Island of the Blue Dolphins
by Scott O’Dell

Everything You Need for Successful Literature Circles That Get Kids Thinking, Talking, Writing—and Loving Literature

- Easy and Effective Management Tips to Keep Kids on Track
- Author Biography
- Key Reading Comprehension Strategies
- Reproducible Writing Prompts and Discussion Questions
- Group Project Ideas for All Learners
Literature Circle Guide: Island of the Blue Dolphins

by Virginia Dooley
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## To the Teacher

As a teacher, you naturally want to instill in your students the habits of confident, critical, independent, and lifelong readers. You hope that even when students are not in school they will seek out books on their own, think about and question what they are reading, and share those ideas with friends. An excellent way to further this goal is by using literature circles in your classroom.

In a literature circle, students select a book to read as a group. They think and write about it on their own in a literature response journal and then discuss it together. Both journals and discussions enable students to respond to a book and develop their insights into it. They also learn to identify themes and issues, analyze vocabulary, recognize writing techniques, and share ideas with each other—all of which are necessary to meet state and national standards.

This guide provides the support materials for using literature circles with *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O’Dell. The reading strategies, discussion questions, projects, and enrichment readings will also support a whole class reading of this text or can be given to enhance the experience of an individual student reading the book as part of a reading workshop.

### Literature Circles

A literature circle consists of several students (usually three to five) who agree to read a book together and share their observations, questions, and interpretations. Groups may be organized by reading level or choice of book. Often these groups read more than one book together because, as students become more comfortable talking with one another, their observations and insights deepen.

When planning to use literature circles in your classroom, it can be helpful to do the following:

- Allow three or four weeks for students to read each book. Each of Scholastic’s *Literature Circle Guides* has the same number of sections as well as enrichment activities and projects. Even if students are reading different books in the *Literature Circle Guide* series, they can be scheduled to finish at the same time.
- Create a daily routine so students can focus on journal writing and discussions.
- Decide whether students will be reading books in class or for homework. If students do all their reading for homework, then allot class time for sharing journals and discussions. You can also alternate silent reading and writing days in the classroom with discussion groups.

### Read More About Literature Circles

- *Getting the Most from Literature Groups* by Penny Strube (Scholastic Professional Books, 1996)
- *Literature Circles* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse Publishers, 1994)
Using the *Literature Circle Guides* in Your Classroom

Each guide contains the following sections:
- background information about the author and book
- enrichment readings relevant to the book
- Literature Response Journal reproducibles
- Group Discussion reproducibles
- Individual and group projects
- Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet

**Background Information and Enrichment Readings**

The background information about the author and the book and the enrichment readings are designed to offer information that will enhance students’ understanding of the book. You may choose to assign and discuss these sections before, during, or after the reading of the book. Because each enrichment concludes with questions that invite students to connect it to the book, you can use this section to inspire them to think and record their thoughts in the literature response journal.

**Literature Response Journal Reproducibles**

Although these reproducibles are designed for individual students, they should also be used to stimulate and support discussions in literature circles. Each page begins with a reading strategy and follows with several journal topics. At the bottom of the page, students select a type of response (prediction, question, observation, or connection) for free-choice writing in their response journals.

**Reading Strategies**

Since the goal of the literature circle is to empower lifelong readers, a different reading strategy is introduced in each section. Not only does the reading strategy allow students to understand this particular book better, it also instills a habit of mind that will continue to be useful when they read other books. A question from the Literature Response Journal or the Group Discussion page is always tied to the reading strategy.

If everyone in class is reading the same book, you may present the reading strategy as a mini-lesson to the entire class. For literature circles, however, the group of students can read over and discuss the strategy together at the start of class and then experiment with the strategy as they read silently for the rest of the period. You may want to allow time at the end of class so the group can talk about what they noticed as they read. As an alternative, the literature circle can review the reading strategy for the next section after they have completed their discussion. That night, students can try out the reading strategy as they read on their own so they will be ready for the next day’s literature circle discussion.

**Literature Response Journal Topics**

A literature response journal allows a reader to “converse” with a book. Students write questions, point out things they notice about the story, recall personal experiences, and make connections to other texts in their journals. In other words, they are using writing to explore what they think about the book. See page 7 for tips on how to help students set up their literature response journals.

1. The questions for the literature response journals have no right or wrong answers but are designed to help students look beneath the surface of the plot and develop a richer connection to the story and its characters.

2. Students can write in their literature response journals as soon as they have finished a reading assignment. Again, you may choose to have students do this for homework or make time during class.

3. The literature response journals are an excellent tool for students to use in their literature circles. They can highlight ideas and thoughts in their journals that they want to share with the group.

4. When you evaluate students’ journals, consider whether they have completed all the assignments and have responded in depth and thoughtfully. You may want to check each day to make sure students are keeping up with the assignments. You can read and respond to the journals at a halfway point (after five entries) and again at the end. Some teachers suggest that students pick out their five best entries for a grade.


**Group Discussion Reproducibles**

These reproducibles are designed for use in literature circles. Each page begins with a series of discussion questions for the group to consider. A mini-lesson on an aspect of the writer’s craft follows the discussion questions. See page 8 for tips on how to model good discussions for students.

- **Literature Discussion Questions:** In a literature discussion, students experience a book from different points of view. Each reader brings her or his own unique observations, questions, and associations to the text. When students share their different reading experiences, they often come to a wider and deeper understanding than they would have reached on their own.

  The discussion is not an exercise in finding the right answers nor is it a debate. Its goal is to explore the many possible meanings of a book. Be sure to allow enough time for these conversations to move beyond easy answers—try to schedule 25–35 minutes for each one. In addition, there are important guidelines to ensure that everyone’s voice is heard.

1. Let students know that participation in the literature discussion is an important part of their grade. You may choose to watch one discussion and grade it. (You can use the Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet on page 33.)

2. Encourage students to evaluate their own performance in discussions using the Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet. They can assess not only their own level of involvement but also how the group itself has functioned.

3. Help students learn how to talk to one another effectively. After a discussion, help them process what worked and what didn’t. Videotape discussions if possible, and then evaluate them together. Let one literature circle watch another and provide feedback to it.

4. It can be helpful to have a facilitator for each discussion. The facilitator can keep students from interrupting each other, help the conversation get back on track when it digresses, and encourage shyer members to contribute. At the end of each discussion, the facilitator can summarize everyone’s contributions and suggest areas for improvement.

5. Designate other roles for group members. For instance, a recorder can take notes and/or list questions for further discussion. A summarizer can open each literature circle meeting by summarizing the chapter(s) the group has just read. Encourage students to rotate these roles, as well as that of the facilitator.

- **The Writer’s Craft:** This section encourages students to look at the writer’s most important tool—words. It points out new vocabulary, writing techniques, and uses of language. One or two questions invite students to think more deeply about the book and writing in general. These questions can either become part of the literature circle discussion or be written about in students’ journals.

**Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet**

Both you and your students will benefit from completing these evaluation sheets. You can use them to assess student performance, and as mentioned earlier, students can evaluate their own individual performances, as well as their group’s performance. The Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet appears on page 33.
Setting Up Literature Response Journals

Although some students may already keep literature response journals, others may not know how to begin. To discourage students from merely writing elaborate plot summaries and to encourage them to use their journals in a meaningful way, help them focus their responses around the following elements: predictions, observations, questions, and connections. Have students take time after each assigned section to think about and record their responses in their journals. Sample responses appear below.

◆ Predictions: Before students read the book, have them study the cover and the jacket copy. Ask if anyone has read any other books by Scott O’Dell. To begin their literature response journals, tell students to jot down their impressions about the book. As they read, students will continue to make predictions about what a character might do or how the plot might turn. After finishing the book, they can reassess their initial predictions. Good readers understand that they must constantly activate prior knowledge before, during, and after they read. They adjust their expectations and predictions; a book that is completely predictable is not likely to capture anyone’s interest. A student about to read Island of the Blue Dolphins might write the following:

I think this book is about a girl who lives alone on an island in the Pacific Ocean. Dolphins live in the ocean around the island. I wonder how she ended up alone.

◆ Observations: This activity takes place immediately after reading begins. In a literature response journal, the reader recalls fresh impressions about the characters, setting, and events. Most readers mention details that stand out for them even if they are not sure what their importance is. For example, a reader might list phrases that describe how a character looks or the feeling a setting evokes. Many readers note certain words, phrases, or passages in a book. Others note the style of an author’s writing or the voice in which the story is told. A student just starting to read Island of the Blue Dolphins might write the following:

Karana makes lots of comparisons to animals and other things in nature. When she describes the ship that comes to her island, she says, “. . . it seemed like a small shell afloat on the sea.” She describes her brother as being “as quick as a cricket.”

◆ Questions: Point out that good readers don’t necessarily understand everything they read. To clarify their uncertainty, they ask questions. Encourage students to identify passages that confuse or trouble them and emphasize that they shouldn’t take anything for granted. Share the following student example:

Why hasn’t Karana ever seen a ship before? She lives on an island in the middle of the ocean. And when does this story take place?

◆ Connections: Remind students that one story often leads to another. When one friend tells a story, the other friend is often inspired to tell one, too. The same thing happens when someone reads a book. A character reminds the reader of a relative, or a situation is similar to something that happened to him or her. Sometimes a book makes a reader recall other books or movies. These connections can be helpful in revealing some of the deeper meanings or patterns of a book. The following is an example of a student connection:

Ramo reminds me of my little brother who is always so curious, always poking his nose into things he shouldn’t. Once, at my grandmother’s house, he got too close to a skunk in her backyard. The skunk finally sprayed him. Boy did he smell!

Karana reminds me of myself. I always have to be responsible for my younger brother and sister.
The Good Discussion

In a good literature discussion, students are always learning from one another. They listen to one another and respond to what their peers have to say. They share their ideas, questions, and observations. Everyone feels comfortable about talking, and no one interrupts or puts down what anyone else says. Students leave a good literature discussion with a new understanding of the book—and sometimes with new questions about it. They almost always feel more engaged by what they have read.

◆ Modeling a Good Discussion: In this era of combative and confessional TV talk shows, students often don’t have any idea of what it means to talk productively and creatively together. You can help them have a better idea of what a good literature discussion is if you let them experience one. Select a thought-provoking short story or poem for students to read, and then choose a small group to model a discussion of the work for the class.

Explain to participating students that the objective of the discussion is to explore the text thoroughly and learn from each other. Emphasize that it takes time to learn how to have a good discussion, and that the first discussion may not achieve everything they hope it will. Duplicate a copy of the Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet for each student. Go over the helpful and unhelpful contributions shown on the sheet. Tell them to fill out the sheets as they watch the model discussion. Then have the group of students hold its discussion while the rest of the class observes. Try not to interrupt or control the discussion, and remind the student audience not to participate. It’s okay if the discussion falters, as this is a learning experience.

Allow 15-20 minutes for the discussion. When it is finished, ask each student in the group to reflect out loud about what worked and what didn’t. Then have the students who observed share their impressions. What kinds of comments were helpful? How could the group have talked to each other more productively?

You may want to let another group experiment with a discussion so students can try out what they learned from the first one.

◆ Assessing Discussions: The following tips will help students monitor how well their group is functioning:

1. One person should keep track of all behaviors by each group member, both helpful and unhelpful, during the discussion.
2. At the end of the discussion, each individual should think about how he or she did. How many helpful and unhelpful checks did he or she receive?
3. The group should look at the Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet and assess its performance as a whole. Were most of the behaviors helpful? Were any behaviors unhelpful? How could the group improve?

In good discussions, you will often hear students say the following:

“I was wondering if anyone knew . . .”
“I see what you are saying. That reminds me of something that happened earlier in the book.”
“What do you think?”
“Did anyone notice on page 57 that . . .”
“I disagree with you because . . .”
“I agree with you because . . .”
“This reminds me so much of when . . .”
“Do you think this could mean . . .”
“I’m not sure I understand what you’re saying. Could you explain it a little more to me?”
“That reminds me of what you were saying yesterday about . . .”
“I just don’t understand this.”
“I love the part that says . . .”
“Here, let me read this paragraph. It’s an example of what I’m talking about.”
About *Island of the Blue Dolphins*

Scott O’Dell was inspired to write *Island of the Blue Dolphins* after coming across a story about a woman who had lived alone on an island for 20 years. He learned about her while doing research for an informal history of California. The woman had been stranded on San Nicolas Island, one of the Channel Islands about 20 miles off the coast of southern California. O’Dell also wrote the book because he was angered by hunters who thoughtlessly slaughter wildlife. His love of animals and nature comes across very clearly in his book.

The *Chicago Tribune* in its review of the book said, “*Island of the Blue Dolphins* has the timeless, enduring quality of a classic.” It truly has become a classic. O’Dell’s depiction of a strong young woman’s survival has been capturing the imaginations of readers for more than 40 years.

About the Author:

**Scott O’Dell**

Scott O’Dell was born in Los Angeles, California, on May 23, 1898. One of his first jobs was as a cameraman in Hollywood’s growing film industry. He also worked as a newspaperman and a book reviewer. O’Dell never intended to be a children’s book author. In fact, he had been writing adult novels for more than 25 years before he wrote a book for children. That first book was *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, and to O’Dell’s surprise, it won the Newbery Medal.

About writing, O’Dell once said, “Writing is hard, harder than digging a ditch, and it requires a lot of patience.” After *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, O’Dell went on to write 26 more books for children and has been the recipient of numerous awards including three Newbery Honors and a Parent’s Choice Award.
Sea otters are only found in the Pacific Ocean, although their relatives, river otters, are found throughout the world. Sea otters live along rocky shorelines and in sheltered coves. These amazing mammals are the largest members of the weasel family. An adult male can grow to 60 inches in length and weigh from 45 to 65 pounds.

Fantastic swimmers, sea otters spend almost their entire lives in the sea. They rarely venture onto land, and when they do, they move quite clumsily. The otters’ streamlined bodies are perfectly suited to swimming and diving. Dense, two-layered fur insulates and waterproofs them. An otter has over one million hairs per square inch on its back. This means they have more hairs per square inch than a person has on his or her head! This dense fur also helps keep sea otters warm by trapping air in the underfur. The air is an efficient insulator. In fact, it’s a better insulator than fat or blubber. The otter’s paddle-shaped, webbed feet and long muscular tail enable it to be a powerful swimmer. They can dive to depths of up to 180 feet. Otters have been known to stay under water for five minutes, but most dives last between 30 and 90 seconds.

Groups of sea otters are called rafts. These rafts are usually found living among large kelp beds where food is plentiful. A sea otter eats about 30% of its body weight each day. Its extremely sensitive whiskers help it find food like small crabs or snails hiding in the kelp or in dark crevices between rocks. Their diet also includes clams, mussels, urchins, and abalone.

Most sea otters give birth to just one pup. In the waters off the southern California coast, females usually give birth in the winter from around January to March. Mothers are very protective of their young and care for them for at least six months.

The rich feeding grounds along the Pacific coast were home to several hundred thousand sea otters in the mid-1700s. Relentless hunting beginning in the late 1700s reduced their numbers to just a few hundred by the early 1900s. Laws were passed in the United States and treaties were signed among countries to protect the sea otter. By 1995, scientists estimate that their population had grown to 2,500.

What else have you learned about sea otters from reading Island of the Blue Dolphins? How do you think this book might change people’s minds about hunting animals like the otter?
Enrichment:
The Chumash

The inhabitants of San Nicolas Island and the other Channel Islands off the coast of southern California were called the Chumash. These Indians lived all along the California coast, from present-day Malibu to Monterey Bay.

At the time when the Spanish began establishing missions in California, historians estimate that between 10,000 and 20,000 Chumash were living in this region. With the arrival of Europeans in California, diseases were introduced that had a devastating effect on the Chumash. By 1880, only 300 Chumash remained.

The Chumash were hunters and gatherers. They didn't raise any crops. For most Chumash, acorns and seeds were important parts of their diet. Acorns were ground up to make a kind of flour. The flour was boiled with water to make soup. The Chumash ate this soup with every meal. As you can imagine, the sea played a huge role in their lives. A major part of their diet was shellfish, fish, and other sea animals.

All the tools the Chumash used were made from stone, shell, bone, wood, or plants. They had no access to metal. The Chumash were superb craftspeople who made beautiful baskets, wooden bowls, and swift-moving boats called tomols. A tomol was a canoe made from either driftwood or redwood. They were about 30 feet long and could hold about 10 people. To make a tomol, the Chumash used several planks glued together with yop, a melted mixture of pine pitch and hardened asphalt. They also fastened the planks together by making holes on each side of the glued seam and tying the boards together with string made from plant fibers. The holes were filled with more hot yop. The Chumash kept their tomols in a moist place in the shade until they were ready to go out to sea. This prevented the wood from drying out.

A Chumash house, called an ap, was round. It was constructed on a framework of poles and covered with grasses. Some houses may have been 30 feet or more in diameter and were shared by several families.

Each Chumash village had a special area where games were played. One popular game was played by all the men and women of one village against another village. It was called tikaawich or shinny. Each team had facing goal posts, and players held shinny sticks, which were similar to hockey sticks. Each team tried to hit a small wooden ball through its opponent's goal post by striking the ball with great force.

Scott O'Dell doesn't specifically say Karana was a Chumash Indian. However, there are similarities in the lifestyles of the Chumash and Karana's tribe. What similarities do you notice? What are some differences? What else would you like to know about the Chumash?
Enrichment: Wild Dogs

What is a wild dog like? How do you tame a wild dog? To understand wild, or feral, dogs it is helpful to look at the behavior of wolves. Dogs are closely related to wolves, and they share similar characteristics. Both wag their tails as a sign of contentment; they put their tails between their legs when they are afraid; and they curl their lips and growl when angry. Of course, dogs differ from wolves because they’ve learned to cooperate with people to the benefit of both of them. The dog provides a service, such as herding cows or sheep or hunting or simply being a companion to humans; humans provide the dog with food.

Wolves are social animals that live in packs. One wolf is the leader of the pack. The dog, through thousands of years of breeding, has learned to see human society as its “pack,” and its master as the leader of the pack. When dogs are abandoned by humans, like the dogs left on Karana’s island, they will instinctively form packs. One member of the pack will become the leader.

Forming a pack makes it easier for them to hunt for food.

A wild dog can be tamed, or domesticated, if it understands the human will help it survive. Two elements are important when training a dog: reward and punishment. The first may consist of a gentle hug or pat, an affectionate word, or food. The punishment may be speaking to the dog in a severe tone of voice. The fundamental rule for training a dog is that the punishment must be given immediately after the mistake takes place. One should never punish a dog a long time after the misdeed because it will not understand the reason for the punishment.

Dogs adapt more easily than any other animal to living with humans; they become used to the presence of people and learn to obey. Unlike other animals that can be tamed like horses, reindeer, or elephants, the dog can be domesticated without being won over by force. This results in affectionate and intelligent cooperation between dogs and humans.

How did Karana benefit from her relationship with Rontu and Rontu-Aru? How did the dogs benefit?
Island of the Blue Dolphins
Before Reading the Book

Reading Strategy:
Background Knowledge

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be stranded on a deserted island? Having to survive by your own wits is a popular theme in books, movies, and now, television shows. What do you think your biggest concerns would be if you had to survive on your own? What would you do to try to survive? What other books have you read that tell about people trying to survive?

Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.

1. If you were stranded alone on an island and could have three things with you, what would you choose, and why?

2. Karana has no contact with people for a long time. Have you ever been alone for any length of time? How does it feel? What did you do?

3. Karana is deeply connected to her island—not only does she know all the island’s plants and animals, she also understands how they can be used. She eventually befriends a wild dog. Write about a pet you’ve had or wish you had. Why is or would your pet be important to you?

B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections about the book? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.

☐ Prediction ☐ Question ☐ Observation ☐ Connection
Island of the Blue Dolphins

Before Reading the Book

For Your Discussion Group

• If you were stranded on a deserted island for several months, what would you miss the most? Explain your choices.

• People stranded on islands are often faced with a difficult choice: Should they wait to be rescued—which might take a long time or never happen—or should they attempt to leave, not knowing if they’ll make it safely to an inhabited place? What would you do if you were faced with this choice? Discuss your answers.

• What personality characteristics do you think a person who survives alone on a deserted island should have? What personality characteristics do you think would make it difficult for a person to survive such a situation?

TIP
When you are brainstorming, remember that the goal is to collect as many different ideas as possible without commenting on them. Everybody’s ideas should be included.
Island of the Blue Dolphins
Chapters 1–5

Reading Strategy: Point of View

The very first line of Island of the Blue Dolphins makes it clear that the story is an example of first-person narration. The story begins, “I remember the day the Aleut ship came to our island.” The main character, Karana, is telling her own story. Words such as I, me, and my clue the reader that this story is told from a first-person point of view. Try rewriting the first paragraph from a different point of view.

Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.

1. Why do you think the author chose to tell this story from Karana’s point of view?

2. How would you describe Karana? How is she different from Ramo?

3. The men and women on Karana’s island have different jobs. Do you think the work on the island is distributed fairly? How would you feel if you were prohibited from doing certain jobs because of your gender?

B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.

☐ Prediction  ☐ Question  ☐ Observation  ☐ Connection
Island of the Blue Dolphins
Chapters 1–5

For Your Discussion Group

Karana is a very capable twelve year old. She is responsible for watching Ramo and gathering food for the tribe. Do you think she has too many responsibilities? How do her responsibilities compare to yours?

Karana’s father told the captain of the Aleuts his secret name. Why do you think he did so? If you had a secret name, what would it be?

Kimki decides to travel away from the island—alone. How would you feel about traveling alone? Do you think Kimki made the right decision? What do you predict will happen to him?

Writer’s Craft: Metaphors

A metaphor is a comparison of two things that are actually quite different. A metaphor differs from a simile in that the comparison does not include the words like or as. Think about the following metaphors that Scott O’Dell uses in this story:

“The sea is smooth,” Ramo said. “It is a flat stone without any scratches.”

“Then it [the ship] grew larger and was a gull with folded wings.”

What metaphor would you use to describe the sea? As you continue to read, notice O’Dell’s use of metaphor. Notice how they make his writing more vivid. Try using metaphors in your own writing.
**Island of the Blue Dolphins**  
**Chapters 6–8**

**Reading Strategy: Making Predictions**

A good story makes readers wonder what will happen next. Based on what they learn about the characters and situations, they are able to make predictions about how the story might unfold. As good readers go deeper into a book, they adjust and change their predictions and make new ones. Think about Kimki’s departure from the island. Do you predict his journey will be successful? Explain what evidence in the book or personal knowledge led you to this prediction.

**Writing in Your Literature Response Journal**

**A.** Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.

1. What do you predict will happen to Karana?

2. Karana makes a very difficult choice when she jumps off the boat to return to the island for Ramo. What do her actions tell you about her character?

3. Why do you think Karana isn't angry with Ramo when she reaches him on the island? Would you be angry? Tell about a time when someone did something wrong but you didn’t get angry.

**B.** What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.

☐ Prediction     ☐ Question     ☐ Observation     ☐ Connection
**Island of the Blue Dolphins**

**Chapters 6–8**

**For Your Discussion Group**

As she is preparing to leave the island, Karana fills two baskets with items to take on the ship. She takes three whalebone needles, an awl, a stone knife, two cooking pots, and a small box made from a shell with many earrings in it. What would you take from your home if you had to leave quickly? Explain how you arrived at your decision.

Running out of water alarms Karana. She remembers a time when “the people didn’t worry.” Why do you think Karana worries much more now? Has anything ever happened to you to make you see the world differently? Explain your answer.

**Writer’s Craft: Dialogue**

Dialogue is the exact words that characters say to one another. Dialogue is easy for the reader to spot because the words are enclosed in quotation marks. It is often preceded or followed by words that tell how the speaker says these words or looks while speaking.

“The ship,” he said at last, saying the words slowly, “does not belong to our enemies, the Aleuts.”

As in everyday life, what characters say and how they say it help us understand them better. With your group, skim the chapters you’ve already read to identify and share examples of dialogue that show how characters feel or think.
Island of the Blue Dolphins
Chapters 9–11

Reading Strategy: Visualizing

Good writers help their readers visualize characters and scenes as they occur on the page. Through the use of language and plot, writers keep their readers immersed in the story. The flow of words translates into pictures in a reader’s mind. Reread Chapter 9. Take a moment in the midst of your reading to pay attention to what you are imagining. Jot down or draw what you visualized in your journal. Think about what the writer did to help you “see” the story.

Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.

1. Find a few sentences in this section of the book that you feel give a clear picture of what kind of person Karana is.

2. At the beginning of this section, Karana is grief-stricken at the death of her brother. By the end of this section, she has made an important decision. What decision does Karana make? How does she feel at the end of Chapter 11?

3. Visualize Karana as she sets off on her canoe journey. Imagine the canoe and the way she sits in it as she paddles. What happens as she paddles farther and farther away? Draw a series of pictures that illustrate her attempt to leave the island.

B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.

☐ Prediction ☐ Question ☐ Observation ☐ Connection
Island of the Blue Dolphins
Chapters 9–11

For Your Discussion Group

* “Everything I saw filled me with happiness,” says Karana when she returns to the island after her unsuccessful canoe trip. She decides not to try to fix the canoe and leave the island again. In fact, she plans to make a permanent home on the island. Why do you think Karana makes this decision? Is it a wise decision?

* After much hard work to dig out the Aleut chest, Karana decides to throw away the beads and jewelry in it. Why do you think she does this? What would you have done?

* One by one, Karana burns all the huts in the village. Why does she do this? How is she feeling as she does this? Do you think it’s a good thing to do?

Writer’s Craft: Setting

Island of the Blue Dolphins takes place in a unique geographic place. Many of the new words you’ve learned describe the physical characteristics of Karana’s island: ravine, headland, and sandspit. Others refer to the native plants and animals: kelp, abalone, and yucca. What new words have you learned while reading this book? Based on the descriptions and language used in Island of the Blue Dolphins, make an illustration of Karana’s island. Label the geographic features and plants and animals the author has described.
Island of the Blue Dolphins
Chapters 12–14

Reading Strategy: Rereading

Paragraphs or sections of books can sometimes be confusing. If you read a paragraph you don’t understand, the best way to gain a better understanding is to reread it. Also, as the story becomes more exciting, you may find yourself reading more quickly to see what happens next. Because of this, you may miss important details. If you have questions about what you’re reading, take the time to reread the section that you find confusing. Think about which parts of Chapters 12–14 you found the most exciting and probably raced through. Reread those sections. Did you discover anything new in the sections?

Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.

1. Reread the paragraphs in Chapter 14 that tell how Karana escapes the dogs and reaches the cave. Explain how she does this in your own words.

2. If you could meet Karana, what questions would you ask her?

3. Visualize the house that Karana builds. Draw a picture of it using the information given in Chapter 12.

B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.

☐ Prediction  ☐ Question  ☐ Observation  ☐ Connection
Group Discussion

Name ______________________________________ Date _______________________

Island of the Blue Dolphins
Chapters 12–14

For Your Discussion Group

It takes Karana half the winter to build her home. What does this tell you about her personality?

What is the hardest and longest you’ve had to work at achieving a goal? What was the goal? How did you feel while you were working toward it? How did you feel when you achieved your goal?

All cultures have myths or stories that attempt to explain things such as how people came to exist, what happens to us after we die, as well as natural phenomena like thunder or the change of seasons. Why do you think myths and stories like these are so universal? What myths and stories do you know that are similar to the one Karana tells about why people die?

Writer’s Craft: Description

Here’s how the author describes sea elephants in Chapter 13:

The cow has a smooth body and a face that looks much like that of a mouse, with a pointed nose and whiskers, but the bull is different. His nose has a large hump on it which hangs down over his mouth. His skin is rough and looks like wet earth that has dried in the sun and cracked. He is an ugly animal.

Think about the words Scott O’Dell uses. What kinds of comparisons does he use to help you picture the seals? Find a picture of an animal in an encyclopedia or atlas. Write your own description of that animal. Use comparisons to help your readers visualize it.
Island of the Blue Dolphins
Chapters 15–18

Reading Strategy: Summarizing

When you summarize, you state what’s happened in a book or chapter in just a few sentences. A summary includes only the major events—not every detail. Summarizing can help you focus on the important parts of a story. Think about the most important things that happened in these chapters. Summarize Chapters 15–18.

Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.

1. Karana decides to kill the wild dogs. After setting fire to their lair, she chooses to save her arrows to kill the leader rather than use them on the other dogs. Why do you think she did this? Was it a wise decision?

2. At the end of Chapter 16, Karana says, “I was very happy.” Write about why you think she is now capable of happiness.

3. At the beginning of Chapter 18, Karana describes some of the signs of spring on her island. What are some signals that spring is beginning where you live?

B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.

☐ Prediction  ☐ Question  ☐ Observation  ☐ Connection
Island of the Blue Dolphins
Chapters 15–18

For Your Discussion Group

Karana says she didn’t know how lonely she had been until she befriended Rontu. Has this ever happened to you? Share your experiences with the group.

As a sign of mourning, the women of Karana’s tribe singe, or burn, their hair short. What mourning rituals are you familiar with? Why do people follow such rituals?

Karana decides to save the leader of the pack of wild dogs even though she has the chance to kill him. Why do you think she makes this decision? What does it tell you about her character?

Writer’s Craft: Specialized Vocabulary

Groups of animals are often called special names. For example, a group of dogs is a pack, a group of elephant seals is a herd, and a group of otters is called a raft. To make their stories believable, writers must become familiar with the specialized vocabulary for the topic they’re writing about. Think about all the different kinds of specialized vocabulary Scott O’Dell has incorporated into this book. Join with your group to become word detectives. Search for other names for groups of animals.
Island of the Blue Dolphins
Chapters 19–21

Reading Strategy:
Drawing Conclusions

When you draw a conclusion, you come to an understanding about something. To be able to draw the right conclusion, you must consider what you know. You must decide whether that information supports your conclusion. Writers don’t always reveal everything; they rely on their readers to draw conclusions about characters’ actions, feelings, or intentions and why events unfolded as they did. Good readers are alert to the clues that writers give them. What kinds of conclusions have you made so far about the characters and events in this book?

Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.

1. Describe Karana’s attempt to catch the devilfish. Make a list of all the things she does to prepare.

2. Karana must spend the night in Black Cave, a cave filled with strange figures and a skeleton. Why do you think the figures were placed there?

3. At the end of Chapter 20, the Aleuts finally return. What conclusion can you draw about what Karana will do? What specific information supports your conclusion?

B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.

☐ Prediction ☐ Question ☐ Observation ☐ Connection
Island of the Blue Dolphins
Chapters 19–21

For Your Discussion Group

Karana and the Aleut girl try to figure out how to communicate with one another. Have you ever been in a similar situation? What kinds of methods did you use to overcome the language difference? How successful were you?

Why do you think the Aleut girl left the necklace at the cave? What conclusions did you make about the girl?

Why do you think Karana has so much difficulty deciding whether to trust the girl?

Writer’s Craft: Conflict

In literature, conflict refers to the struggle between characters and outside forces (external conflict) or between opposing ideas and feelings in a character’s mind (internal conflict). In Island of the Blue Dolphins, Karana’s dealings with the wild dogs is an example of an external conflict. Her struggle over how to deal with the girl brought by the Aleuts is an example of an internal conflict. Name other external and internal conflicts Karana has had to deal with.
Island of the Blue Dolphins
Chapters 22–25

Reading Strategy:
Asking Questions

As you read a book, you usually will find yourself asking questions about the characters, the setting, and the events. The search for the answers to these questions is one of the reasons that you keep turning the pages. Write down your questions as you read and note the answers when you come to them later in the story. If you have questions that remain unanswered, share them with your group. What is the major question you have right now about Island of the Blue Dolphins?

Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.

1. What questions do you have for Karana about Tutok? What questions do you have for Tutok?

2. Karana doesn’t trust Tutok at first. What do you think made her change her mind and want to become friends?

3. Why do you think Tutok never tells the Aleuts about Karana? What would you have done if you were Tutok? Explain your answer.

4. The otter that Karana saves makes her feel “gay and sad.” How can someone be happy and sad at the same time? When has this happened to you?

B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.

☐ Prediction    ☐ Question    ☐ Observation    ☐ Connection
Island of the Blue Dolphins
Chapters 22–25

For Your Discussion Group

Karana experiences many changes in Chapter 25. What are they? Which change do you think is the most significant?

“If [animals] the earth would be an unhappy place,” says Karana. How would your life be less happy without animals?

What two words would you use to describe Karana? Explain how you arrived at your choices.

Writer’s Craft: Character Development

Writers don’t usually explain everything about a character at the beginning of a story or a book. The reader discovers more and more about each character as the story progresses and the characters face new challenges. At the beginning of Island of the Blue Dolphins, Karana is a very responsible, no-nonsense girl. By the end of Chapter 25, she has become a thoughtful young woman who is not afraid to go against the norms of the society in which she grew up. What challenges helped Karana to develop into this thoughtful young woman?
Island of the Blue Dolphins
Chapters 26–29

Reading Strategy:
Recognizing Cause and Effect

In a well-written book, as in real life, one thing
(a cause) leads to another (an effect). For example,
in Island of the Blue Dolphins, having only herself
to rely on, Karana must break her tribe’s taboo
forbidding women to make weapons. Because of
her isolation on the island, Karana has to hunt and
fish to survive. Find other examples of cause and
effect that you’ve discovered in the story so far.

Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.

1. Karana decides she will never again kill an animal. What causes her to make
   this decision?

2. The men make a dress for Karana to wear. Why do you think they do this? What
do you think it says about the life she’ll lead when she leaves the island?

3. Write a paragraph from Karana’s point of view describing her voyage away from
   the island.

4. What do you think will be the most difficult adjustment for Karana to make when
   she returns to civilization?

B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you
read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.

☐ Prediction    ☐ Question    ☐ Observation    ☐ Connection
**Group Discussion**

*Name ______________________________________ Date _______________________

**Island of the Blue Dolphins**  
**Chapters 26–29**

**For Your Discussion Group**

- Reread the description of how Karana captures the puppy. Do you think this was the best method? How else might she have gotten a puppy?

- Why do you think Karana decides to leave the island?

- What will Karana’s life be like after she leaves the island? Will she miss anything about living alone on the Island of the Blue Dolphins?

- Think about the title of the book, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Defend the title, or make a case for another title that you feel would be better.

**Writer’s Craft: Theme**

The **theme** of a story conveys important ideas about life. The writer doesn’t usually reveal the theme or themes in a direct way. It’s up to readers to discover the themes themselves—and each reader may discover a different theme. One of the themes in *Island of the Blue Dolphins* is that people can survive, and even thrive, despite many hardships. With your group, discuss and record other themes that you find in the story.
Island of the Blue Dolphins

After Reading

Island of the Blue Dolphins is an example of the genre of historical fiction. This means it is a made-up, but realistic, story that incorporates accurate historical information. When authors write works of historical fiction, they use their imaginations to write the words and thoughts characters might have. However, the events and setting of the story remain true to the history of the period. Some of the characters may have been real people.

To develop a better understanding of this genre, complete the following chart.

For each person, group, or event listed, describe what is fictional and what is historical.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Facts</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aleuts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missionaries</td>
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<td>Karana</td>
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<td>Native Americans</td>
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<td>Otter hunting</td>
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Share your responses with the other members of your group. Discuss the similarities and differences in your charts.

Then work with your group to write a plot outline for a work of historical fiction. Concentrate on the historical period you’re currently learning about in Social Studies. Discuss which historical events to include in your story. Also, write one or two paragraphs telling about each of the main characters in your story.
Individual Projects

1. In the author’s note at the end of the book, Scott O’Dell mentions Robinson Crusoe. Find out more about this other fictional survivor. Was he rescued? Create a Venn diagram comparing Robinson Crusoe and Karana. Then use the diagram to write two paragraphs comparing and contrasting their stories.

2. Create a shoebox diorama of either the village of Ghalas-at or the home Karana builds. Use whatever materials you have available: paper, clay, toothpicks, pipe cleaners, as well as toys. Present your diorama to the class.

3. Create a map of the Island of the Blue Dolphins. Be sure to show the following places on your map: the village of Ghalas-at, Karana’s home, Tall Rock, the wild dogs’ cave, Coral Cove, the headland, the spring, and the place of the sea elephants. Include a map key and a compass rose.

Group Projects

1. Scott O’Dell wrote Island of the Blue Dolphins as a protest against the slaughter of wildlife. Create a newspaper called the Wildlife Gazette that includes information about the current state of the animals mentioned in the book. Each article can address a different animal species and answer questions such as: Is the animal endangered? What has or is being done to protect the animal? What are the greatest potential threats against the animal? The animals you might include are sea otters, elephant seals, foxes, cormorants, and dolphins.

2. Many geographic terms are used in Island of the Blue Dolphin. Create a Dictionary of Geographic Terms. A member of your group can illustrate a term and then write a short definition of it. Place the pages together in alphabetical order and bind them into a book. Terms to include are headland, cove, island, ravine, sandspit, hill, cliff, ridge, dune, reef, and mesa.

3. Make a time line that illustrates the last 500 years of California history. Your time line should have five 100-year sections and begin with 1500. Research important events such as the arrival of Europeans, the establishment of the first mission, Native American uprisings, statehood, and so on. Include labels and dates for these events. Also include dates that show when this story would have taken place.
## Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Helpful Contributions</th>
<th>Unhelpful Contributions</th>
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