
Teachers' Notes



AIDAN VERSUS THE OCEAN

Dannika Patterson / Heidi Cooper Smith

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Reading level: Middle Fiction 9+

BOOK SUMMARY

All Aidan thought he'd have to survive during the summer school holidays was yet another game of Fortnite with his mates. But his plans are suddenly swept out to sea after one teeny-tiny bad decision leads to a whole bunch more. Now he's forced to play a real-life game of survival off the wild West Australian coast.

With his Border Collie Barney by his side, will Aidan's courage, humour and grit, along with inspiration from a few celebrities, be enough to see him safely home?

THEMES

Resilience & Resourcefulness • Responsibility • Courage •

Personal Growth • Connection to Nature • Decision-Making & Consequences •

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**Dannika Patterson is available for author talks and workshops.
Contact Wombat Books for more information.**

Aidan Versus The Ocean Teachers' Notes can be used in schools (independent learning, small groups, and whole classes); at home with caregivers; and as part of mental health support programs facilitated by counsellors, psychologists, children's charities, etc.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dannika Patterson is an internationally published children's author and workshop presenter. She has written more than 20 books for children, some of which have been shortlisted for awards, including the Speech Pathology Book of the Year Awards in 2023 and 2025. Her books are used widely as resources in homes and schools, helping to open relatable conversations about important topics.

Things Dannika can't get enough of include outdoor adventures with her family, coffee, dogs, seashells, good books and conversations with kids (they say the most inspiring, important and true things!).

Discover more about Dannika, her books and her range of creative workshops and author incursions for schools here: dannikapatterson.com

AUTHOR NOTES

I chose to write this book because my two darling children told me that I couldn't. You see, at the ripe old ages of nine and eleven, they felt as though they were "too old" to enjoy the picture books that I mostly write! I believe NO ONE is ever too old for picture books!

They also know me well. When I am told that I cannot do something that I really want to do, I set my jaw and say, "Watch me!" So, I set out to prove my children wrong by writing a novel-length story they would **love**. Something completely different to the sweet and gentle picture book stories that they expect from me. A fast-paced adventure full of action, set in the wilderness, with survival at stake. I threw in plot twists like sudden storms, snakes, sharks, YouTube celebrities and I threw in a brave pet dog for good measure!

I wrote every day and read completed chapters to them at night, always leaving them with a cliffhanger.

At the end of Chapter 1, they said, 'That doesn't totally suck, Mum.'

At the end of Chapter 2, they said, 'Kids our age might actually like this...'

From Chapter 3 onwards, they asked, 'What happens next? Can you write more tomorrow?'

And so it went. On and on.

Until I finished the final chapter. Typed 'THE END'. And said to my darling children, the loves of my life, 'I did it! I told you so!'

And those cheeky little munchkins smiled up at me and said, 'We knew you could, Mum. We only told you that you couldn't, so you'd actually do it.'

Aidan versus Ocean exists because of Tom and Olivia.

Well played, kiddos, well played.

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REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

Aidan Versus the Ocean is a fast-paced survival adventure that offers an engaging entry point for students to explore themes of resourcefulness, resilience and responsibility in a safe and accessible setting. The novel provides rich opportunities to examine cause and effect, risk-taking and personal decision-making in ways that are highly relatable for middle-grade readers. As Aidan struggles to cope in an unfamiliar and dangerous environment, the story highlights the importance of perseverance, adaptability and emotional resilience. His journey encourages reflection on coping strategies and the ways people learn and grow through adversity, mistakes and challenge.

Set against the backdrop of the West Australian coastline, the novel introduces students to Australia's coastal environment, weather systems and marine life, including the dangers and unpredictability of the ocean. The setting supports cross-curricular learning opportunities in English, Science and Health. With its short chapters, humour and high-stakes action, *Aidan Versus the Ocean* is an ideal class novel or read-aloud text, particularly for reluctant readers, encouraging critical and creative thinking through discussion, reflection and response activities.

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

CURRICULUM V9

YEAR 4

English, HASS, HPE, Science

AC9E4LA02 - identify the subjective language of opinion and feeling, and the objective language of factual reporting

AC9E4LA07 - investigate how quoted (direct) and reported (indirect) speech are used

AC9E4LA09 - understand past, present and future tenses and their impact on meaning in a sentence

AC9E4LE03 - discuss how authors and illustrators make stories engaging by the way they develop character, setting and plot tensions

AC9HS4K05 - the importance of environments, including natural vegetation and water sources, to people and animals in Australia and on another continent

AC9HS4K07 - the differences between "rules" and "laws", why laws are important and how they affect the lives of people

AC9HP4P01 - investigate how success, challenge, setbacks and failure strengthen resilience and identities in a range of contexts

AC9HP4P03 - describe how choices and actions can be influenced by stereotypes

AC9HP4P06 - explain how and why emotional responses can vary and practise strategies to manage their emotions

AC9HP4P10 - investigate and apply behaviours that contribute to their own and others' health, safety,

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relationships and wellbeing

AC9S4U02 - identify sources of water and describe key processes in the water cycle, including movement of water through the sky, landscape and ocean; precipitation; evaporation; and condensation

YEAR 5

English, HPE

AC9E5LA01 - understand that language is selected for social contexts and that it helps to signal social roles and relationships

AC9E5LA02 - understand how to move beyond making bare assertions by taking account of differing ideas or opinions and authoritative sources

AC9E5LE03 - recognise that the point of view in a literary text influences how readers interpret and respond to events and characters

AC9HP6P01 - explain how identities can be influenced by people and places, and how we can create positive self-identities

AC9HP6P04 - describe and demonstrate how respect and empathy can be expressed to positively influence relationships

AC9HP6P08 - analyse and rehearse protective behaviours and help-seeking strategies that can be used in a range of online and offline situations

YEAR 6

English, Science, Media Arts

AC9E6LA02 - understand the uses of objective and subjective language, and identify bias

AC9E6LA08 - identify authors' use of vivid, emotive vocabulary, such as metaphors, similes, personification, idioms, imagery and hyperbole

AC9E6LE01 - identify responses to characters and events in literary texts, drawn from historical, social or cultural contexts, by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors

AC9E6LE03 - identify and explain characteristics that define an author's individual style

AC9E6LY02 - use interaction skills and awareness of formality when paraphrasing, questioning, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing and supporting arguments, and sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions

AC9S6U01 - investigate the physical conditions of a habitat and analyse how the growth and survival of living things is affected by changing physical conditions

AC9AMA6D01 - develop media production skills to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning through manipulation of media languages, including images, sounds, texts and/or interactive elements, and media technologies

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TEACHING POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

This book may be used in whole class, small group or independent learning activities in schools.

Please note, the following suggestions and activities are suited to a variety of year levels spanning Year Four to Year 6 primary aged children, and possibly Year 7 in secondary school. We advise teachers to use best judgement due to the large age range as to what will suit their students.

KNOWLEDGE AND LITERAL UNDERSTANDING

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Examine the cover of *Aidan Versus the Ocean*. What details stand out to you? What mood or atmosphere does the cover create, and what do you predict the story might involve?
2. Read the back cover blurb as a class. What themes or challenges do you think may appear in the novel? Does the story remind you of any other books, films or survival stories you know?
3. Discuss what students already know about water safety, particularly in the ocean. Why can the ocean sometimes be unpredictable or dangerous?
4. Imagine you were stranded in a survival situation. What is one item would you take, and why?
5. The novel is set on the West Australian coast. What kinds of environments, weather conditions or wildlife might a person encounter there?

AFTER-READING QUESTIONS

1. Identify a moment in the story where one of Aidan's decisions leads to an immediate consequence. What happened, and what might he have done differently?
2. How does Aidan change throughout the novel? Think about his behaviour, attitude and decision-making at the beginning and end of the story. Use descriptive words to explain his growth.
3. Does Aidan remind you of anyone you know, such as a friend, family member or fictional character? What similarities do they share? Perhaps he even reminds you of yourself.
4. Aidan faces many physical and emotional challenges while stranded on the island. Which challenge do you think was the most difficult for him, and why?
5. The novel features a range of Australian animals and marine life. What additional facts do you know about any of these species, such as their habitat, diet, behaviour or predators?
6. How does Barney help Aidan throughout the story? What does their relationship reveal about companionship, trust and loyalty?
7. How would you describe Aidan's relationships with his father and grandfather? Do these relationships change over the course of the novel?
8. The novel features a range of Australian wildlife and coastal environments. What did you learn about the ocean, weather or animals featured in the story?
9. What message or lesson do you think readers can take away from *Aidan Versus the Ocean*?

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

RESILIENCE & RESOURCEFULNESS

- If you were in a survival situation like Aidan's, what personal strengths or skills would help you cope? What is one survival skill you would like to learn in the future?
- Aidan uses the resources available to him on the island to survive. Which survival strategy or idea did you find the most creative or effective?
- When Aidan opens the marine safety bag, he examines the items inside. Choose four items and explain how they could be useful in a survival situation.
- When stranded on the rock surrounded by sharks, Aidan has very few options. If the rescue boat had not arrived, what other solutions might he have tried?
- Aidan often draws inspiration from famous people and fictional heroes. Can role models help people stay motivated during difficult situations? Explain your answer.

RESPONSIBILITY

- What responsibilities did Aidan have at the beginning of the story? Did he always act responsibly? Explain your thinking using examples from the novel.
- How do Aidan's actions affect the people around him, particularly his father and grandfather?
- Do you think Aidan becomes more responsible by the end of the novel? Why or why not?
- Aidan ignores his father's warning about the incoming storm. Why is it important to listen to safety advice from trusted adults or experts?
- Responsibility often involves thinking ahead before making a choice. Which of Aidan's decisions do you think showed poor planning, and what could he have done differently?

COURAGE

- Which moment in the story required the greatest courage from Aidan? What made this moment especially challenging?
- Courage does not always mean being fearless. How does Aidan continue moving forward even when he is frightened or uncertain?
- Barney stays beside Aidan throughout the ordeal. How can companionship help people face difficult or frightening situations?
- Sometimes courage means asking for help or admitting mistakes. Does Aidan show this kind of courage in the story? Explain your answer.
- Which character in the novel do you think demonstrates the most courage, and why? Consider Aidan, his father, Grandad, Barney or the rescue crew in your response.

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PERSONAL GROWTH

- What would you identify as Aidan's strongest character traits? Consider qualities such as persistence, bravery, curiosity, creativity or kindness.
- How does Aidan change over the course of the story? Which experiences seem to shape him the most?
- If Barney had not been with Aidan on the island, how might Aidan's experience and behaviour have been different?
- Aidan is an avid Fortnite player. Are there any skills from games, hobbies or sports that could help someone in a real-life survival situation? Explain your ideas.

CONNECTION TO NATURE

- The novel features a range of Australian coastal environments and wildlife. Which part of the natural setting did you find the most interesting or memorable, and why?
- What kinds of animals might a person encounter on a deserted island or along the Australian coastline? How could these animals help or challenge someone trying to survive?
- Aidan searches for freshwater on the island. Besides the cliffs, where else in nature might freshwater be found?
- The ocean in the novel can be both beautiful and dangerous. How does the story show the power and unpredictability of nature?

DECISION-MAKING & CONSEQUENCES

- Do all decisions have consequences? Are consequences always immediate, or can some appear much later?
- Think about the many choices Aidan makes throughout the story. How might changing just one decision have altered the outcome of the novel?
- When the search helicopter flies over the island, Aidan chooses to run after it instead of staying in one place. Do you think this was a good decision? Why or why not?
- Aidan decides fishing is the best way to find food on the island. What other choices might he have considered for survival?
- Some of Aidan's decisions are made quickly under pressure. How can emotions such as fear, panic or excitement affect a person's judgement?

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

DECISION FLOWCHART

Create a flowchart showing Aidan's key decisions and the consequences that followed. Consider how changing one choice could have changed the story.

Extension: Rewrite the ending by changing one of Aidan's decisions.

REPAIR RATHER THAN REPLACE

Grandad believes in fixing and reusing things instead of throwing them away. As a class, discuss why repairing items can be important for people, communities and the environment. Think about objects in your own home that could be repaired, reused or repurposed instead of replaced.

Extension: Design a poster encouraging people to "Repair Rather Than Replace", or research a real-world example of the Right to Repair movement.

AIDAN'S DIARY ENTRY

Write a diary entry from Aidan's perspective during his time on the island. Include important events, thoughts, fears and decisions from the story.

SET THE SCENE

Draw or paint an important scene from the novel, focusing on the ocean setting and atmosphere.

TEXT MESSAGES

Retell part of the story as a series of text messages between two characters.

There is a worksheet on our website that can be used for this if necessary.

SURVIVAL SKILL RESEARCH

In small groups, research a real survival skill such as finding freshwater, building a shelter or basic first aid. Present your findings to the class.

ANIMAL FACT FILE

Choose one animal featured in the novel and create a fact file about it. Include information such as habitat, diet, predators and other interesting facts.

WORKSHEET: SURVIVAL PLAN

Name:

Date:

YOUR TASK

Imagine you are stranded on a remote island like Aidan. Think carefully about what you would need to survive.

PART 1: SHELTER

Where would you build your shelter and why?

What materials would you use?

PART 2: FRESH WATER

How would you find or collect fresh water?

PART 3: FOOD

What food sources could you use to survive?

PART 4: SAFETY

What dangers might you face on the island?

How would you stay safe?

PART 5: RESCUE PLAN

How would you try to signal for help or attract rescuers?

PART 6: EXTENSION

Draw a map of your island. Label important survival locations such as:

- Shelter
- Fresh water
- Food sources
- Dangerous areas
- SOS or signal locations

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-
-
-
- Safe
 - Mysterious
 - Chaotic
 - Peaceful
 - Lonely
 - Magical
 - Dangerous
 - Changing
-
-
-
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