins are very sociable animals and love to touch and communicate with each other.
- They are very intelligent.



A dolphin calf with its mother

TEACHING NOTES

Song of the Dolphin Boy Elizabeth Laird



A dolphin too close to a balloon that's landed in the sea

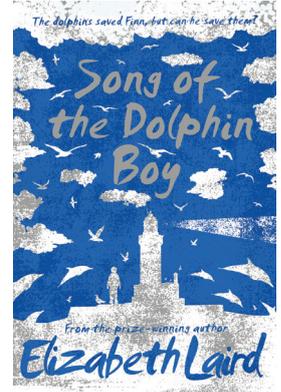


A dolphin leaping into the air

TEACHING NOTES

Song of the Dolphin Boy

Elizabeth Laird

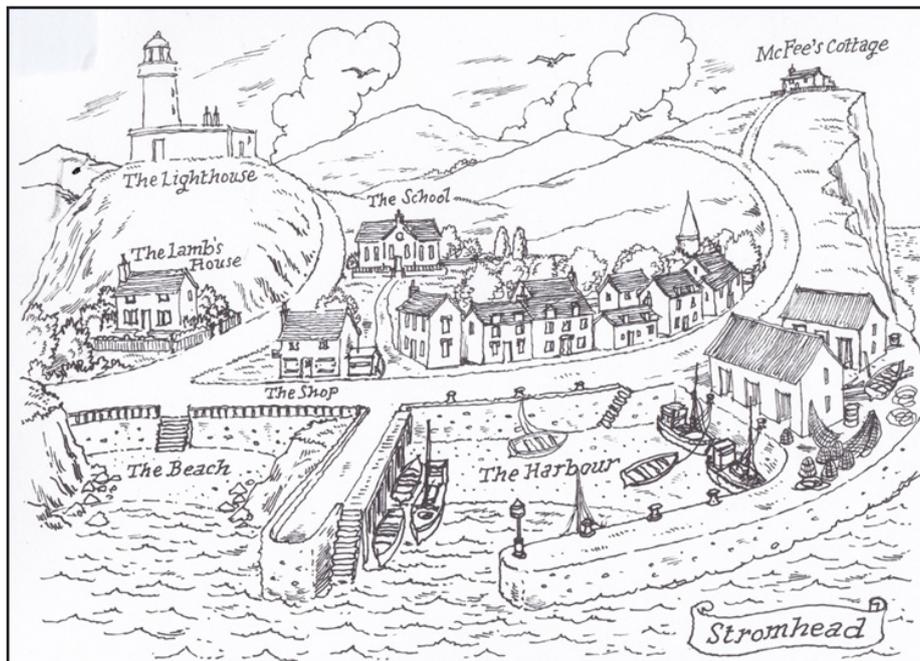


The Selkie Myth

One of Scotland's best-known folk tales is the story of the seal woman who falls in love with a fisherman. She comes out of the sea, sheds her skin, and marries him. He hides her skin, but one day she finds it again. The call of the sea and her own people is too strong. She puts her skin back on, returns to the sea, and is never seen again. I made the old legend the basis for my story, substituting a dolphin for the seal, and giving her son, 'the magical boy', the ability to be like the dolphins. I wrote the poem at the start of the book in the traditional ballad style, in the way that so many old Scottish stories have been told.

*A fisherman sat on the lonely shore,
Mending his nets and sighing.
Far out to sea, a dolphin heard
The love song he was singing...*

About the Illustrations in the Book



Song of the Dolphin Boy is brought to life by Peter Bailey's wonderful illustrations. This image of the fictional village of Stromhead gives the reader an accurate map of where all the action takes place.

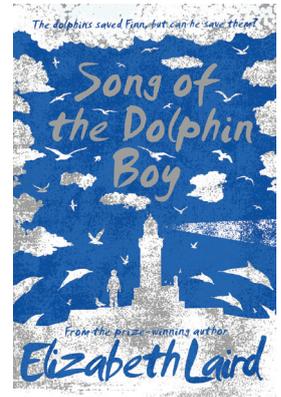

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TEACHING NOTES

Song of the Dolphin Boy

Elizabeth Laird



How You Can Help

Rubbish, such as glass or plastic bottles, floats in almost every ocean and sea. This is very dangerous for marine animals who eat plastic bags, confusing them with food, and get tangled in the rubbish. Here are some tips to show you how YOU can help!

- Write to your Member of Parliament and start a campaign to make mass balloon releases illegal!
- Recycle plastic, glass and other materials. This prevents them getting into the sea.
- Say no to using plastic straws, cups or cutlery when you can.
- Remember to take your own bags to the shops instead of using plastic bags.
- When you go for a picnic outside, remember to bring back all your rubbish with you, or to recycle it, or dispose of it in a bin.
- If you see some rubbish on the beach, pick it up and recycle it or throw it in a proper bin.
- When you're on the coast or in the sea, avoid damaging rocks, seaweed, animals and coral.
- Do not collect animals or plants. Leave them as part of their natural habitat.
- Do not buy souvenirs of marine animals, such as starfish and seahorses.

Discussion Notes

1. "[Finn] didn't quite fit in with anyone."

Examine the ways in which Finn could be described as an outsider. Do you think he's really as different as he feels?

2. "The swell washed round him softly as if it was welcoming him. It seemed almost to hold him in an embrace."

Discuss the language and imagery used by the author to describe the sea. Is it effective?

3. Why do you think the author chose to set her story in this fishing village?

4. Jas and Finn have both grown up without a mother – how do their experiences compare?

5. "Finn had brought himself up without much help from his dad."

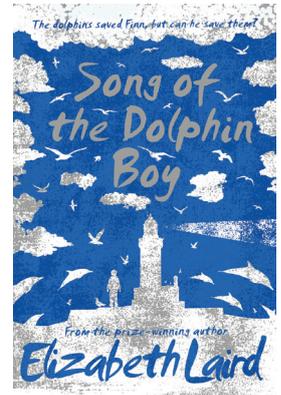
Discuss Finn's relationship with his father. How does it change throughout the story?

6. Compare and contrast the friendships Finn makes throughout the story. Consider his friendships with both the dolphins and the Lighthouse Crew.

TEACHING NOTES

Song of the Dolphin Boy

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7. “And then, with the greatest joy he had ever known, he stopped wondering about what was happening, and gave himself up to the sea. He felt as if he had come home.”

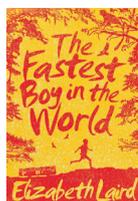
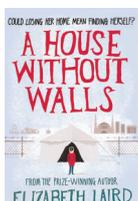
Is there anything that makes you feel as happy as Finn does in the sea? Perhaps a hobby or sport?

8. “Then he saw that the balloon’s string was caught in the dolphin’s teeth. She was twisting herself round to get rid of it, but only succeeded in tangling it over one of her flippers.”

Have the environmental elements of this story made you think about how we treat our planet? What do you think can we do to be greener?

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