

Through the Darkening Sea

Claire Saxby & Peter Cheong

Book Summary

An awe-inspiring, lyrical story by award-winning author Claire Saxby, rendered by award-winning illustrator Peter Cheong in collage-style artwork that is equally eye-catching and breathtaking.

*Out in the open ocean, where currents sway wild
as wind,
where sharks and sea lions widely roam,
a whale falls.*

The ocean comes alive in this incredible tale about the cycle of life. Watch the colours of marine creatures change as a whale falls towards the darkness of deep waters. Discover the extraordinary animals that live beyond the light.

Recommended Reading Age: 5+

Resources Created For: Middle primary

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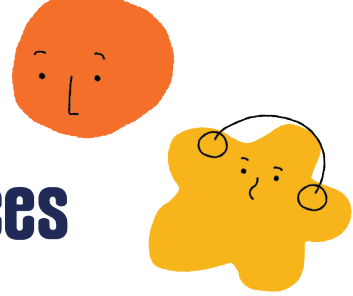
Vocabulary

- **Adrift:** floating without purpose or direction.
- **Aloft:** above, overhead.
- **Bioluminescent:** the term for a living organism that produces light.
- **Flit:** to move from place to place quickly, not staying long anywhere.
- **Frenzy:** Wild excitement, agitation or movement.
- **Fronds:** long leaves that have edges divided into lots of thin parts.
- **Oasis:** a place of safety, peace and plenty surrounded by difficult conditions or circumstances.
- **Sea snow:** a term used to describe organic material (usually decomposing leaves or animals) falling from the ocean surface to the sea floor.
- **Skitter:** to move lightly and quickly.
- **Swarm:** a large group moving together.

Questions & Activities

1. The front cover of *Through the Darkening Sea* tells the reader a lot about the content of the book.
 - a. Where is the story set?
 - b. What do you find surprising about the cover?
 - c. Can you identify all of the animals?
2. 'Whale fall' is the term used to describe the way the body of a dead whale falls to the ocean floor. Do you find it surprising there is a specific term to describe this event?
 - a. Why do you think there is a specific term for this, but not for what happens to other animals after they die?
3. Make a list of all the animals that are mentioned throughout the book.
 - a. Try to find each animal in the illustrations.
4. Select an animal from *Through the Darkening Sea* that you would like to know more about.
 - a. Research the animal and prepare a short presentation which includes:
 - i. The animal's common and scientific names
 - ii. Habitat
 - iii. Food
 - iv. A picture of the animal





- v. How it reproduces
 - vi. Its importance in its ecosystem
 - vii. A weird or interesting fact
5. Create a diagram which demonstrates the way the fallen whale contributes to the food chain, and ultimately the birth of a new whale.
 6. While Claire Saxby is describing the process of a whale carcass falling to the ocean floor and being consumed by animals which are themselves then eaten, she uses verse that is rich in imagery to do so.
 - a. Turn to the third spread in *Through the Darkening Sea*. (This spread begins 'Away from where dolphins spin ...')
 - b. Write your own description of what is happening on this spread as a scientific explanation.
 - c. Compare the verse Claire Saxby has written with your description. While they are both relating the same event, which do you prefer? Why?
 7. There is a lot of figurative language used in *Through the Darkening Sea*. Find examples of:
 - a. Alliteration
 - b. Vivid verbs
 - c. Colour
 - d. Imagery
 8. How does the use of vivid, descriptive language contribute to your understanding of what is happening to the whale?
 - a. Why do you think Claire Saxby has chosen to write *Through the Darkening Sea* in this language, rather than as a scientific explanation?
 - b. What is your favourite line or phrase from the text? Write a short paragraph explaining why you think it works so well.
 9. The illustrator, Peter Cheong, has used a very limited colour palette.
 - a. While there are not many colours used in *Through the Darkening Sea*, there are many shades of each colour. How many shades can you identify?
 - b. Some of these shades may have names you know, for example coral pink and navy blue. Name the shades you already have names for, then make up names for those you don't. Try to use descriptive language; you may like to use words or phrases from the text that reflect how the shade is used. For example, you could name the blue used on the whale bones 'bone blue'.



- c. How does the limited colour palette affect your reaction to and understanding of what is happening in the book? You may like to particularly consider the use of blue from the surface of the water down to the ocean floor.
10. Do you think the text would be as effective if there were no illustrations?
- a. Find a spread where you think the text and illustration work particularly well together. Write a short paragraph explaining how the text and illustration complement (enhance or improve) each other.

About the Author & Illustrator

Claire Saxby writes award-winning fiction, non-fiction and poetry for young people. Her work is published in Australia and internationally. Recent books include *Though the Darkening Sea*, illustrated by Peter Cheong and *Storm*, illustrated by Jess Racklyeft. More information about her work can be found on her website, clairesaxby.com.

Peter is the illustrator of *I'm a Hero Too*, *Nothing Alike* and the Pow Pow Pig and Freddie Spector series. Peter's debut book as an author/illustrator, *Every Night at Midnight*, was voted CBCA Shadow Judging Winner for Picture Book of the Year in 2024. He has since released his second author/illustrated book, *Where We Can Hear the Giants Sing*. Peter is currently working on his debut graphic novel series, *April Ordinary*, *Thief Extraordinary*, the first of which will be out in 2027.

Peter lives in Perth (Whadjuk Country), Western Australia, with his very understanding wife, sons, and less understanding cat.

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