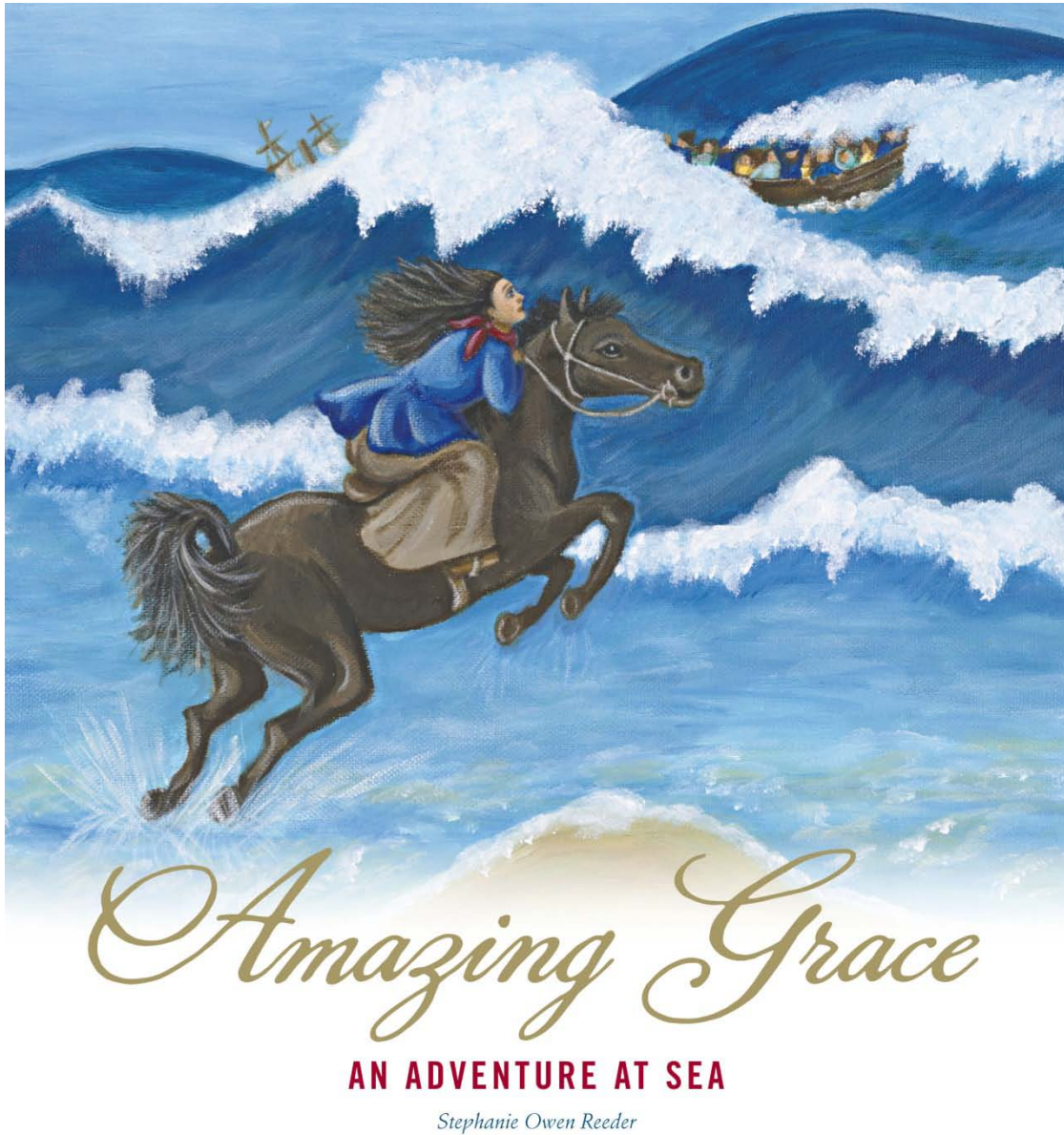


Teachers' Notes

Amazing Grace: An Adventure at Sea

by Stephanie Owen Reeder



RELEVANT CURRICULUM AREAS

Amazing Grace is ideal to use in the curriculum areas of:

- Visual Literacy
- Creative Arts
- Studies of Society and Environment (themes such as heroism, shipwrecks, pioneering life, Australian colonial history)
- Studies of Society and Environment (values such as compassion, resilience, fear, bravery, hope).

ABOUT AMAZING GRACE

Amazing Grace: An Adventure at Sea by Stephanie Owen Reeder is a fictionalised retelling of the true story of the sinking of the SS *Georgette*, a steam and sailing ship which was wrecked off the Western Australian coast in 1876. Grace Bussell, a 16-year-old girl who lived on a nearby farm, bravely rode her horse into the surf and helped to save over 50 people from drowning. However, she was not the only brave soul in this amazing tale of perseverance, selflessness and heroism.

Based on eye-witness accounts and newspaper articles from the time, as well as later versions of the story, *Amazing Grace* relates the story from the perspective of Grace, as well as the people on board both the ship and its ill-fated lifeboat. The book is lavishly illustrated with paintings and drawings from the 1800s, drawn from the vast Pictures Collection of the National Library of Australia, as well as illustrations by the author based on pictures from illustrated newspapers of the time.

Amazing Grace also features photographs of the main characters, as well as extracts from newspaper reports and from letters written by the people involved. Information sections at the end of each chapter cover the following topics:

- the *Georgette*
- life at sea
- pioneering life
- wrecks and rescues
- Christmas in the colonies
- communications and newspapers.

An epilogue relates what happened after the shipwreck and rescue to Grace, Sam and the other people involved. A glossary explains nautical terms, and a select bibliography provides suggestions for background reading.

ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

Family History

Have students interview their parents and grandparents to find out about their family history. Ask them to document it in a scrapbook. Some suggestions for the scrapbook are:

- photos and drawings of family members
- pictures of houses that they and family members have lived in or of a house that relatives built

- retellings of family stories that have been handed down from generation to generation or stories of their parents when they were children
- a family tree going back to great-grandparents, with information about the people featured
- a letter describing an exciting event in their lives or in the life of a family member
- newspaper-style interviews with family members
- a map showing where family members have lived in a particular state, or in Australia or in the world
- information about family Christmas traditions, including menus and recipes, decorations, presents, special traditions.

Local History

Busselton and Grace Bussell

Sadly, Grace Bussell's home, Wallcliffe House, which was built by her father in the 1860s and features in *Amazing Grace*, was destroyed in the bushfires that swept through the Margaret River area of Western Australia in November 2011, the month that *Amazing Grace* was released.

Ask students to:

- research the history of Wallcliffe House and either draw a picture or make a model of the house
- find a map of the Margaret River area and see how many things they can find (streets, towns, roads, highways, caves etc.) that are named after Grace, the Bussell family or the *Georgette*
- create a multimedia artwork showing either the sinking of the lifeboat or the wrecking of the *Georgette*. Select media, colours and imagery that best reflect the drama and horror of the situation
- choose their favourite character in *Amazing Grace*, and do a painting, drawing, collage or model construction which shows his/her role in the story.

The students' local area

Ask students to research the history of their local area and:

- identify any shipwrecks or other historical events of interest
- write either a newspaper report about the incident or a fictionalised retelling of the story
- draw, paint or construct a picture of the incident.

Heroes and Heroines

- Discuss with students the definition of a hero or heroine. Ask them who they think are heroes or heroines. (Does this include sports stars?)
- Have students research some modern child heroes. What brave act did they perform? Did they get a bravery medal? Were they as brave as Grace, Sam and James? As a class, have the students discuss what they would do in the situations in which the characters in *Amazing Grace* found themselves, and what they would do in similar situations as the modern child heroes they have researched.

Visual Literacy

Ask students to carefully look at one of the five images that appear at the end of each chapter:

- shipboard life (pages 32–33)
- fighting a bushfire (pages 48–49)
- surviving a shipwreck (pages 62–63)
- celebrating Christmas (pages 78–79)
- finding out about Australia (pages 94–95).

Have students discuss the images using the following questions as guidelines:

- What atmosphere has the artist tried to create?
- What have they used to create this atmosphere (colour, composition, linework)?
- What is the focal point of the picture? How does the artist draw your eye to this point? Why have they chosen this particular aspect of the image to focus on?
- How do the people in the picture feel? How has the artist used body language, facial expressions etc to communicate this?

Have students paint/draw or construct a picture of the same topic using a different focal point, and creating a different atmosphere by varying the colour, composition and/or linework, and changing the reactions of the people in the picture.

Creative Writing

Ask students to write a story based on one of the five narrative pictures that appear at the end of each chapter:

- shipboard life (pages 32–33)
- fighting a bushfire (pages 48–49)
- surviving a shipwreck (pages 62–63)
- celebrating Christmas (pages 78–79)
- finding out about Australia (pages 94–95).

Give students the following guidelines:

- Plot: What is happening in the picture? How will you structure your narrative? Where will your story start and end?
- Setting: Where and when is the story set? Is the setting integral to the story or does it just provide the background?
- Point of view: Whose point of view will you tell the story from (from one of the character's point of view or from a narrator's point of view)?
- Characters: Who is your main character and what sort of person is he/she? Who else will you feature?
- Theme: What is the point of the story? What message do you want to convey?
- Atmosphere and tone: What sort of story is it? How do you want the reader to feel?
- Title: What is the title of your story?

You can find other narrative paintings and images in the National Library of Australia's Pictures Collection, are available online at www.nla.gov.au.