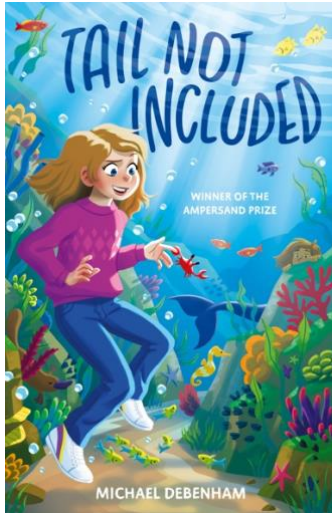


Teacher's Notes



Tail Not Included

Written by Michael Debenham

Teacher's Notes by Bec Kavanagh

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Middle-grade readers (ages 9-14, grades 5-7)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
 - Literacy – speaking and listening
 - Literacy – reading and viewing
 - Literacy - writing

THEMES

- Masculinity
- Leadership and democracy
- Ethics
- Friendship
- Family
- Identity

SYNOPSIS

Aside from her school burning down (twice!), Becky's life is fairly predictable – and that's just how she likes it. So, when her dad turns up out of the blue, she's not interested in meeting him. After all, he's a total stranger. And kind of strange.

But Becky can't help wondering: what's the Ceremony of the Waves he insists on taking her to? Why did he leave her and her mum? Why is he so keen to get into the ocean? And ... why does he smell like fish?

From Ampersand Prize-winning debut author Michael Debenham comes this brilliantly funny middle-grade novel, perfect for fans of Nat Amooore and *Get Your Act Together*, Doris Kozlowski by Jo Dabrowski.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR

Michael Debenham is a freelance writer and musician based in Melbourne. He splits his time between working for hire and writing fiction, and has been the recipient of an ASA Award Mentorship and the Ampersand Prize. Under the cunning alias 'Mike Debenham' he has released two albums of original songs – one for children, one for former children. He can be found at michaeldebenham.net.

THEMES

Masculinity

Consider the following scenes, where Zim considers what it means to be a man:

- Zim gets angry with Becky for making him give back the duckmole eggs, telling her that she's prevented him from 'becoming a man' (p.140)
- When Zim is reflecting on the Test of Manhood, Ethel tells him: 'Let there be no shame in becoming a man. To be a man is an opportunity to do great good in the world, to be courageous and kind. To take responsibility for one's actions.' (p.212)
 - Do you agree? What would you add/change?
 - What kind of masculinity does Hrothgar represent? How do mermen like Ethel, Zim and Coleridge show different ways of being masculine?
 - What men do you look up to as role models? Why?

Leadership and Democracy

'Where are we going?' asked Becky. 'Are you taking us to your leader?'
'Well, "leader" might be pushing it a bit.'
'Democratically elected representative,' clarified one of the duckmoles.
'We leave that "king" rubbish to the fishmen. Pok.'
(p.152)

Consider the leaders of the duckmoles and the leaders of the mermen.

- How does each group choose their leader?
- What qualities do they value in a leader?
- Discuss the human leaders you know (you might think about school leaders, or the leaders of the country) – how do we choose our leaders?
- In groups, come up with a list of qualities you think a good leader should have and why.
- Discuss how a democracy works. Do you think this is a good form of leadership? Why? What other types of leadership are there?



WRITING STYLE

Like many quest narratives, *Tail Not Included* follows a structure often referred to as the 'hero's journey'. This is a type of story that many of you will be familiar with from other books and film. In it, the hero's story follows a series of steps, including:

- the call to adventure
- aid from a supernatural being
- crossing the threshold
- facing challenges and obstacles
- transformation
- returning home

Choose one of the book's three protagonists (Becky, Zim or Kiyo and map out their hero's journey). Could you use this structure to tell your own adventure story?

COMPREHENSION

- Which details in the first three chapters suggest that Becky's dad isn't entirely human?
- Why does Kiyo need an alibi for the fire? What does she decide to do when Becky can't help her?
- Why does Ethel believe that everyone must have adventures?
- How does Becky feel when she discovers that Ethel is her father? How do her feelings towards him change over the course of the book?
- Even though Ethel isn't good at expressing his emotions, it's clear that he loves Becky. How can you tell? What evidence can you find that shows you how he feels?
- Why is Becky better at fighting off the shellycoats than Zim?
- What do Becky and Kiyo learn about each other by having their separate adventures? How would you describe their friendship? What do you think they learn about themselves?
- What do Zim and Becky have in common? What does Zim learn about right and wrong from his adventure?
- What traditions do the mermen follow? What's the meaning behind these rituals and traditions? Why does Becky challenge them to change?
- What do the duckmoles want from the mermen? Why are the mermen reluctant to agree to their demands?

WRITING EXERCISE

Imagine that, like Becky, you discover you've inherited a strange ability that sets you apart from the other kids at your school. What is it? Where did it come from? Are there any rituals associated with it?

Write a scene that takes place either just as you discover your ability or immediately after.



CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. What qualities do you think it takes to 'become a man'? Create an alternative Test of Manhood for Zim that allows him to demonstrate these qualities.
2. Write your own extremely boring story to fight off a shellycoat. Take turns reading your stories aloud to a partner and vote for the most boring.
3. Write a short review of the book for the library. Without spoiling the ending, give a short summary of the plot, and then share the things you loved or found interesting about the book. What kind of reader would like it?
4. Draw a map of Becky's adventure. Use one colour for the places inhabited by the mermen, and another for the human world. In your own words make a note of where the key events from the story take place. Draw a similar map of a place that's familiar to you. Imagine that a part of this familiar world is shared by fantastical creatures – add their homes/habitats to your map. Now write your own stories into the map and display them around the classroom.

RELATED READING

A Giant's Trek
By Nick Stella

Get Your Act Together, Doris Kozlowski
By Jo Dabrowski

The Right Way to Rock
By Nat Amore

The Wave
By Sarah Armstrong

Malamander
By Thomas Taylor

