

Sam, Grace and the Shipwreck

Michelle Gillespie with

illustrations by Sonia Martinez

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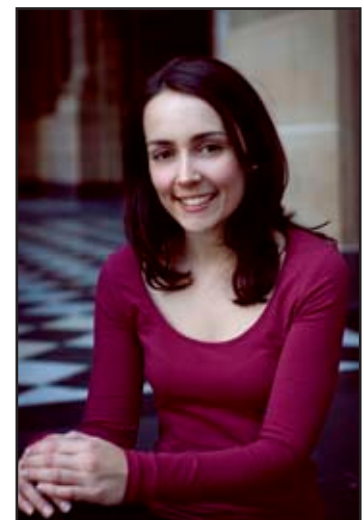
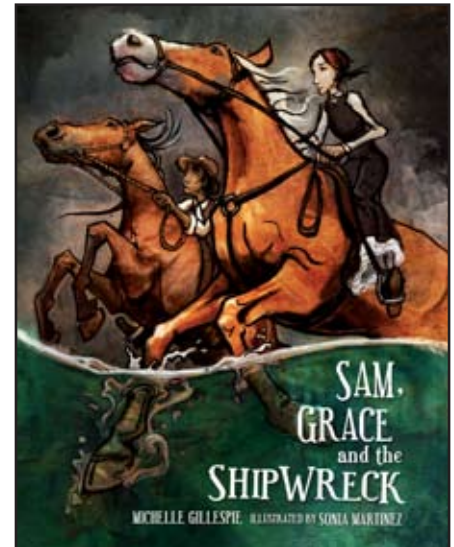
ABOUT THE BOOK

Synopsis

Sam, Grace and the Shipwreck tells the dramatic story of the rescues performed by Grace Bussell and Sam Isaacs following the wrecking of the collier ship *The Georgette* off the south west coast of Western Australia. Built in 1872, *The Georgette* was on its way from Fremantle to Adelaide via Bunbury, Busselton and Albany when it developed a leak. The ship was many kilometres from shore and it was after midnight. Attempts to use a bucket line to bail out the ship proved futile and the ship's fires were extinguished by the water when the pumps failed. At the time there were fifty passengers plus crew on board, as well as a load of jarrah timber. A decision was made to abandon ship, but the first life raft to be launched was destroyed as it was lowered, resulting in the loss of twelve lives. *The Georgette* continued towards shore, eventually running aground at Redgate Calgardup Bay, ten kilometres south west of the Margaret River township and just to the south of Prevelly.

Aboriginal stockman Sam Isaacs saw the ship and its passengers floundering in the surf and rode to nearby Wallcliffe House, where sixteen year old Grace Bussell was helping her mother and sisters baking in the kitchen. Grace joined Sam and together the two rode back to the site of the shipwreck. They rode down the cliffs and into the surf, with apparently little consideration for their own well being. They helped the struggling survivors, and as many as could grabbed hold of the horses and ropes and were pulled to safety on the beach. Sam and Grace toiled for around four hours and eventually, so the records suggest, all the remaining passengers found their way to shore without further loss of life. A plaque located at the site of the rescue states that 'all on board reached the shore in safety and were taken to Wallcliffe House, the home of Grace Bussell, where they were welcomed and given shelter.'

Following the rescue, Sam Isaacs was awarded a Humane Society bronze medal and 100



acres of land. Grace Bussell received a Humane Society Silver Medal and a watch as a recognition of her bravery. The wreck of *The Georgette* remains today in around five metres of water just 90 metres off the shore. The ship's bell is housed in The Augusta Museum in Western Australia. Grace Bussell went on to marry Frederick Drake Brockman and have seven children.

Themes

The story of Grace Bussell and Sam Isaacs allows us as readers to consider the related themes of heroism, bravery and compassion towards other people in times of hardship. The writer explores the true nature of heroism and reminds us that heroes can come in many forms. We discover through the story of *Sam, Grace and the Shipwreck* that in the face of enormous challenge and disaster, some people are able to dig deep within and find the true stuff of heroism. We also learn that the most unlikely people can show bravery towards others and can work together to achieve a common goal. The illustrator transports us back in time to the late 1800's and the pioneering spirit which characterised early Australian settlements, and so allows us to think about the notion of bravery against a backdrop of a harsh and rugged coastal landscape.

Writing Style

The author employs a third person narrative style for *Sam, Grace and the Shipwreck*, and uses frequent dialogue to help us as readers engage more closely with the characters. She captures the rugged coastal landscape and rapidly changing weather through careful use of descriptive phrases throughout the story. Dramatic tension builds towards the climatic rescue in the surf, and this is reflected both in the writing style and in the use of pane by pane illustrations for this section of the book. The writing technique which draws the reader back to the beginning of the story is employed to great effect with the use of a repeated sentence as the last line. This serves to encourage the reader to turn back to the beginning of the story and consider the plot once more, but now in the context of having read the final notes about the background to the shipwreck and having gained a more complete understanding of the characters and their actions.

Author Background

Inspired by historical accounts of the wreck of the *Georgette*, Michelle Gillespie wrote *Sam, Grace and the Shipwreck* when she was just nineteen. Michelle now lives in Canberra where she is a communications professional in the public service.

Illustrator Background

Sonia is a Western Australia based illustrator and graphic designer. She has studied ancient history, fine art and design, and recently graduated from Curtin University with a major in illustration. Her work incorporates many different styles and media, both digital and traditional, but always contains a sense of caprice. *Sam, Grace and the Shipwreck* is Sonia's second picture book.

STUDY NOTES

Discuss and write

The story is set in the late 1800s. The young Grace Bussell lives in a remote homestead with her family. Life as an early pioneering family would have been hard, and Grace would not have known many of the modern comforts that we take for granted. Discuss how Grace's life would have been very different to that of today's young people. Make two lists to compare and contrast life for people today and life as a pioneer. Discuss how technology, infrastructure, modern medicine, education and relationships between cultures have all changed greatly since 1876.

Ask students to write a short expository piece about life on an Australian pioneer homestead.

Ask students to select one word that relates to pioneer life which interests them and create an acrostic poem using the letters of the word to create the first letter of each line of the poem. For example,

'COLD' –

Cannot use central heating to keep warm

Over my bed is a quilt I made myself

Lots of people got sick in winter

Dirt on the floor of our house

Art and illustration

The illustrations in this book are very distinctive, with a soft brown background contrasting with sharply angular and out of proportion faces. Look closely at the style used by the illustrator and discuss why the pictures have been created in this way.

What effect does it give when characters are shown with their faces slightly distorted and out of proportion?

Why has the background to the pages been coloured in pale brown shades?

Have students use a tea bag dipped in water to create their own olden style paper which can then be used for creating a border or background for an illustration of a pioneer homestead.

Ask students to choose one spread from the book and reillustrate it in their own style.

First person writing

Ask students to imagine they are Grace Bussell or Sam Isaacs, writing about their experience on the night following the rescue, or when they receive news of the award from the Humane Society. The writing could take the form of a diary entry or letter.

Research

Work with students to develop individual focus questions about the story of Grace Bussell and Sam Isaacs. Students can learn more about an aspect of the story which interests them, such as:

- The history of *The Georgette* – use sources such as local museums and the Shipwreck Database of the Western Australian Museum
- The journey taken by the ship on her way from Fremantle to her final resting place just south of Prevelly – use sources such as Google Earth or an Australian atlas to locate key places and mark these on a map of the region
- Original source material used for learning about historical events – use sources such as TROVE to locate digital copies of old newspaper articles and information about the wreck of *The Georgette*
- Pioneering women in Australia – use sources such as Picture Australia (National Library of Australia) to find images of Grace Bussell and other early Australian pioneering women, and use the school library to find text information about pioneering women
- Indigenous workers in Australia – use sources such as Picture Australia (National Library of Australia) to find images of Sam Isaacs and other Indigenous Australian's from this time, and use the school library to find text information about Aboriginal Australia
- Other shipwrecks on the Western Australian coastline – use sources such as the Shipwreck Database or a Google search to locate information on shipwrecks, then collate and present this information in a poster or as a table in a Word document

Civics and Citizenship

Discuss the nature of heroes in the context of the actions of Sam and Grace. What does it really mean to be a hero? Ask students if they can think of some examples of more recent examples of heroism shown by people striving to rescue others.

Interpersonal skills

Have students work with a partner to make a 'hero' shield and decorate it with words, images and decorations which show what being a hero means. Students will need to discuss their ideas, agree upon the structure of their shield and then work collaboratively to create their finished piece.

Maths

Use Google Maps or Google Earth to locate key places from the story, such as Fremantle, Bunbury Bussellton, Margaret River, Prevally and Adelaide.

- Make a timeline showing the events of the ship wreck and rescue along with other key events in Australian history.
- Write a short quiz to share with a partner which focuses upon the mathematical language of position in space, used to compare the location of one place in relation to another. For example, students could answer true and false questions such as 'Is Prevally to the north of Margaret River?' (False)

- Calculate the distance from Fremantle to Adelaide (the original journey to be completed by *The Georgette*) if travelling by road using an online tool such as Google Maps or whereis.com and entering a start and finish address for each town (such as a railway station or post office in each town)

Digital skills

Ask students to work individually to design an alternative cover for the book, using a program such as Powerpoint or Word, or by creating a cover by hand and then scanning and saving the image as a digital file.

Students could create their own book about the rescue of the passengers from the ship using Powerpoint and then share their finished books with another member of the class.