

TEACHER NOTES
Fabulous Fishes
Written and Illustrated by Susan Stockdale

Title: *Fabulous Fishes*
Author / Illustrator: Susan Stockdale

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Author / Illustrator: Susan Stockdale was born in Miami, Florida, USA, and studied art at Occidental College in Los Angeles. After a brief stint in Spain she returned to the USA where she worked as a textile designer for a large clothing company. Her introduction to the world of children's books came in 1996 with the publication of *Some Sleep Standing Up*, and was followed by *Carry Me! Animal Babies on the Move*, and *Bring On the Birds*. Her latest picture book, *Stripes of All Types*, will be published in 2013. Susan's books celebrate nature with grace and cleverness. She has received awards from the American Library Association, Parents' Choice, the National Science Teachers Association, and the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural history. Stockdale lives in Maryland, USA and speaks frequently at schools and conferences.

SYNOPSIS *Fabulous Fishes* is a "fabulous" rhyming story about fishes of all shapes, sizes and colours, many of which can do amazing things. They leap, they glide, they crawl on land, and 'they all call the water home'.

WRITING & ILLUSTRATIONS

Susan Stockdale has created a delightful book that introduces young readers to non-fiction and the world of nature. The idea for this book came while Susan Stockdale was out snorkelling with her husband. She says:

My husband and I went snorkeling some years ago, and I was astounded by the diversity, shape and color of the fishes I saw beneath the water. I knew immediately that I had to create a book about them, as they are so spectacular looking! I came home, sat at my computer and began writing:

"Round fish, clownfish, fish that like to hide.

Striped fish, spiked fish, fish that leap and glide."

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The outcome was *Fabulous Fishes*, Susan's first book written in rhyme. *Fabulous Fishes* is a perfect 'read-aloud' book. The simple rhyming text invites children to join in the reading. The basic rhythm of the story follows a particular pattern –two-word/three-syllable phrases, repeated twice, followed by one five-word/syllable phrase, (“*shiny fish, / spiny fish, / fish that hitch a ride.*”). The text is rich with delightfully simple, descriptive and rhyming words and phrases that highlight the specific characteristics of each of the fish, (“*Sand fish. / land fish, / fish that flash their lights. / Speckled fish, / spotted fish, / fish with tails curled tight.*”). There is a change in the rhythmic pattern of the text in the last two pages, (“*Fish that swim in numbers, / fish that swim alone. / No matter what they look like, they call the water home.*”). Here Susan lengthens the phrases, slowing down the pace of the rhythm, and leading to the satisfying conclusion that ends with the warm and reassuring sound of “*home*”. Susan Stockwell used acrylic paint on paper for the illustrations in this book. The bright, bold, colourful illustrations clearly depict the different aspects and behavioural characteristics of the various fishes, (“*spiky,*” / “*sand fish*”, / *fish with tails curled tight.*”), At the same time the illustrations extend the meaning of the text by providing additional information, with particular details from the fishes' habitats and immediate environment. Thumbnail sketches at the back of the book provide more detail on each fish represented in the book. The simplicity of the text and illustrations makes *Fabulous Fishes* a delightful book to read and to look at. It also introduces children, families and teachers to the world's oceans, full of fascinating and diverse fish species.

DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

- This lovely book can be looked at, and read with babies, toddlers, preschool and school-aged children.
- It can be read with individual children, small groups and large groups. Give the children time to look at, make comments and talk about the pictures. Let them ask questions. Together, reflect on what might be happening on each page. This helps the children to create their own 'sense' of the story. Take time to let the children linger over each page, or move on, as they are ready.
- Share your own reflections with the children. Talk about the fish. Refer to the thumbnails at the back of the book. Find out the names of each fish, why they look the way they do, why they do what they do, how they protect themselves.
- You will find that the children will quickly join in the 'reading' of this story – it has such a toe-tapping rhythm, that you can emphasise when you are reading it.

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- There will be many different ways that you can share this story with children.
 - All ‘reading’ together while tapping out the rhythm with your feet or hands on knees.
 - Teacher: “*Round...*” Children: “*fish,*” Teacher: “*Clown...*”, Children: “*fish,*”
Everyone together: “*Fish that like to hide.*”
 - Teacher: “*Round fish,*” Children: “*clown fish.*”
Everyone together: “*Fish that like to hide.*”
 - Divide children into three groups and tell the story as above, with each group reciting a different part. With this ‘reading’ use co-workers and / or parents to help lead each group.
- Find words that rhyme: *sand – land, hide – ride – tide - glide, lights - tight,*
- Find words that start with the same letter/s : *Speckled – spotted – spiked – spiny*
 - You can make these phrases into little single rhymes – emphasising the sounds and the rhythm. *Speckled – spotted – spiked – spiny*
- Talk with the children about the meaning of the descriptive words and ask them to reflect and to comment on why the fish look like they do, and live where they do, and why where they live makes a difference to what they look like.
- Use the pictures in the book as reference for children to draw, or make with collage, their own fish, and fish habitats.
- Talk with them about the different colours, the shapes, the sizes of the fish and their environments
- Tell the story using the children’s drawings (perhaps made into puppets)
- At the painting easel provide colours like those in the book and suggest that the children make bold, colourful paintings on large sheets of paper. The children can use the pictures in the book as reference.
- Provide different coloured paper for the children to draw on. And different types of drawing materials – crayons, dry pastels, oil pastels, pencils, tempera or acrylic paint
- Dramatise the actions. Make yourselves into round fish, spiky fish, leaping and gliding and hiding fish.
- Use ‘fish music’ everyone to move to.
- Use fabric in the colours of the illustrations to help set the scene for the ‘swimming fish’
- Refer to the information that is included on the last pages.
 - With the children discover which of the world’s oceans each fish lives. Use a map or an atlas.
 - Find out which fish live in Australian waters. Find out more about these fish.
 - Find out more about each of the fish – where they live, how they protect themselves, etc.
- Find out more about Susan Stockdale her books, her way of working and her interests at her website <http://www.susanstockdale.com>