



Seal Song

Andrea Spalding

illustrated by Pascal Milelli

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The Story

Finn's father is a fisherman. When each day's work is done, the boy slips away from the cannery sheds to a secret cove where the seals gather. He loves to swim with them. One day he rescues a young seal that has become entangled in some netting. The seal is weak from her struggle with the net, so he pushes her up onto the beach. He catches some fish and feeds her until she regains the strength to return to the water. Finn wishes that this friend could live on the land.

The following afternoon a strange young girl appears on the docks. The fisher folk believe that she is a shape shifter—a selkie, a magical seal. Finn ignores the whispers and enjoys playing with his new friend, Sheila. During the day they mend nets, gather firewood and play together, but the young girl never approaches the ocean. At dusk she disappears into the shadows.

One day as Finn and Sheila are heading into the forest to gather mushrooms, Finn looks back and sees that the fish are jumping. Despite Sheila's plea to stay on the shore, he jumps into his skiff and rows out into the bay, right into a storm.

Sheila runs to the wharf and alerts the fishermen of Finn's plight. Then she runs to the water's edge. As she enters the waves her shape changes—she is a young seal swimming. Finn is saved by Sheila, who bids him farewell and returns once more to the ocean.

During the winter Finn helps his father to build a new boat. On each fishing trip after that they toss a salmon to the seal who swims beside them.

About the Author

Andrea Spalding is a prolific writer for children. Born in Manchester, England, she trained as a teacher. Andrea immigrated with her husband to Canada in 1967. Canadian life proved to be rich and varied. Curiosity about her chosen country compelled Andrea to listen to other Canadian immigrants who shared tales that

later became her folktale book, *A World of Stories*. Andrea's first children's book, *The Most Beautiful Kite in the World*, was selected as a Canadian Children's Book Centre's "Our Choice." She has garnered awards and nominations ever since. Andrea gives school presentations across the country, and also teaches writing workshops and in-service presentations to teachers, librarians and any one interested in her passion for Children's Literature.

About the Illustrator

Pascal Milelli graduated from the Alberta College of Art and Design. His first picturebook was the award-winning *Rainbow Bay* (Raincoast), followed by *The Art Room* (Groundwood), which was awarded the Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Award for Illustration. His work has also been recognized by The Society of Illustrators and has appeared in *Communication Arts* and *Applied Arts* magazines. Pascal lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Lesson: Making Inferences

(This lesson was created by Brenda Boreham for the "World Oceans Day—June 8" article in the March /April 2013 edition of *Canadian Teacher Magazine*.)

Readers infer when they take what they know about a story and then fill in the information that was not included. When talking to students about inferring, it is important to emphasize that:

- Inferring helps the reader to better understand the story.
- Readers need to look for clues in the pictures and the text, as well as rely on their own background knowledge to fill in what is not written on the page.
- Some authors deliberately write very little but leave the reader clues to think about.

Before Reading: Step 1

1. Mark the following pictures in the book with sticky notes for easy reference:
 - Picture #1: Finn hiding behind a barrel on the cannery wharf
 - Picture #2: Sheila watching from the shore as Finn goes swimming
 - Picture #3: Sheila slipping into the ocean and transforming into a seal
 - Picture #4: Finn feeding a salmon to a seal that is swimming beside the boat
2. Explain to the class what inferring is (something that good readers do to understand what the author is saying even if it is not written in the text).
3. Explain that inferring requires the reader to think about the clues that the author has left behind in the text and in the pictures.
4. Explain that readers can also use their own background knowledge to help fill in the missing information.
5. Practice inferring: use body language and your facial expression to display an emotion. Have the class guess what the emotion is. Have them justify their answers ("I think that...because...").

6. Repeat the above activity using students to model an emotion.
7. Discuss, as a class, what clues the models gave you that helped you to make inferences.

Before Reading: Step 2

Picture #1

1. Show Picture #1 to the class (enlarged on an overhead or an ELMO would work well).
2. Model inferring with the students. Describe some of the details that you can see in the picture and infer from them. Examples below:
 - Finn's father looks like he is calling out loud. I think maybe he is trying to find Finn.
 - There is a box of salmon on the wharf. I think Finn's father is going to sell the fish to the cannery.
3. Continue modeling until all the details have been discussed

Picture #2

1. Show Picture #2 to the class.
2. Model inferring with the students. Describe only one of the details that you see in this picture and make an inference. Example below:
 - A girl is standing on the shore watching Finn swim. It seems strange that he is swimming all by himself. I think the girl has been told not to go in the water.
3. Have some of the students help you with the modeling by volunteering to tell you what they can see in the picture and what they can infer from that detail.
4. Continue until all the details are covered in the discussion.

Picture #3

1. Show Picture #3 to the class.
2. Model inferring with the students. Describe one of the details you see in the picture. Example below:
 - The artist has drawn the girl diving into the water and then her body changes. I think maybe she is turning into a seal.
3. Have each student talk to one partner. Have them discuss the other details in the picture and make inferences from those details.
4. Have the students report out to the larger group. Have them justify their thinking (I think...because...).

Picture #4

Repeat the modeling and inferring lesson from Picture #3 with the last picture.

Before Reading: Step 3

1. Have each student talk to a partner and generate a list of facts that they now have about the story. Have them report their facts to the larger group. Record the list on the chalkboard.
2. Have each student talk to a partner and generate a list of questions that they have about the story. Have each student report one question to their group. Record the questions on the chalkboard.

During Reading

Read the story to the class. Pause to comment and look at the pictures where needed.

After Reading

Go through the list of questions to see if they have been answered. Ask: Was the answer to this question on the page or did you infer it?

Further Activities or Discussion Topics***Selkie Stories***

Stories of selkie seals are found in Scottish, Irish and Icelandic folklore. They are also the subject of story telling on the east and west coasts of Canada. It is thought that the Shetland and Orkney Islands are the birthplace of the seal legends. The word “selkie” is derived from the Old English word *seolh* (seal).

Find a traditional selkie story to read to the class. Compare it with *Seal Song*. How are they similar? What has the author or illustrator changed? Which do students prefer? Ask students to think of other stories that they have heard that involve people shifting into animals and vice versa.

Commercial Fishing

Finn and his family live in a fishing community. Discuss how fish get from Finn's boat to your kitchen. Ask students to think of how fishing to feed a family would be different than fishing to stock a grocery store.