

BYRON SHIRE ECHO BOOK REVIEW No 10

Four books illustrated by artist and author Kim Michelle Toft

***One Less Fish* by Kim Michelle Toft and Allan Sheather**
***Neptune's Nursery* by Kim Michelle Toft and Alan Sheather**
***Turtle's Song* by Kim Michelle Toft and Alan Brown**
***The World That We Want* by Kim Michelle Toft**

Publisher: University of Queensland Press

Reviewer: Crabbes Creek Public School Pupils

Crabbes Creek Public School pupils were very excited this year to be asked to review four gorgeous books illustrated by a local artist Kim Michelle Toft. At first glance it is not easy to decide which age of child would love these books best, so we decided to introduce them to all of our K to 6 students. Each book was read in small multi-age groups with the senior children writing comments for themselves and for the younger children as they went. The classroom was abuzz with excitement as heads poured over these truly beautiful picture books.

The four books reviewed were; 'One Less Fish' and 'Neptune's Nursery' by Kim Michelle Toft and Alan Sheather, 'Turtle's Song' by Kim Michelle Toft and Alan Brown, and 'The World That We Want' by Kim Michelle Toft.

All of us were so captivated at first by the shimmering, colourful illustrations that we immediately wanted to find out how they were done. It was with great delight that we discovered that Kim Michelle Toft is a local, full-time exhibiting silk artist. The technique used for each illustration was the time consuming method of hand drawing, then painting on silk using a combination of a latex-based ink called gutta and dyes blended like watercolour. To fix the colour, the silk is rolled up and steamed in a special machine. The next process is then somehow translated onto the paper pages of a book! This creates the most beautiful feeling of being immersed in a magical blue-green sea or sky with all of the wonderful Australian creatures you meet on each successive page.

Each book not only shows the illustrator's love for the beauty of underwater life but also teaches the reader to understand the importance of preserving this precious world. These books are a reflection of Kim Michelle Toft's love for the beauty of life underwater and her desire to help our children understand the importance of its preservation. So as we read further, the older children started to find the deeper message of conservation in each book and were excited to find very detailed animal facts in the back of each book.

'One less Fish' has reached the honour list of the Children's Book Council of Australia and is a truly powerful book for all ages. All of our children gained excellent insights into the plight of not only our Barrier Reef but also other coral reefs around the world. Each page opened up a lively discussion, with the older children returning time and time again to the information pages. This book tells them to remember that: 'fish that die one by one may soon become none by none'.

'Neptune's Nursery' teaches us about many creatures of the Australian sea. Our Grade One children quickly noticed the little sea horse that hides throughout the book

and spent a long time searching for it amongst the colourful habitats of many sea animals. On turning to the back of the book the older children were able to explain many things about this small upright fish. Again, we read that these creatures are increasingly under threat from humans, with a project to breed sea horses already under way in Tasmania (something important for us all to learn!)

'The World That We Want' explains in vibrant pages the nature of our coastal ecosystem, taking the reader on a journey from the air to the ocean and highlighting the importance of keeping this world in perfect balance.

'Turtle's Song' takes the reader on a journey of the sea turtle – from its first moments awakening from the egg to its old and wise self. We are shown the intriguing ability and huge effort of female turtles to find the exact beach where they were born so that they can also lay eggs. This reminds us once more how important it is to preserve habitats like this, enabling the cycle of life to continue.

In short, this is a very important set of books for all libraries, giving our children further tools and deep understanding on their journey to assist in the preservation, maintenance and restoration of our world.