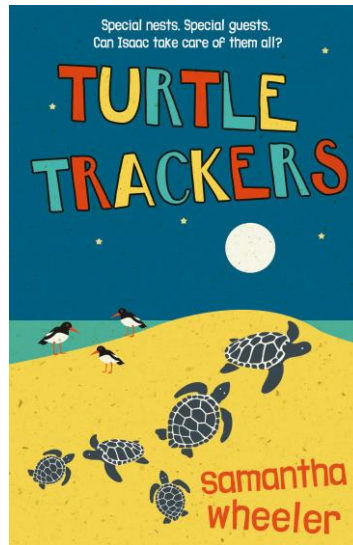


UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

TURTLE TRACKERS

Samantha Wheeler



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

ISBN: 978 0 7022 5995 1 / AUS \$14.95

Synopsis	2
Themes	2
Writing Style	2
Study Notes	2
Author Motivation	7
About the Author	7

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools
but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

SYNOPSIS

Isaac and his mother manage a small caravan park near Bundaberg in Queensland. The summer holidays are in full swing, so Isaac is busier than ever with chores around the park. But when he visits the nearby turtle conservation park at Mon Repos, he witnesses first-hand the incredible journey that sea turtles undertake in order to survive. Desperate to volunteer as a turtle tracker, Isaac must find a way to balance his responsibilities at the park and his new-found passion.

Turtle Trackers is a gripping story about friendship, perseverance and taking a risk to make a difference.

THEMES

Friendship

Turtles

Community

Responsibility

Grief

Conservation

Teamwork

Action

WRITING STYLE

Turtle Trackers is written in first person, past tense. Ten-year-old Isaac is tasked with the overwhelming responsibility of helping his mother manage The Pines Holiday Village caravan park after the death of his father. Younger readers will immediately empathise with Isaac, who longs to spend his holidays doing what other children do – swimming, hanging out with friends and watching the cricket on television. Instead, he works long hours so that he and his mum can continue to live and work at the park. This text is well suited to independent readers in the middle grades, but is also an excellent choice for a class-based literature study, as it addresses important themes such as responsibility, action, conservation and relationships through the use of clever storytelling and beautifully crafted writing.

STUDY NOTES

- After reading Chapter 1 of *Turtle Trackers*, discuss the ways in which the elements of narrative such as setting, characters and complications have

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

been introduced. How has the author been able to share these with the audience so effectively by 'showing not telling'?

- The novel begins with a 'sizzling start' on pages 1–2 before including a small amount of 'backfill' for the reader. Why is this such an effective way in which to structure an introduction?
- Reread the first paragraph on p3 in which Isaac describes the beach. Create a Y Chart, using the headings 'See', 'Smell' and 'Feel'. Add aspects of Isaac's description, before adding some of your own ideas about the beach into each respective section. Write your own description of the beach using these words and phrases.
- For the first few chapters, we know that it is just Isaac and his mother, and that Isaac's dad is no longer with them. Speculate on what might have happened to him. How does Samantha Wheeler foreshadow his absence? Why is it not until p18 that we know for sure that he has died?
- When on the turtle tour, Isaac's mum checks her phone. Why does Isaac tell her to put it away? Why is the tour group getting impatient with how long the turtle is taking to move on the beach? Why does the author slow the pace of the story here?
- Isaac has many responsibilities at the caravan park. How does this compare with the chores you are asked to do at home? Discuss the impact Isaac's chores have on him. If you were Isaac, how would you feel about these added responsibilities?
- As you finish each chapter, take note of what you have learnt about turtles, including their behaviour and the obstacles they face. Use the following inquiry questions, or develop questions of your own as a class, to guide your research:
 - How are different species of turtles distinguished from one another?
 - How do turtles use light? How do campaigns like 'Cut the Glow' help turtles?
 - What is the life cycle of a turtle?
 - What dangers in oceans and on beaches impede the survival rates of hatchlings?
 - In what ways does human behaviour affect turtles?
 - What are some ways that humans can change their habits in order to help turtles?
- Take note of the various shorebirds included in *Turtle Trackers*, such as beach stone-curlews, oystercatchers, black-winged stilts, red-capped plovers and silver gulls. How do these shorebirds reflect the relationship that Isaac had with his dad? Find out more about these shorebirds, and the role they play in the coastal biome.

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

- Throughout the text, Isaac notices different ways in which his mum smiles. How do these observations help the reader to understand the hardships his mother is facing? Below are some examples:
 - She smiled, but not a smile that reached her eyes. (p8)
 - Mum was smiling. A proper smile. With sparkling eyes and rounded cheeks. Like she used to. (p13)
- How would you describe the relationship Isaac has with his mother? How do you think this would be strengthened once they become turtle trackers together? Why?
- Shane says that 'patience always pays off in the end' (p13). How is this sentiment reflected in *Turtle Trackers*?
- In Chapter 3, we meet Mrs Halverson and her cat, Princess. What role does Mrs Halverson play in *Turtle Trackers*? Why does Isaac say she 'reminded me of a colourful bird' (p16)? How do Isaac and Mrs Halverson help one another during the course of the novel?
- We are told that Isaac and his mother don't have time to disagree, and that they never argue. Are there other reasons why they don't argue? Discuss.
- Using the descriptions of The Pines Holiday Village, make your own map of the caravan park. Include the different sites, and where certain guests stay.
- Write a reflection of a camping or caravanning holiday you have had with your family. How is Isaac's description of the park similar to or different from your experiences?
- How do the locals of the community, such as Mr Perera, help Isaac? In what ways does *Turtle Trackers* reveal the importance of community?
- In what ways does Isaac show courage and perseverance in *Turtle Trackers*? Give examples from the text to help illustrate your ideas.
- Isaac goes into great detail when describing the loggerhead turtle's appearance. Observe photos of loggerhead turtles and compare these images with Isaac's description on p9. Choose another species of turtle mentioned in *Turtle Trackers* and write your own piece of description based on images. Swap with a friend and sketch one another's animals using only the written description as your guide. Display these descriptions and sketches around the classroom.
- Discuss Samantha Wheeler's use of figurative language throughout *Turtle Trackers*. How do these language choices contribute to the quality of the storytelling? Some examples include:
 - I was jumpy, like a leopard on the hunt. (p1)
 - The turtle swept her front flippers beside her shell, like she was doing breaststroke on the land. (p12)
 - Sand flew every which way around her, like a mini dust storm. (p12)

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

- My stomach fizzed like a sherbet bomb. (p12)
- The spindly branches of the casuarinas sent long shadows across the glistening shore. (p45)
- His bare feet were whiter than the underbelly of a freshly caught fish. (p48)
- Wispy pink clouds made crocodile scales over the sky. (p80)
- Soft waves lapped at the beach. *Slap, whoosh. Slap, whoosh.* (p80)
- Her freckles looked like tiny flecks of caramel in the dimming light. (p81)
- The mess surrounding the nest was like shattered headstones in a graveyard. (p100)
- I...hovered like a fly while he unpacked. (p126)
- It was worse than seeing a shark's fin slice the ocean's surface. (p150)
- Princess was now biting at the cage, her teeth like razor-sharp daggers. (p150)
- Princess was being rocked like she was riding a two-humped camel. (p153)
- They followed me in a tight jerky pack, their leathery flippers swinging left and right like wind-up toys as they floundered in the sand. (p158)
- No longer clumsy little robots, they sped off like mini torpedoes in the water. (p159)
- Why does listening to the cricket on Mr Perera's radio bring tears to Isaac's eyes? (p66)
- Why is there a character like Sutto in *Turtle Trackers*? In what way does he reflect some people's ignorance about environmental issues? How does his attitude develop during the story?
- How does the fact that Isaac makes rules for the park show his passion for the turtles? Why does Sutto say that people don't care about rules? Do you agree or disagree with Sutto? Discuss.
- In what ways does *Turtle Trackers* make you think about your own consumer behaviour, such as using plastic bags and bright lights?
- Track the plot of *Turtle Trackers* on a story map. Consider creative ways in which to present this story map, for instance, using a map of The Pines Holiday Village or the Bundaberg/Mon Repos coastline as a backdrop, or the illustrations at the start of each chapter as prompts. For each plot point on the map, include each chapter's central idea.
- How has Isaac developed as a character from the beginning to the end of the text? What has allowed this growth to occur?
- What role does Jeffrey, the little loggerhead turtle, play in *Turtle Trackers*? Why does the author purposely make Isaac miss saying

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

goodbye to him? How does this make the ending more effective? Discuss the importance of satisfying endings in stories.

- Isaac has a collection of things that remind him of his dad. Create your own collection of sentimental objects that reflects the relationship you have with one of your family members. Choose one of these items and share with your class why this object is so precious, and how it represents your relationship with that person.
- How has the author used the moon to connect Isaac with his father?
- Discuss the advice Isaac's mum gives him about not having to 'fix everything at once' (p114), but rather doing small things that still make a difference.
- Isaac says that when helping guide the hatchlings to the water, 'we worked as a team' (p158). How is this theme central to *Turtle Trackers*?
- Investigate the problems that introduced species such as foxes, camels, rabbits, toads etc have had on native flora and fauna. Share your findings in an information report or multi-modal presentation.
- The concept of 'action' is an important theme of *Turtle Trackers*. Discuss the ways in which people of all ages and abilities have the capacity to act and contribute effectively to the community and the environment. How does Isaac go about creating such change through his action? What have you learnt about action through his experiences?
- Create a postcard of The Pines Holiday Village. In the role of one of the guests, write a postcard of your time at the caravan park to send to people back home.
- In the role of Mr Eastwood, write your travel article after having helped Isaac guide the hatchlings towards the water.
- Read Isaac's blog at the end of the text. Use this information to practise note-taking skills, using the same headings that the blog uses.
- As a class, write posts for your own blog based on *Turtle Trackers*.
- Complete a persuasive writing or speaking piece convincing the public to 'Cut the Glow'.
- Create an advertisement for The Pines Holiday Village, either suitable to air on television or radio, or to appear in print.
- Visit the websites listed on pages 179–180 of *Turtle Trackers*. Use these sites to add to your research notes. Using the research notes taken, present your findings about sea turtles in a mode of your choice. Suggestions include a website, blog, article, broadcast, podcast, brochure, poster or information report.
- Create an infographic that shows the life cycle of turtles.

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

My inspiration for *Turtle Trackers* came from two different sources: the first was a newspaper article about foxes destroying turtle nests on Stradbroke Island in South-East Queensland. The destruction led to members of a local wildlife group taking turns to sleep on the beach to keep the foxes away – a dedicated move indeed!

The second part of my inspiration came when my mum and dad convinced me to catch the Tilt Train from Brisbane up to Bundaberg with my eight-year-old niece, so we could join them on their caravanning holiday. Mum mentioned she'd booked us on a turtle tour, but I didn't think too much about it. When we arrived at the caravan park, it was quite run down, a long way from the turtle centre, and very windy! But Mum and Dad were so thrilled we had joined them that I muddled in to set up camp. The beach was a bit too choppy for swimming, but when we wandered down late that afternoon, we saw a big green turtle waddling up the dunes! My dad went nuts with the camera, and we kept our distance, but the turtle didn't seem to mind that we were there. What really struck me was how wide and distinctive her tracks were – so specific to a turtle rather than any other creature that may have ventured on to the beach.

And then, of course, there was the actual turtle tour! Seeing my niece's face as we crept along in the dark, hearing her whisper in excitement, and having her small hand cling tightly to mine: it was wonderful. Not to mention the privilege of seeing wild turtle hatchlings poke their heads up out of the sand to discover our world for the very first time!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samantha Wheeler fell in love with animals when she received a tortoise at the age of six. She went on to study agriculture, work with dairy farmers, and teach science, until writing her first children's book, inspired by koalas, in 2011. Her books, which include *Smooch & Rose*, *Spud & Charli*, *Mister Cassowary*, and *Wombat Warriors*, have been shortlisted for the Queensland Literary Awards, the Readings Children's Book Prize, The Wilderness Society's Environmental Award for Children's Literature, and the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales Whitley Awards. Samantha hopes her books will inspire everyone to make a difference. www.samanthawheeler.com.au