One White Dolphin
By Gill Lewis

• Sustainability • Natural world • Family
• Life & death • Bullying • Friendship & kindness

Synopsis

Kara comes from a Cornish town of cobbled streets and alleyways, where the smell of chips and beer mingle above the hum of construction and tourist traffic. In a new estate beyond the whitewashed cottages of the harbour, we find Kara living with her father and extended family in the shadow of her mother’s disappearance. She mysteriously vanished over a year ago to take part in a dolphin-saving expedition in the South Pacific. Since then Kara’s father has been struggling under mounting debts. To her dismay, he reluctantly decides to sell Moana, the modest sailboat they lovingly restored. Aboard Moana is where Kara feels most at peace; the sea spray in her face, bouncing over the waves. It seems that her whole world is falling apart.

If this wasn’t enough, Kara is also dealt her fair share of schoolyard bullying; enter the Evans family. Jake and Ethan push Kara to breaking point just pages into the novel, and we catch a glimpse of the fiery-tempered girl beneath. Jake’s father, Dougie Evans, owner of a local fishing fleet, plans to dredge Kara’s beloved reef as soon as the temporary ban is lifted. He blames Kara’s family for his eldest son’s tragic death. Dougie’s greed and desire for revenge feed the whole family’s determination to destroy the marine environment forever. However, they underestimate Kara. She may be young but she is clearly her mother’s daughter, and with every dash she makes away from the cramped cottage to the sea spray of the clifftops, Kara grows in energy and confidence.

As she stares out to sea, Kara becomes convinced she has glimpsed an albino dolphin and her calf, making the image of a lonely girl without a mother all the more poignant in contrast. Kara believes the white dolphins are a sign. She refuses to accept the possibility that a mother would ever leave her child.

Kara finds an unexpected friend in Felix, a new boy to the school. Pragmatic and fearless, he doesn’t let a physical disability stop him from learning to sail, or diving from Moana’s bow to swim amongst the kelp and cuttlefish. Felix is the perfect companion to stand by Kara in her crusade to save the reef, and to help her come to terms with the fact her mother may never return home.

When the horrifying news breaks that the albino dolphin has washed ashore after being caught in old nets, the whole town goes into a frenzy. But it is of course Kara, after naming this dolphin, who fights the hardest to save Angel when everyone else gives up. She believes that Angel’s mother will surely return to her calf.

This is where the beauty of the novel lies, with a young girl drawing her strength from nature and using it to fight for the protection of the reef and all the creatures whose survival depends upon it.

This is great book to instil strong environmental values and to inspire children to believe that, like Kara, they really do have the power to change the world.
About the Author

Gill Lewis is a former veterinarian who lives in the UK. From a young age, Gill, like Kara, was drawn to adventurous pursuits: ‘When I was young I knew I wanted to do something with animals. I liked the idea of being an explorer journeying into leech-infested jungles or crossing the high Arctic in a dog sledge in search of polar bears. If I couldn’t be an explorer, I wanted to be a vet or a zookeeper’.

Gill’s passion for animals and the natural world shines through each page of One White Dolphin, as it does in her other novels Moon Bear, Sky Hawk and her debut novel, Wild Wings.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

LOST LIVELIHOOD?

On p 235, Dougie Evans almost convinces the town to support scallop dredging on their coastline:

“This lovely town of ours isn’t just for sandcastles and holidays. We’ve been fishing in this port for hundreds of years. It’s our livelihood. When tourists go home, we’ve still got to make a living.”

Share with your class this link to an article in The Telegraph in the UK, written in 2008.

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/earthcomment/charlesclover/3344761/Scallop-dredging-ban-for-Lyme-Bay.html

In this article, James Portus, secretary of the South West Inshore Fishermen’s Association, said:

“I’m very disappointed, to put it mildly. Dozens of people’s livelihoods along the south coast are being sacrificed on the altar of the marine environment which we were perfectly capable of protecting through our agreement. We don’t ban all the cars from the road just because one or two break the speed limit.

“We were even prepared to legislate to enforce our agreement. As it is, they haven’t just closed the reefs, which are a much smaller area, they have closed a vast area. They have used a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

“It is not the way government ought to work, it should pay attention to the economic and social costs as well as to the marine environment. There has got to be a better way of managing the sea than this.”

Ask your students:

• Do you support the views of the fishermen?
• Do you feel sorry for them? Can you think of a compromise?
• To research sustainable solutions for the fishing industry.

CALL FOR ACTION

Kara’s mother died protecting what she believed in.

Ask your students:

• Do you think she was right to take part in dangerous adventures, leaving her family behind in order to save the dolphins?

Lots of men and women all over the world have taken part in similar activities and missions, many of which are even more dangerous. Some, like Kara’s mother, never come back.

Ask your students:

• How far is too far?

Share the Greenpeace Australia website, paying particular attention to this blog ‘Protecting The Great Barrier Reef’:


Ask your students:

• What sort of activities can you think of that everyday Australians could take part in to support this cause?

Activities and Blackline Masters

ACTIVITY 1: SAVE THE REEF

Arrange for your class to do some research on the causes or factors that endanger the marine environments here in Australia. Use the research template BLM and start with the Crown of Thorns Starfish and the reasons behind the outbreak.


The children share their research and go on to write local newspaper report—a Save the Reef article.

a. BLM-Research template

b. BLM-Newspaper article

ACTIVITY 2: OCEAN SYMPHONY

In this book the mood of the ocean changes in every chapter, almost like the parts of a song. It is the perfect way to have some fun in class, allowing children’s imaginations to run wild by bringing literacy and music together.

Read the passages below to your class. Record feelings and images on the BLM Music Mood Sheet when planning the compositions.

**Peace and wonder:**

Page 28: “I let go of the shrouds and dive into the water, down into the blue brightness shot with sunlight. I turn and watch a trail of silver bubbles spiral upward”.

Page 123: “Shafts of sunlight filter through the water, reaching into the deep, deep blue... purple jewel anemones line the narrow crevices. Small silver eels flit between the rippling strands of seaweed. I spread my arms and soar above this world”.

**Magical and dreamlike:**

Pages 203, 204: “Bright stars swirl though the water. Something is swimming with me, by my side. A dolphin... a trail of spinning stars spiral from her fins and tail flukes... She dives under again, leaving a tumbling trail of phosphorescent swirls of light. I dive too, and watch the bright stars trail from my fingertips.”

**Tumultuous:**

Page 319: “The waves roll in, one after another, massive mountains of moving water, spray flying from the tops like windblown snow.”

Page 324: “A foaming wall of surf surges between the harbor walls.”

Ask your students to go off in groups to practise and bring the mood of the ocean alive with their instruments. Afterwards they could perform to the rest of the class and constructively review each group’s performance on the provided BLM.

c. BLM-Music Mood sheet 🎶
d. BLM-Review of performance 🎵