



Dead in the Water

Robin Stevenson

Reading level: 3.1

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AR Quiz # 122444

Book Summary

Simon Drake is determined to become a long-distance sailor. Despite his father's opposition, he has saved his hard-earned money and signed up for a week-long live-aboard sailing course which will take him and three other students around northern Vancouver Island.

Simon is eager to do well, but things don't get off to a smooth start. Two of his fellow crew members, brothers Joey and Blair, look like the junior version of the wealthy yacht clubbers his father despises. The other crew member, Olivia, is a contrary vegetarian who hates sailing. On their first day out, Simon earns the nickname "Spacey" when he mistakes a man-overboard drill for the real thing, and Patrick, their instructor, lectures him for not being a good team player. And if all that wasn't enough, as soon as the wind picks up, Simon gets embarrassingly seasick.

Then real trouble begins. The group anchors for the night in a quiet bay, and Simon and Olivia get curious about a nearby cabin cruiser. They decide to do a little snooping around and stumble upon an abalone poaching operation. A group of men are illegally harvesting a threatened species of shellfish, and there is a lot of money at stake. Simon has always believed that the only person you can count on is yourself, but when he and Olivia are captured and their lives are in danger, he realizes that they will have to work together if they are to survive.

Prereading Ideas

- Northern abalone has been designated a threatened species of shellfish, and any harvesting in BC waters is prohibited. Despite this, poaching continues and a number of individuals have been arrested for possession and selling of abalone. Research this problem and see what information you can find. How serious is the threat to the species? What is being done to combat the problem of poaching?
- Most people are concerned about environmental issues. Many take small but important steps to benefit the environment; some get involved in lobbying and protests; and a few are even willing to put their lives on the line to protect a species or a habitat. What examples can you find of individuals or groups taking extreme actions to protect a threatened species or to draw attention to an environmental issue? How far would you be prepared to go to protect the environment?

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Simon's father has always told him that the only person you can count on is yourself. How might his father have come to hold this view? How do you think this has influenced Simon? What events change his opinion?
2. At first, Simon dismisses Joey and Blair because of their apparent wealth. What assumptions does he make about them? Where do his attitude and beliefs come from? How do these change over the course of the novel?
3. Olivia is convinced that the men on the cabin cruiser are poachers and she is desperate to stop them, but she has trouble convincing the rest of the crew. Why do the others tease Olivia instead of taking her seriously? Do you think that gender and sexism play a role here?
4. "I hate how people only care about animals that are cute," Olivia says. What does she mean by this? Are some issues more appealing to the public than others? What other examples can you think of?
5. At the end of the book, Simon says of Patrick: "Maybe he tried to do the right thing, but I wasn't convinced." What positive and negative qualities do you see in Patrick's character? Were his loyalties to his students, the poachers or to himself? Do you believe he is telling the truth when he says he wouldn't have hurt Simon?

Author's Note

I am a sailor myself and so I decided to write an adventure story about sailing, set in the waters around Vancouver Island. I was mulling over possible plot ideas when I heard about the problem of abalone poaching from my mother, who had been in the northern BC town of Prince Rupert when some arrests were made. I researched as much as I could about the issue online, and then made some phone calls to learn more. I spoke to a biologist at an abalone research station, and I had a very helpful conversation with an employee of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans who had been directly involved in a number of investigations into abalone poaching operations. With my sailing experience and this research to draw on, the story came together quickly and was a great deal of fun to write.

Resources

The course Simon takes is based on a Canadian Yachting Association (CYA) course called Intermediate Cruising. Information about sailing and about CYA courses is available on the CYA website.

www.sailing.ca/home.php

You can read about Northern Abalone and Canada's Species at Risk Act (SARA) on the website of Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Read more about Abalone research and conservation.

<http://oceanlink.island.net/Conservation/abalone/BHCAP/Nisga/ncw.html>
www.marinematters.org

Author Biography

Robin Stevenson is the author of a number of books for teens. She lives on Vancouver Island and loves sailing. A number of years ago, she took a week-long live-aboard cruising course rather like the one in this story, only without the abalone poachers and the life-or-death boat chase. You can visit her website for more information. She loves to hear from students!

Author Website

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