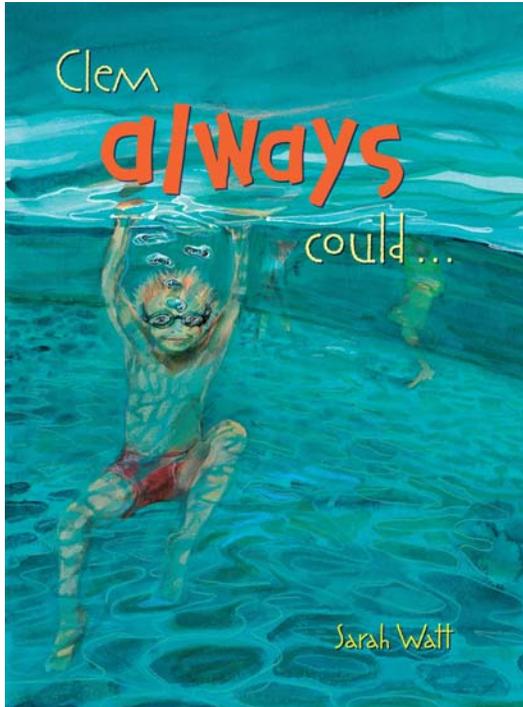


CLEM ALWAYS COULD

Author & Illustrator: SARAH WATT



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Teachers' Guide by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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INTRODUCTION

Clem can do lots of things. But he really doesn't want to learn to swim. How can his mother convince him to change his mind?

This picture book invites readers to engage with the issue of learning to swim from a child's perspective. Adults may well preach that swimming is easy, but to a young child that huge expanse of water can be terrifying.

Clem's story will encourage discussion of childhood fears and of milestones in personal development. Beautifully illustrated by the author it is a richly hued work which tells a story whilst conveying its emotional resonance visually.

Clem can do lots of things. And now one of them is swimming!

TOPICS & THEMES

Several **topics and themes** are covered in this work which might provoke class discussion:

- **Learning to Swim**

Activity: Discuss swimming and the importance of being able to swim.

Question: Ask students how they learned to swim, and at what age? Did they find it difficult? Invite students to write a brief story about how each of them learned to swim.

Activity: Clem thinks of all kinds of dangers in the water. Make a list of other things which might go wrong in the water. (Make them as funny as you can make them.)

Activity: Write a list of words which you might associate with swimming in a pool. How many can you think of?

Question: Clem is of school age. Would it have been easier for him, if he'd learned as a toddler, or even as a baby?

- **Overcoming Fears**

Activity: What are you frightened of? Some people hate spiders. Or dark corners. Or black cats. How have you overcome that fear?

- **Personal Achievements**

Activity: What are the things you like to do? What are your special skills? Start a story of your own, written in the style in which this one is written. e.g. 'Clem can make a bat and a ball out of anything... He has always like sport.' But use your own name instead.

LANGUAGE & LITERACY

- Every story has a **beginning** which gives the reader a hint as to how it is going to progress, such as 'Clem can do a lot of things' or 'On a dark and stormy night...'

Activity: Think of some interesting 'story beginnings'.

- **Rhyming** can be fun. e.g. 'Fat cat on the mat'.

Activity: Think of words to rhyme with the following words which appear in this text.

Sport		Waves	
Style		Scooter	
Bars		Head	
Friends		Puzzle	
Nice		Pool	
Jump		Keen	
Wink		Time	

- **Word Meanings**

Activity: There are some words in this text for which young readers may wish to search for dictionary meanings. e.g. determined, reasonable, decided, keen, bribery, invisible.

VISUAL LITERACY

- **Format in the design of the storyboard** in a picture book adds to its visual and narrative interest. Each of the double page spreads here are illustrated in a variety of formats. e.g. The opening page is a double page illustration bled to the edge of the page. The second and third pages depict Clem doing things cut out against a white background. There are also snapshots of him as a baby.

Activity: Examine the various styles in which each double page spread is designed. Then create your own images (to accompany the text written above) in one of these styles.

- **Sub-text in picture books is essential.** The pictures should show things the text doesn't say; they should enhance and expand on the written text.

Activity: Discuss sub-text in this book. e.g. When the text says that Clem 'has always had style' the picture shows a very mixed-up outfit consisting of a pirate hat, a beach shirt, and shorts worn over his pajama bottoms with sandals.

- **Perspective is important in a picture book.** It can convey a lot about the characters and the story.

Activity: In the picture where Clem goes to the pool for the first time, he and his mother are presented as tiny figures on the edge of a huge expanse of water which extends across a double page spread in the book, and across the gutter between the two pages. What does this picture convey about Clem's feelings?

- **Medium is the style and technique** used by the artist in a picture book.

Activity: The pictures here are painted in richly hued watercolours, overlaid with pastels, pencil and texta. Discuss this technique with students and then paint a picture using the same colour palette.

CREATIVE ARTS

- **Craft**

Activity: Make a pair of wacky swim goggles for Clem to wear to the pool. Find instructions at: <http://crafts.kaboose.com/swim-goggles.html>

Activity: Students might colour in pictures related to swimming. [See Bibliography for relevant websites.]

- **Display**

Activity: Make a classroom display of things associated with swimming. Add some of the books you've read which relate to swimming, and also the stories and pictures you've created.

- **Excursion**

Activity: Take the class on an excursion to the local pool as part of this unit of work.

CONCLUSION

Swimming can be fun. But it can also be scary for a first timer.

It's often just a matter of gaining confidence ... or of forgetting oneself for a moment.

And once you learn to swim, you simply can't remember a time when you couldn't!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR and ILLUSTRATOR

Sarah Watt is an award-winning film writer, producer, director and animator. In 1995, she directed a short film, *Small Treasures*, which won Best Short at the Venice Film Festival. In 2000, she made a program for the SBS series *Swim Between the Flags*. She received the Australian Film Institute's award for best Director for her 2005 film *Look Both Ways* which she wrote for her husband William McInnes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. She teaches writing for children and young adults at Griffith University (Gold Coast) where she gained her PhD for a thesis on the development of the Australian children's publishing industry. One of her latest publications is *Paper Empires a History of the Book in Australia 1946-2005* (co-edited with Craig Munro) (UQP, 2006). Some of her most recent articles have been a profile of publisher Rosalind Price for *Magpies* (November 2007), a celebration of Shaun Tan's work for *The Australian Author* (December 2007), a profile of Jan Pienkowski for *Magpies* (March 2008), and one on Indigenous Publishing (May 2009) also for *Magpies*. She writes teachers and reading group notes for a variety of publishers.