Island of the Blue Dolphins

by Scott O’Dell

(Dell Publishing, 1960)

(Available in Canada: Doubleday Dell Seal; the United Kingdom: Doubleday Bantam Dell; Australia: Transworld Publications)

Based on the true story of an Indian girl who was found on an island off the coast of California in the early 1800s, Island of the Blue Dolphins is an amazing story of survival. When Karana and her brother, Ramo, are digging roots on the far side of the island, they see a ship sailing into the harbor. This ship has brought Aleut hunters. The captain of the Aleut ship strikes a deal with Chief Chowig so he can camp on the island and hunt otter. Unfortunately, the captain of the Aleuts is not true to his word, and he attempts to leave the island without paying for the otter he and his men have killed. In a battle on the beach, many of the men from the island tribe are killed, and the Aleuts flee with the otter. Following this massacre, the island tribe is depressed. Their men are dead, and the island is heavy in spirit. One of the remaining men, Kimki, decides to leave the island in search of another island. After almost a year, Kimki returns in a ship and is prepared to take the entire tribe to a new home. The tribe anxiously packs and boards the ship. As the ship starts for the open sea, Karana realizes that her brother is not on board. She jumps into the sea and swims to the shore. Since the ship is unable to turn around, Kimki calls that he will send a ship soon to rescue them from the island. The next day, Karana’s brother is killed by a pack of wild dogs, and Karana is left alone on the island. While she waits for Kimki to return, she collects food, builds a house, and creates weapons to protect herself. She does not know that the ship carrying her tribe was destroyed in a storm and that there were no survivors. Instead, Karana lives in the hope of being rescued.

During the following eighteen years on the island, Karana becomes self-sufficient. She receives companionship by taming the animals with whom she lives, she hunts and prepares for winter, and she watches for the return of the Aleut hunters. When Karana is finally discovered by missionaries eighteen years after being left on the island, she is a grown woman and the sole survivor of her tribe.
Coastal Map

Saint Nicholas Island is one of several islands off the coast of Southern California. History tells us that although it was settled by Indians in 2000 B.C., it was unknown to Spanish explorers until 1602. The Indian inhabitants of the island were left relatively undisturbed until around 1835.

Locate San Nicholas Island, or the “Island of the Blue Dolphins,” on the map. Use the scale to calculate about how far it is to the surrounding islands and to the California coast. Then, on the back of this paper, respond to this question: Do you think the isolation of this island affected the inhabitants in a positive or a negative way?
Mapping Descriptions

Knowing your surroundings is important for survival. Without a clear picture of an area, an individual may limit or be unaware of important resources. Mapping out a region can help one organize and remember where important landmarks are for future use.

Most of the maps that we use are diagrams rather than pictures. This means that the map maker has used symbols to represent mountains, lakes, rivers, and other landmarks instead of actual pictures. The reader can identify these symbols by referring to the map’s key or legend.

Karana describes her island early in the novel. Read Karana’s description and design a map of the island in the space provided below. As you continue to read the story, add details to your map describing the places that Karana frequents throughout her years on the island. You can develop your own symbols to represent the landmarks. Be sure to record all of your symbols in a key so anyone reading your map will understand their meanings.
Within Karana’s tribe, the men and women had clearly defined roles. The men defended the island, hunted for food, and built canoes, while the women gathered roots, made clothing, and cooked. Since the work was divided equally, the tribe survived in peace. The traditions of these roles were so ingrained in the people that they became tribal law. Superstition even surrounded the following of these laws. Karana had been told that if she were to make a weapon, the weapon would break in a time of dire need and danger.

Although we live in a society which is much more liberal than Karana’s, many of us still have roles within our families which are performed by either the males or the females. What roles do you have in your family? Are there certain jobs that only the males or females do in your house? Do you agree with these roles? What would happen if you were to go against these roles?

Make a list of the jobs in your home and who usually performs them. Write beside each whether you agree or disagree with the role assignment and explain your reasoning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Who Performs</th>
<th>Agree/Disagree</th>
<th>Why?</th>
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Bravery

Although she is but a young girl with little survival experience outside her tribal community, Karana is brave and accomplishes what is necessary to survive alone on the island. One of the greatest examples of her bravery occurs when she realizes that her brother is left behind on the island, and she leaps into the stormy ocean so he will not be abandoned alone. Through this action, she not only shows her courage, but she also unknowingly saves her own life.

Read the acts of bravery listed below. Explain Karana’s motivation behind attempting to accomplish each act.

1. leaping into the ocean to be with her brother on the island ________________________________

2. killing the wild dogs ______________________________________________________________

3. saving the lead wild dog’s life and taming him _________________________________________

4. crossing the ocean alone in a canoe to be with her tribe_________________________________

5. attempting to kill the bull sea elephant ______________________________________________

6. making friends with Tutok__________________________________________________________

7. entering the Black Cave____________________________________________________________

8. attacking the devil fish_____________________________________________________________

Answer:
Do you think you would have been able to accomplish these feats and survive as Karana does?
Endangered Species

In the mid 1800s, the fur trade was thriving. Hunters up and down the West Coast were trapping and trading furs for goods. Demand for precious furs was high. Unfortunately, the sea otter was one of the animals prized for its pelt. Hunters traveled from Alaska to Southern California to capture the furs. As a result, the playful sea otters were hunted almost to extinction by the late 1800’s. Since then, the government has taken an interest in sea otters and has placed a ban on the hunting of these creatures. Although there are still hunters who illegally poach these animals for their fur, the population of sea otters off the coast of California is increasing.

Many other species have suffered the same massacre as the sea otters. Choose one of the endangered animals listed below to research. Find out where it lives, what perils it has survived, and how many still exist. Share this information with your classmates.

- whooping crane
- ivory-billed woodpecker
- mongoose lemur
- giant anteater
- dwarf gibbon
- sperm whale
- blue whale
- red wolf
- black-footed ferret
- snow leopard
- Mediterranean monk seal
- Amazonian manatee
- Sumatran rhinoceros
- marsh deer
- red deer
- giant armadillo

You may wish to write to one of the following organizations to learn more about wildlife protection.

National Wildlife Foundation
1400 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202)637-3700

World Wildlife Fund
1250 24th Street NW
Washington, DC, 20037
(202)293–4800
Animal Rights

There are many groups in the United States which have opposing views on animal rights. For example, the American Medical Association believes that animal experimentation is a benefit to human health because it allows researchers to develop new drugs and techniques that save human lives. The Humane Society disagrees with this premise. This organization believes that animal experimentation is not necessarily a benefit to human health because the results of the experiments are not always directly related to humans. Both groups have arguments based on facts to support their views.

How do you feel about animal rights? Hold your own series of debates in your classroom to further explore animal rights. Several debatable issues are listed below. Divide the class into cooperative teams. Assign an argument for each team to research. Remember, a good debate is based on fact, not opinion. Once the teams are ready, allow each team to present its views. Be sure to allow equal time for each team to present its ideas. The class can vote to decide which team presented a more convincing argument.

Issues

1. A. Zoos are a benefit to animal populations.
   B. Zoos are not a benefit to animal populations.

2. A. Animal experimentation in laboratories should be allowed.
   B. Animal experimentation in laboratories should not be allowed.

3. A. Hunting animals should be allowed.
   B. Hunting animals should not be allowed.

4. A. Trapping animals for fur is justified.
   B. Trapping animals for fur is not justified.

Teacher Note: You may want to write the issues on slips of paper and have teams randomly choose, or you may have students group together by selecting topics that interest them.
Karana spends eighteen years alone on her island. During this time, her sole companions are Rontu and the other animals she tames. When the Aleuts return to the island and Karana meets Tutok, she remembers what it is like to talk with a human. She enjoys the companionship and sharing. After Tutok leaves, Karana thinks of her people and the hope of once again meeting them.

We have all felt lonely at one time or another. How does it feel to be lonely? Do you have to be alone to feel lonely?

Use the web format to brainstorm words that have to do with loneliness. The word “loneliness” is written in the center for you.

Now use your word bank to write a poem expressing your feelings about loneliness.
Karana’s life and responsibilities change dramatically when she is left to survive on the island alone. She no longer has her family or village to support and protect her. She must accomplish the jobs of all the village by herself if she wishes to survive.

As you are reading *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, make notes about typical responsibilities in Karana’s life during her isolation. Give specific examples from the text to support your ideas. Beside each chore, make a note explaining who would have typically completed this chore if Karana had not been alone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
<th>Who?</th>
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Language is the means by which we communicate with one another. It is the transmission of thoughts and ideas through words, print, and gestures. Without language, our thoughts have no meaning to others.

When Karana meets Tutok, they share many happy hours learning words and ideas from one another’s languages. They even find that some of their words are very similar. We call words that are similar in two or more languages “cognates.”

Read the words and phrases below. Work in teams to research and find out how they are said in the languages listed. If you are already familiar with some of the languages, share your knowledge with your classmates. The blank spaces are left for you to add some words of your own choosing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>American Sign</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Your Language Choice</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. mother</td>
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<td>2. father</td>
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<td>3. hello</td>
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<td>4. good-bye</td>
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<td>5. friend</td>
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<td>6. school</td>
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<td>7. My name is (</td>
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<td>8. What is your name?</td>
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<td>9. I am hungry.</td>
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<td>10. Where is the bathroom?</td>
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