



## Reading by the Beach



BY SHARON KATZ COOPER

**A**ugust is a month for beach vacations and reading by the seashore. Children are naturally interested in nature and the ocean holds a special appeal. Crashing waves, salty water, fascinating creatures, the feel of sand beneath your feet – there is so much to observe and soak in.

The lazy days of summer are also great opportunities for reading together with your child. Reading, of course, stimulates a love of books and interest in the topics you may read about. It encourages literacy and learning in a supportive atmosphere outside of the formality of school.

To combine thoughts and experiences of the ocean and provide reading ideas, this month we present some of our favorite books about the ocean and activities to go along with them. Bring them to the beach to read together – or read them by a pool if you can't get to the beach. Remember your sunscreen!

### A Swim through the Sea

by Kristin Joy Pratt, 1994

**In this beautiful and poetic alphabet book about the ocean, young readers will meet all kinds of large and small ocean creatures. The basic text of the book is simple and melodic, but each page includes a lot of more detailed information for the parent, older child, or for research.**

Kristin Joy Pratt wrote this book when she was only 15 years old! You could try to write an ocean alphabet book too. Together, read through some other books about the ocean and look closely at the animals and plants in the margins of this book. Then assemble 26 sheets of paper, some crayons, and a stapler, and together come up with an ocean creature for every letter. You can draw a picture of each one, or find old magazines to cut up and make a collage.

### Over in the Ocean in a Coral Reef by

Marianne Berkes, 2004

**In this rhythmic counting book, readers will encounter seahorses, octopus, clownfish, needlefish, and more. On each page – illustrated in**

**colorful and textured polymer clay – children learn one significant fact about where or how the animal lives. Children are also challenged to count the animals, which are often hiding in their habitat. The back of the book includes music for the song, more detailed information about the animals and their babies, and some background on coral reefs.**

In the back of the book, there are some hints on creating a fingerplay for this story. Go through each of the action verbs in the book (e.g., squirt, grind, dart, jump, graze, skitter), and practice the hand movements. Then put on your fingerplay as you read or sing the story.

### This is the Sea that Feeds Us

by Robert F. Baldwin, 1998

**This is a book that goes beyond the details of animals themselves to focus on the relationships between them. In a lovely and poetic manner, this book traces an ocean food web, from the plankton at its base, to the people who eat large fish for dinner. Readers can learn about the flow of energy through the system and begin to appreciate the complexity of food webs – even those that bring them food for their own meals!**

Think about what would happen if the food chain in this book was disturbed? In other words, think together about what would happen without the shrimp? Or the plankton? What would happen to the foods we depend on? What would happen to the ocean?

### Octavia and her Purple Ink Cloud,

By Donna and Doreen Rathmell, 2006

**In this brand new and very fun book, a young octopus tries to figure out how to escape from hungry predators by squirting her purple ink cloud. But somehow it never comes out purple! In the process, we meet a whole bunch of other ocean critters, who all tell us how THEY hide or escape from animals that want to eat them.**

Many animals use camouflage to hide from animals that want to eat them. Camouflage means looking like their surroundings. Have your child draw what he or she might want to look like if she wanted to hide in the ocean. The forest? The grass?

### The Beauty of the Beast

Jack Prelutsky, 1997

**This is a beautifully illustrated book of poems about the animals of all kinds. In the chapter titled, "Jubilant, We Swim," children and parents can read poems by a variety of authors and in a variety of styles about fish, jellyfish, eels, oysters, crabs, octopus and more. The watercolor drawings are playful, colorful and calming.**

1. In the poem, "Fish," by Mary Ann Hoberman, there are many action words, such as wiggling, swerving and whizzing. Ask your child to act out each of these words. Can your child think of another animal that does each of the actions described in this poem?

2. In the poem, "Song of the Silver Fish," Margaret Wise Brown describes what sunlight and moonlight look like to a fish. Light changes when you look at it through water. Try an experiment. Fill a big glass or glass bowl with water and try looking through it at a light bulb or flashlight. What do you observe? How do other things in the room look different through the water? ♦

### This helps develop...

Reading together develops many language and literacy skills. It also contributes to a lifelong love of reading and learning.

*This monthly family activity series, "Hands-on-Kids!" is brought to you by a partnership between the Children's Museum of Northern Virginia (CMNOVA) and FAMILY Magazine. For more activities you can do with your children to spark their love of learning, visit the CMNOVA web site, [www.cmnova.org](http://www.cmnova.org). On their web site you will also find information about the Children's Museum of Northern Virginia and how you can become involved. CMNOVA is committed to building a place where our children can freely explore and develop a lifelong love of learning. Sharon Katz Cooper is a museum educator and freelance writer in Fairfax. She is a volunteer with CMNOVA.*