

## WHAT COLOUR IS THE SEA?

KATIE STEWART

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YEAR LEVEL: K-3

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Koala has a question for her friends – what colour is the sea? But they all give her different answers, and Koala doesn't know whom to believe. Owl suggests she finds out for herself. Koala sets off for the sea, only to discover that all her friends are right – the sea is no colour and many colours. A beautiful tale of discovery and perception.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katie Stewart is an author and illustrator. Born in the north of England, she came to Australia at the age of nine. She started her working life as an archaeologist and ethnohistorian, went on to teaching and then to being a mother. She later worked in a school library, but her lifelong dream was to be what she is now. She is married to a farmer, has three children and lives north of Northam, where her love of animals means she has a lot of pets and takes lots of nature photos. In her spare time, she tries to play the harp or wanders the countryside with a metal detector amusing the neighbours and occasionally finding an interesting piece of history.

### THEMES

- Australian animals
- The sea
- Perception
- Discovery

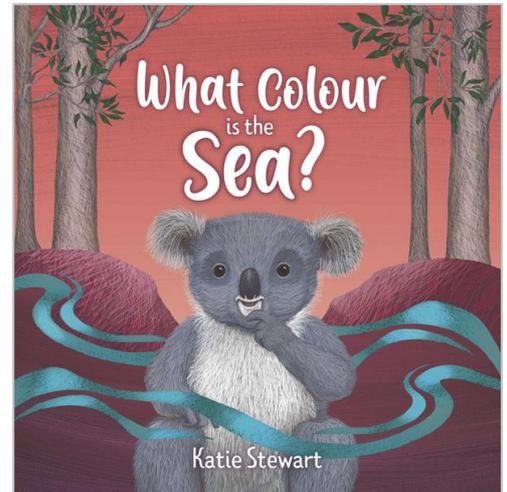
### AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

K-3 English

K-3 Biological Sciences

K-3 Visual Art

K-3 Mathematics



## CLASSROOM IDEAS

### Discussion questions

1. Look closely at the front cover – what do you think the story might be about? Who is the main character? How do you know?
2. Before you start reading, what colour do *you* think the sea is? Turn to a partner and share. Discuss student responses as a class – does everyone agree? Is there more than one answer to this question?
3. How many friends does Koala ask about the sea? Why do you think each has a different answer?
4. What is an ‘open-ended question’? (Hint: a question that encourages students to discover the answer for themselves.) Brainstorm a list of open-ended questions as a class and collect them in a ‘Curiosity Box’. Every Friday, choose one to ponder over the weekend. Children can then share individual discoveries during a ten-minute ‘reflection time’ on Monday mornings.

### Writing and storytelling

1. The author uses many different verbs (action words) to describe the movements of the different animals in the book, e.g. *shuffled*; *hissed*; *stalked*; *scampered*. Create a list. Challenge: can you use each of these verbs in a sentence of your own?
2. What is a simile? (Hint: a phrase using ‘like’ or ‘as’ to compare one thing to another in order to enhance imagery.) E.g. *the sea is blue, like a fairy-wren*; *The sea is as black as the night sky*. Can you complete the similes below? (Challenge: can you come up with some similes of your own?)
  - a. The sky is pink like a ...
  - b. The boy is as tiny as a ...
  - c. The dog is as fast as ...
  - d. His hair was red like a ...
3. Create an acrostic poem based on your favourite animal in the book – include at least one simile!
4. Create popstick puppets of the characters using recycled materials and a variety of geometric, coloured cardboard shapes, felt and cellophane. In pairs, students can then use them to read along with and act out the story.
5. Choose your favourite animal from the story and create an informative poster, pamphlet or PowerPoint presentation with the following information: name, physical characteristics, habitat, diet, life cycle, interesting facts, special adaptations, labelled diagram, conservation status.
6. Choose your favourite character from the story and imagine you can live as this animal for one day – what kinds of adventures will you have? Write an imaginative short story!

### Recount and sequencing

1. Some of the events of the story are mixed up below. Can you put them back in the correct order?
  - a. Koala finds a shell and scoops up some water – it is clear and sparkling.
  - b. Koala asks her friends, ‘What colour is the sea?’
  - c. Koala has found her answer.
  - d. Koala journeys to the sea to observe the water for herself.
  - e. Koala’s friends all give her different answers – she is confused.
  - f. Owl suggests Koala finds out for herself.
  - g. Koala has a question – what colour is the sea?

### Visual art

1. *Visual literacy*: What style has the illustrator used to draw the animals? E.g. realistic, cartoon, abstract? What medium/s has she used? E.g. acrylic, watercolour, pencils, ink, digital? What do you like best about this illustrator’s style? Design your own illustration of an Australian animal (not already included in the book) in the style of Katie Stewart.
2. How does the illustrator weave the ocean theme into each page? (E.g. look closely at the fairy wren’s tail – what do you notice?) Do you like this effect?
3. Look closely at the illustration of the green sea when Koala says, ‘*Kangaroo is right*’. Can you see the shadow of a fern? Are there shadows on any other images of the sea? (Hint: look closely at the blue and silver ocean scenes.) Why do you think the illustrator chose to do this?

4. Use oil pastels to draw the outline of your favourite animal in the story (for best results, use watercolour paper). Next, apply watercolour paint to 'colour in' the animal and the landscape background. What do you notice? Why does the paint fail to cover up the crayon underneath?
5. Create a sculpture of your favourite animal from the story using plasticine, clay or recycled materials.
6. Create a shoebox diorama of your favourite scene from the story.

## Mathematics – counting and basic geometry

1. How many animals can you count on each page? How about in the entire book?
2. Directional language: *up*, *down*, *over* and *through* are all positional words that help Koala navigate her way to the sea. Invite students to draw a map of the story large enough that they can manoeuvre a cut-out of Koala around to emphasise the positional words. This could work with a felt board as well.
3. Ask the students to describe what they see on each page using positional words, e.g. for the front cover 'Koala is *in front* of the trees'; 'The trees are *behind* Koala.'
4. Give the students a sheet with some familiar positional words and have them draw a corresponding picture to represent each word.

## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

### ***Where did you get the idea for What Colour Is the Sea?***

I first thought about the sea being lots of colours, but at the same time no colour, when I was a teenager and living in Albany – that's a long time ago. The solution of how to use that idea in a story evolved later. The version I sent to Fremantle Press was written only months before I sent it.

### ***How did you become a writer and illustrator?***

I always wanted to illustrate and I always enjoyed writing, but for various reasons actually becoming a writer and illustrator proved a very long journey, interrupted wonderfully by other things like getting married and having children. I did little bits along the way, but it wasn't until I read 'The Element' by Sir Ken Robinson that I finally decided to really put in an effort to be traditionally published. So I gave up work and started seriously writing and illustrating. They say it takes a few years to build up recognition and that's how it was. Four years after I left work, I finally had a manuscript accepted.

### ***Why did you choose Koala to be your main character and not one of the other animals?***

Everyone loves koalas. You only have to look at the reaction to koalas being lost in the bushfires over East to see that they hold a special place in the hearts of Australians. I love koalas too, and I thought it would be fun to have an animal that's renowned for sleeping most of the time actually making the effort to go and find something out.

### ***What colour do you think the sea is?***

The colour of the sea in my mind (because there's not a great ocean view from where I live in Northam) depends on whether I'm thinking about being in it, on it or by it. I'm terrified of being in the sea, so the thought of that makes the sea in my mind a dark, ominous blue-black. I'm not fond of being on it either, so it's a very deep, bottomless blue-green when I think of sailing. But in the early morning or evening, I love to walk on the beach, so then it's a lovely calm green or gold, just as Koala discovered.

### ***What's your favourite animal and why?***

I love all animals, but my favourite animal is an owl. I started collecting owl things nearly forty years ago and I have a lovely collection of them now. I love their huge eyes, the way they can twist their heads so far around and the silence of their flight through the dark. That's like magic. There are so many different owls, too, some very regal and some quite comical.

***What would be your advice to any young writers wanting to create a picture book?***

Spend a while thinking about your story before you write it down. Maybe not forty-five years, but long enough to have it fairly well sorted in your mind. Then, when you've written it, leave it alone for a while and go back to it when you've forgotten what you wrote. That way, you can look at it with a fresh eye and fix anything that doesn't seem right. Most importantly, write the story that you want to write, not what you think will please the most people. That way it will be all your own.

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