

Aidan Versus The Ocean

AUTHOR

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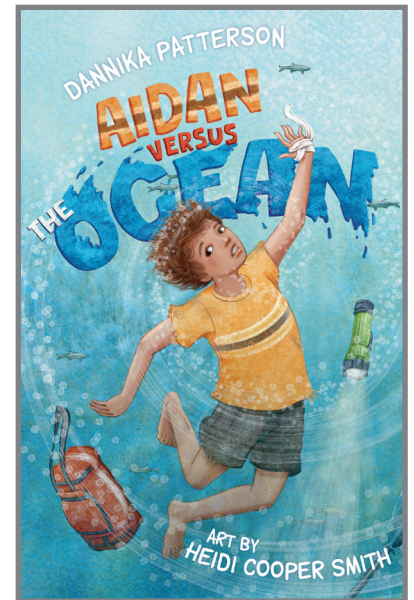
ILLUSTRATOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid Primary



SYNOPSIS

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?

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!).

THEMES

- Resilience and resourcefulness
- Responsibility
- Courage
- Personal growth
- Connection to nature
- Decision-making and consequences

CURRICULUM LINKS

Australian Curriculum

- Year 4
 - English: AC9E4LA02, AC9E4LA07, AC9E4LA09, AC9E4LE03
 - HASS: AC9HS4K05, AC9HS4K07
 - HPE: AC9HP4P01, AC9HP4P03, AC9HP4P06, AC9HP4P10
 - Science: AC9S4U02
- Year 5

- English: AC9E5LA01, AC9E5LA02, AC9E5LE03
- HPE: AC9HP6P01, AC9HP6P04, AC9HP6P08
- Year 6
 - English: AC9E6LA02, AC9E6LA08, AC9E6LE01, AC9E6LE03, AC9E6LY02
 - Science: AC9S6U01
 - Media Arts: AC9AMA6D01

WRITING STYLE

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 readaloud text, particularly for reluctant readers, encouraging critical and creative thinking through discussion, reflection and response activities.

STUDY NOTES

KNOWLEDGE AND LITERAL UNDERSTANDING

Pre-reading questions

- 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?
- 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?
- Discuss what students already know about water safety, particularly in the ocean. Why can the ocean sometimes be unpredictable or dangerous?
- Imagine you were stranded in a survival situation. What is one item you would take, and why?
- 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

- 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?
- How does Aidan change throughout the novel? Think about his behaviour, attitude and decisionmaking at the beginning and end of the story. Use descriptive words to explain his growth.
- 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.
- 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?
- 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?
- How does Barney help Aidan throughout the story? What does their relationship reveal about companionship, trust and loyalty?
- How would you describe Aidan's relationships with his father and grandfather? Do these relationships change over the course of the novel?
- 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?

- What message or lesson do you think readers can take away from *Aidan Versus the Ocean*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Resilience and 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.

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 and 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?

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.

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?

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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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