

## Fluke

By Lesley Gibbes & Michelle Dawson

Fluke, a southern right whale calf, is 'born under the shadow of the great harbor bridge...' People flock to watch Fluke and his mother playing together in the sheltered waters of the harbour. 'He was safe and happy in the warm harbour water...' until one day they become separated when Fluke takes fright, panics and flees to the bottom of the ocean. Eventually, Fluke is found, nuzzled up against a moored yacht, and is reunited with his mother. The two of them stay in Sydney Harbour until just before summer when it is time for them to set off on their long journey south.

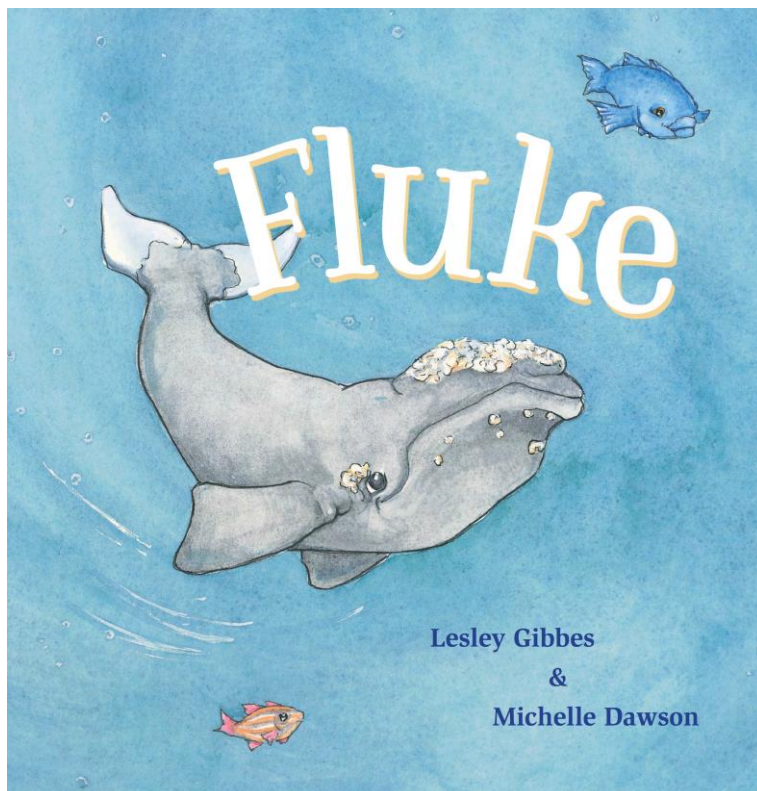
### Themes

Whales

- Harbour Bridge
- Separation
- Reunion

### Curriculum Outcomes

English, Social Science, STEM



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## BOOK SUMMARY

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Lesley Gibbes and Michelle Dawson have created a sweet and tender story that captures the wonder and awe of our natural world.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lesley Gibbes grew up on Sydney's Northern Beaches and Wagga Wagga, in country NSW. In 1991, she graduated with a Bachelor of Education (Primary) from The University of Sydney and began teaching in Sydney's inner west at Concord Public School, where she specialised in drama and dance.

Between 1999 and 2008 she taught at a number of other public schools in NSW, and is currently on leave after having her children, Austin and Georgia. She began writing in 2011 and is a member of the Children's Book Council NSW and the NSW Writers Centre. Her first book *Scary Night* illustrated by Stephen Michael King and published by Working Title Press was a 2015 Honour Book for CBCA Book of the Year Award – Early Childhood. Her most recent publication with Working Title Press is *Quick as a Wink Fairy Pink*, published in 2016. The story of Fluke is based on events that occurred in 2012 when a southern right whale gave birth to a calf in Sydney Harbour.

## ILLUSTRATOR

Michelle Dawson Michelle Dawson was born in New Zealand, and moved to Australia in 1985. She has been working as a professional artist since 1996 and has studied both in Australia and the UK. In 2009, she illustrated her first picture book *HOW WEIRD IS THAT?* a fantastic tale (written by Gyan) which features a collection of amazing hybrid beasts woven around the theme of Australian native animals. Both an art book and a children's book, it was subsequently shortlisted for the 2009 Crichton Award for New Illustrator of the Year. *FLUKE* is her third picture book, which follows the very successful bedtime book *LET'S GO TO SLEEP* written by Margaret Wild and published by Working Title Press in 2013. Michelle lives and works in a converted church near the coast in rural Australia.

## WRITING

The story of *Fluke* is based on events that happened Sydney Harbour. In 2012 a southern right whale gave birth to a calf. The mother and calf stayed in the sheltered waters of the city's inlets and bays for several months before heading south to the Antarctic waters. The people of Sydney were entranced by the presence of these whales. Since then there have been numerous other sightings of whale calves in Sydney waters. One which was found nestling next to a boat after being separated from its mother.

Lesley Gibbes' text captures the excitement, joy and awe that the presence of these magnificent mammals create among the citizens of Sydney. She has created a tender lost-and-found story that young children can identify with. She captures the excitement, joy and awe that these magnificent mammals created among Sydney's residents and visitors.

It was a magical event that captured the hearts of the people of Sydney. Everyone flocked to the harbour foreshores to watch the mother whale and her calf play in the sheltered waters

On the first page *Fluke* and his mother are introduced, and the setting is established. The little southern right whale was born under the shadow of the great harbour bridge. This sentence creates a soothing lyrical mood that echoes the rhythmic movement of the whales, the sea and the reflected bridge. The use of poetic phrasing and devices maintains this feeling over the next few pages. The choice of words and how they are placed on the page, and the use of alliteration\* and assonance† adds warmth and underlying meaning to the story.

- His mother pushed him gently to the surface for his first breath.
- ... soft dark eyes and white-tipped tail flukes
- Cradled in the crook of her tail...
- the soothing rhythms of her whale song
- 'Oooooomm-Oooooomm-Oooooomm,'

When Fluke and his mother are spotted by passers-by the rhythm of the story changes from underwater calmness to excitement. The use of more exuberant language shows how Fluke responds to the attention he is getting.

- Fluke enjoyed playing
- ... slapping his tail noisily
- ... blowing spouts of water high into the air.
- ... he played peek-a-boo with the crowd, poking his head above the surface, and then disappearing down to the ocean floor.

The mood of the story changes again when Fluke is separated from his mother. This creates tension in the story - now there is problem that must be dealt with.

\* **Alliteration** the use of the same consonant letter at the beginning of a number of words placed close together

† **Assonance** repetition of the same vowel sound in a number of words placed closely together



Then, over the next six pages (three double-page spreads) the story is told from three different perspectives. Fluke, who is stranded at the bottom of the ocean, lost and frightened. His mother who calls him from the other side of the harbour. And the people in the city who search for him.



From here, the story steps the reader towards a happy ending, when Fluke is reunited with his mother, and they can stay in the harbour until just before summer when it was time to leave and head south.



Then he and his mother breached high out of the water ...  
once, twice and then three times before setting off slowly on their long journey south

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Michelle Dawson used watercolour paints, dual brush pens and watercolour markers on paper for the illustrations in this book. Her beautiful illustrations bring Fluke and his rich underwater world to life, and capture the emotion and drama of his story.

The experience of being lost, the vulnerability of that time and then the reassurance and relief of being reunited with the parent is a scenario any child can identify with. Michelle Dawson

Michelle was thrilled to be asked to illustrate Lesley Gibbes' story. However, she soon realised there were a number of issues she would need to consider.

### 1. The question of scale

Michelle decided that the best option would be to make the artworks as double page spreads, which would allow her to get a much greater sense of the whales' impressive size.

Using the double page spreads also allowed Michelle to include the other smaller 'critters' in the compositions without them becoming so small as to be insignificant. Although she wasn't illustrating a scientific manual she felt it was still important that the drawings be reasonably to scale.

I quickly realised that one of my biggest issues in illustrating this story was going to be the question of scale! An adult Southern Right Whale is around 18-20 metres and a calf around 5-6 metres! Michelle Dawson





#### 4. Choosing a technique

Michelle painted up one of the illustrations before beginning the final artworks to try out the different techniques for the water and the whales, groper, bubbles, etc. She also tried out different markers to see what to use where and how. And she wrote what she had done on the illustration to use as reference as I went along.

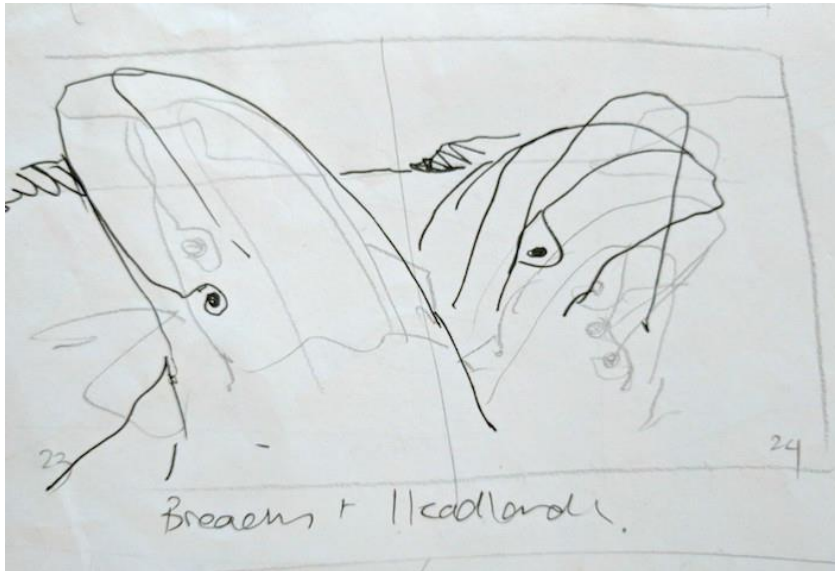
#### 5. Creating the characters

Careful observation led Michelle to the discovery that the Southern Right Whale was a tricky creature to draw and paint.

- The eyes are very close to the bottom and near the pectoral fins,
- The mouth swings right up to the top and front of the head. This means the images needed to be in profile, or at best  $\frac{3}{4}$  turns to get their character and eyes, because the soul or spirit and emotion is predominantly expressed through their eyes



## 6. The process



*Humble beginnings -  
Initial little thumb nail  
sketch*



*Studio wall with drafts*





*Desk and final artwork*





## DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

- This sweet and tender story captures the wonder and awe of our natural world.
- The text works much the same way as poetry – the the words, phrases and sentences used, and their placement on the page create images, feelings and meaning for the reader / listener.

Fluke nuzzled in close to his mother's smooth round belly.

He was safe.

The long u makes Fluke a slow word. Other slow words in this passage– nuzzled, close, mother, smooth, belly. These words are warm and comforting. He was safe is a reassuringly short statement.

Look for other examples of how Lesley Gibbes uses language in this way.

- Interesting words:

flukes, blowing spouts, peek-a-boo, churning, mournful, desperately, breached.

How do they sound?

What do they mean?

What are they referring to in the story.

Eg. What is a whale fluke? Why is peek-a-boo be used in the story about a whale? How does the word churning make you feel?

Look at Michelle Dawson's thumbnail sketch. Talk about what she has drawn – think about line, shape, space. Can you see any under-drawing (aka palimpsest).

Read the words.

Which part of the sketch shows the whale breaching? Can you see where she has drawn the headland?

Choose a picture from the book and make your own thumbnail sketches, using just paper pencils. Don't be afraid to start again if you are not satisfied – no rubbing out! Make notes about what you have drawn.

Drafts and test sheets – paint a picture using watercolour. Try out some of the materials the Michelle used for the test sheets / drafts - Water spray bottles, sea sponges, rags brushes to flick, sponge, brush, drip water and paint onto the paper.

Many opportunities for discussion and activities can be drawn from the endpapers that are delightfully designed with waves of blue-hued lines providing 37 fascinating facts about the southern right whale.

Southern right whales the species *Eubalaena australis*.

What are the names of other two whales that belong to this species? Find out how are they similar or different from the southern right.

What are the migration patterns of the southern right? Use a world or southern hemisphere map to track where they go to in summer and winter.

Draw your own maps to show their movements across summer and winter – use different colour for each season.

What other whales are in the southern hemisphere?

More interesting words to investigate from the endpapers

Comb-like, baleen, bristles, zooplankton, organisms, ensnare, suckle, survival, communicate, low-frequency, belches.

Find more.

STEM ACTIIVITES: Measurement and scale

How long would Fluke's mother be?

What about Fluke?

How much longer than Fluke is his mother.

Measure the lengths with steps/paces, string, stones/rocks, sticks, tyres, blocks, or anything other suitable materials.

Form – name the unique features of the southern right whale. What are the hard white growths around their heads? Do all whales have these?

Find out more about the work of Lesley Gibbes at <http://www.lesleygibbes.com> and Michelle Dawson at [www.ms dawsonart.com](http://www.ms dawsonart.com)