The Island of the Blue Dolphins

By Scott O’Dell
Far off the coast of California looms a harsh rock known as San Nicolas Island. Blue dolphins splash in the water surrounding it; sea otters play in the kelp beds, and seabirds roost in its crags. Once, Indians also lived on the island—until one day they decided to leave and sailed to the east.

A young girl was left behind.

Karana is that girl. Year after year, she waits for the ship to come back. But it never does. Finally, she realizes she must make a fateful choice: follow her people on her own or remain alone on the island for the rest of her life.

★ “A haunting and unusual story.”
—Library Journal, starred review

“Strange and beautiful, revealing courage, serenity, and greatness of spirit.” —Horn Book
Summary

Readers meet 12-year-old Karana, the sole survivor of a tribe of indigenous people inhabiting a remote island about seventy miles southwest of Santa Barbara. After otter hunters and wild dogs kill off most of her people, Karana becomes self-sufficient and protects herself against wild animals, the weather, and potential intruders. Karana first tries to kill and then befriends Rantu, the leader of the dog pack, who becomes her beloved companion. This opens the door to her shifting view of all the animals on the island as more than just food, but spiritual beings with whom she may live in harmony. When at last Karana is rescued from the island and taken to the mission in Santa Barbara, she remains alone, because no one is alive who understands her language. It is a touching story of resilience and determination in the face of astounding obstacles.

by: Paula McMillen, Ph.D.
An Excerpt from *Island of the Blue Dolphins*...

A short distance beyond the dune, near the cliff, I saw the pack of wild dogs. There were many of them and they were moving around in a circle. In the middle of the circle was Ramo. He was laying on his back, and had a deep wound in his throat. He lay very still. When I picked him up I knew that he was dead. There were other wounds on his body from the teeth of the wild dogs. He had been dead a long time and from his footsteps on the earth I could see that he had never reached the cliff. Two dogs lay on the ground not far from him, and in the side of one of them was his broken spear. I carried Ramo back to the village, reaching it when the sun was far down. The dogs followed me all the way, but when I had laid him down in the hut, and came out with a club in my hand, they trotted off to a low hill. A big gray dog with long curing hair and yellow eyes was their leader and he went last. It was growing dark, but I followed them up the hill. Slowly they retired in front of me, not making a sound. I followed them across two hills and a small valley to a third hill whose face was a ledge of rock. At one end of the ledge was a cave. One by one the dogs went into it. The mouth of the cave was too wide and high to fill with rocks. I gathered brush and made a fire, thinking that I would push it back into the cave. Through the night I would feed it and push it farther and farther back. But there was not enough brush for this. When the moon rose I left the cave and went off through the valley and over the three hills to my home. All night I sat there with the body of my brother and did not sleep. I vowed that someday I would go back and kill the wild dogs in the cave. I would kill all of them. I thought of how I would do it, but mostly I thought of Ramo, my brother.
Time to be honest with ourselves…

- How do we know this is a quality piece of literature?
  - Don’t take my word for it:
    - Newbery Medal in 1961
    - Children’s Literature Association judged it as one of the ten best children’s books published in the US in the past two hundred years.
    - O’Dell was the first American to receive the Hans Christian Anderson Medal (1972) the highest award for children’s literature.
    - O’Dell received three Newberry Honor Medals
Time to be honest with ourselves...

Still not sold?

That’s ok. We all know Author credibility is nice, but it all truly comes down to the cost-benefit for our classrooms.
What is the cost benefit for your classroom...

Post-Reading Activities:

• Comparing Historical Truth and Fictional Truth:
  Let readers discuss the difference between historical and fictional accounts of the same event. Questions such as the following might be discussed:
  
  • What is the difference between a factual account and a fictional story based on the factual account? Let students give examples of other fictional stories based on fact.
  • Why are fictional accounts often more interesting and more emotionally moving than factual accounts? Many students may prefer accounts to fiction; encourage students to debate the issue.
The Real Reason We Are Here...

What is the cost benefit for your classroom...

Post-Reading Activities:

- **Creating an Island:**
  Students who are interested in geography might enjoy the following activities:
  
  - Using the details that Karana gives, draw a detailed map of her island.
  - Alone or with others, create the kind of island you would prefer to be marooned on. Specify the latitude and longitude, vegetation, topography, weather, and animals. Draw pictures that illustrate your island.
The Real Reason We Are Here…

What is the cost benefit for your classroom…

Post-Reading Activities:

- Comparing Crusoe and Karana

  Daniel Defoe is believed to have based Robinson Crusoe on a real person, a sailor who was marooned on an island for almost five years. Advanced readers might enjoy reading Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and comparing the two survival tales
The Real Reason We Are Here...

What is the cost benefit for your classroom...

Post-Reading Activities:

- **Additional Reading:**
  Students many times benefit and enjoy reading books that explore similar topics:
  
  - *Morning Girl*, by Michael Dorris- A short, beautifully written story narrated from the point of view of two Taino children on a Bahamian island in 1492.
  - *Ta-Na-E-Ka*, by Mary Whitebird- A short story about a young girl who must survive on her own in the woods as part of the coming-of-age ritual of her Kaw ancestors.
  - *Three Skeleton Key*, by George Toudouze- In a weird and frightening short story set on an isolated island off the coast of French Guiana, three men in a lighthouse struggle against a vicious invading army.
  - *When the Earth Shakes*, by Patricia Lauber- This non-fiction account describes one of nature’s most awesome forces-the earthquake.
Thank Your for your attention

If you have any questions about this book, or as to its benefit to your classroom please feel free to ask.