

# Book Review

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## **The specific ocean**

**Kyo Maclear and Illustrator Katty Maurey. (2015). Kids Can Press**

The star in this book is the Pacific Ocean, the main character and her family remain unnamed throughout. We learn that their family of four live in a large bustling city, I presume in America, and go on vacation along the Pacific coast. There is much for New Zealand children to relate to with our homeland being a South Pacific nation, and this same ocean makes up part of our psyche and childhood memories for many New Zealanders.

When arriving at the ocean destination, the girl assumes it holds no value and her vacation break will be 'boring'. However, once she spends time exploring she builds a strong admiration for the ocean's beauty and magic. It offers her stability and keeps her mindful. 'The whole world rushes ahead, but the ocean does its own thing, rolling backward and forward. Wash, swash, splush, hush. There is no late or hurry or racing in ocean time.' She forms a connection with nature, which she uses to lift her spirits. 'The ocean is so big that it makes every thought and worry I have shrink and scatter.' She personalizes this developing bond, with what was initially a mispronunciation – the specific ocean, a phrase that comes to symbolize the personal connection she feels with this special place. As someone who struggled as a child with pronunciation, I found that this vulnerability enhanced the story.

Another thread within the story that Kiwi kids will relate to is the concept of Whakawhanaungatanga – the ways by which people come into relationship with the world (including the land), with people, and with life. The girl sees value in her connection to the ocean as her parents do to their homelands.

'One thought stays. I want this ocean to be mine. Mama has a snowy mountain in Japan, and Papa has the South Downs in England. I want to put it in a bowl and carry it home to the city. If I had my own ocean, I could let my thoughts swim free and dream of an underwater life.'

There is also conservation message about protecting and preserving the ocean; but to me the main takeaway message is about the wellbeing benefits of feeling connected to something that is bigger than oneself.

‘Because even when I go home, back to the city and my friends it will all still be there deep down inside me [...]. No matter where I am, this specific ocean will be with me.’

**Reviewed by Kim Higginson, Information Management Specialist**

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