

# Title: *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell (Published in 1960)

## Approved for use in High School Reading Intervention Setting

### Summary of the Work:

*Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell is a historical fiction novel based on the true story of a Native American girl who survives alone on an island off the California coast. The story follows Karana, a young girl left behind when her tribe is evacuated after a violent conflict with Russian fur traders and Aleuts. Over the years, Karana learns to fend for herself, building shelter, making weapons, hunting, and forming unexpected bonds with animals, especially a wild dog she names Rontu. As she faces isolation, natural threats, and emotional loss, Karana's resilience and connection to nature help her endure. The novel explores themes of survival, independence, identity, and the human need for companionship.

### Rationale:

*Island of the Blue Dolphins* provides accessible yet rich opportunities to build key literacy skills while engaging students with a compelling narrative. The novel allows students to explore themes of resilience, self-reliance, and personal growth through the experiences of Karana, a young girl who must survive alone after being left behind on her island.

The novel's clear setting and vivid environmental details offer a foundation for teaching setting and environmental analysis, while the use of symbolism and imagery deepens students' understanding of how authors convey complex ideas through literary elements.

Karana's evolving relationship with the animals on the island, especially her bond with Rontu, provides a meaningful lens for discussing the emotional and symbolic role of animal companionship in human survival and identity formation.

The unit culminates in a character development map, a summative task that reinforces reading comprehension and analysis by requiring students to trace and explain Karana's emotional, psychological, and moral growth over time. This activity supports struggling readers by organizing key story elements in a structured, visual format.

### Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

#### The Guardian

A reviewer from *The Guardian* awarded the book 4.5 out of 5 stars, praising it for portraying "the resilient beauty and strength of a brave girl."

#### Lauren Wolk, Author

Lauren Wolk, writing for *The Guardian*, shared that the novel "helped me become [a strong and resourceful young woman] myself," emphasizing its influence on her personal development and writing aspirations.

#### Montessori Foundation

The Montessori Foundation recommends the book for readers aged 12 and up, noting its themes of isolation and perseverance. They highlight Karana's journey as a testament to resilience and self-reliance.

#### Newton Public Library

A review from the Newton Public Library describes the novel as "a unique story of survival and strength," commending its beautifully descriptive writing and the portrayal of Karana's "amazing girl-power moments."

#### YABooksCentral

A reviewer on YABooksCentral remarks that the book "makes you think," appreciating its narrative of a girl who, after losing her family, learns to survive and adapt, forming connections with animals and discovering more about herself.

### Noted Distinction:

#### John Newbery Medal (1961)

Awarded by the American Library Association for the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children.

#### Lewis Carroll Shelf Award (1961)

Recognizes books that belong on the same shelf as *Alice in Wonderland* for their enduring quality.

#### William Allen White Children's Book Award (1963)

Selected by Kansas schoolchildren, this award honors books that have made a significant impact on young readers.

#### Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis (1963)

Germany's Youth Literature Prize, acknowledging outstanding children's literature.

#### Nene Award (1964)

Hawaii's children's choice award, reflecting the preferences of young readers in the state.

#### International Board on Books for Young People Honor List (1962)

Recognizes books of high literary and artistic quality that are accessible to children worldwide.

#### Southern California Council on Literature for Children and Young People Notable Book (1961)

Highlights notable contributions to children's literature in Southern California.

#### Pomona Friends of the Library Award (1961)

Acknowledges significant literary works recognized by the Pomona community.

#### George C. Stone Center for Children's Books Recognition (1971)

Honors books that promote peace, social justice, and environmental responsibility.

#### Rupert Hughes Award

Recognizes excellence in literature, though specific details about this award are less commonly documented.

#### Lexile Score: 1000

#### Readability Level: 5.4

#### Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

#### Standard Alignment: CCSS 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3, 9-10.5, 9-10.6, 9-10.9

#### Approval:

#### Submitted to Committee:

#### Approved for Adoption:

### Notes on the Text:

While *Island of the Blue Dolphins* is written at a 5th grade readability level, it remains appropriate for older students in reading intervention or enrichment settings because of its themes of isolation, survival, and personal resilience, which offer depth for discussion and analysis beyond the surface reading level.

### Connection to the Curriculum:

As an anchor text for Unit One: Survival and Isolation, this novel provides a highly accessible yet thematically rich narrative that supports both the literacy skill development in a high school reading intervention curriculum. The novel explores how isolation (physical and emotional) can shape a person's identity, values, and cultural understanding, making it a strong foundational piece for discussions around the broader concept of Culture and Identity.

### Additional Connections:

Students will read, listen, and view supplemental texts: "The Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island," *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park excerpt, *My Side of the Mountain* by Jean C. George excerpt, *Nell* movie scene, "Teens who seek solitude may be on the right track" article, and "Loneliness is bad for Brains" article.