

Task for *Past the Shallows*

Ways of reading texts

Texts are not created in vacuum. Authors are conscious of a world of textuality from their own reading and the texts they read build on others. We can therefore see *Past the Shallows* as being part of a much bigger picture – part of a wider world of texts that draw on the sea for their imagery and for their meaning. Drawing students' attention to the ways the sea has been represented through different texts makes them aware of the interconnectedness of texts for imparting meaning, with every new text building on the texts that have come before.

The sea is a powerful motif and often represents the experience of human struggle. The struggle is often physical with humans – usually males – fighting the elements of the sea and either conquering or losing the struggle. What follows is usually an emotional awakening, as the characters involved come to understand something within themselves or about their relationship with the world. Many myths and legends especially from island states centre on the sea because it is also such an important source of food. Canonical texts where the sea is a central character include:

- the American novels: *Moby Dick* (Herman Melville, 1851), *The Old Man and The Sea* (Ernest Hemingway, 1952)
- the English poem: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1834)
- the Australian novel: *For the Term of his Natural Life* (Marcus Clarke, 1872 – also a [Reading Australia text](#) and [teaching resource](#))
- the Norwegian non-fiction text: *The Kon-Tiki Expedition* (Heyerdahl, 1948)

The sea is not just a setting or backdrop: it creates a space for discovery, connecting different places but also connecting with the mind. The sea also has a spiritual connection through the Bible with Jesus' disciples as fishermen who depended on the sea for their sustenance. More recent Australian writers, especially Tim Winton, have also used the sea as an essential part of their texts. Indeed, Favel Parrett's second novel, *When the Night Comes* (Hachette, 2014) again uses the sea and the Southern Ocean as a powerful creative force in her work.

Ask students:

- How much does Favel Parrett's book draw from past traditions of the sea in literature?

Read the extracts below to answer this question.

Firstly consider:

- How is the sea represented? Consider the language that is used
- How do humans relate to the sea in the extract?
- What emotion about the sea is each extract designed to evoke in the reader?
- Which is the most effective extract for you – explain why.

Then answer the question:

- How much does Favel Parrett's book draw from past traditions of the sea in literature?

Find an extract from the novel *Past the Shallows* that you think could be added to these extracts below as an example of the way the sea is represented.

Extract 1: [*For the Term of his Natural Life*](#) (Marcus Clarke)

Chapter VI: *The Fate of the "Hydaspes"*

The well-lighted, well-furnished cuddy, the homely mirth of the fore-castle, the setting of sentries and the changing of guards, even the gloom and terror of the closely-locked prison, combined to make the voyagers feel secure against the unknown dangers of the sea. That defiance of Nature which is born of contact with humanity, had hitherto sustained them, and they felt that, though alone on the vast expanse of waters, they were in companionship with others of their kind, and that the perils one man had passed might be successfully dared by another. But now — with one ship growing smaller behind them, and the other, containing they knew not what horror of human agony and human helplessness, lying a burning wreck in the black distance ahead of them — they began to feel their own littleness. The Malabar, that huge sea monster, in whose capacious belly so many human creatures lived and suffered, had dwindled to a walnut-shell, and yet beside her bulk how infinitely small had their own frail cockboat appeared as they shot out from under her towering stern! Then the black hull rising above them, had seemed a tower of strength, built to defy the utmost violence of wind and wave; now it was but a slip of wood floating — on an unknown depth of black, fathomless water. The blue light, which, at its first flashing over the ocean, had made the very stars pale their lustre, and lighted up with ghastly radiance the enormous vault of heaven, was now only a point, brilliant and distinct it is true, but which by its very brilliance dwarfed the ship into insignificance. The Malabar lay on the water like a glow-worm on a floating leaf, and the glare of the signal-fire made no more impression on the darkness than the candle carried by a solitary miner would have made on the abyss of a coal-pit.

And yet the Malabar held two hundred creatures like themselves!

The water over which the boats glided was black and smooth, rising into huge foamless billows, the more terrible because they were silent. When the sea hisses, it speaks, and speech breaks the spell of terror; when it is inert, heaving noiselessly, it is dumb, and seems to brood over mischief. The ocean in a calm is like a sulky giant; one dreads that it may be meditating evil. Moreover, an angry sea looks less vast in extent than a calm one. Its mounting waves bring the horizon nearer, and one does not discern how for many leagues the pitiless billows repeat themselves. To appreciate the hideous vastness of the ocean one must see it when it sleeps.

The great sky uprose from this silent sea without a cloud. The stars hung low in its expanse, burning in a violent mist of lower ether. The heavens were emptied of sound, and each dip of the oars was re-echoed in space by a succession of subtle harmonies. As the blades struck the dark water, it flashed fire, and the tracks of the boats resembled two sea-snakes writhing with silent undulations through a lake of quicksilver.

Extract 2: [*The Old Man and the Sea*](#) (Ernest Hemingway)

Page 10

He always thought of the sea as la mar which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her. Sometimes those who love her say bad things of her but they are always said as though she were a woman. Some of the younger fishermen, those who used buoys as floats for their lines and had motorboats, bought [29] when the shark livers had brought much money, spoke of her as el mar which is masculine. They spoke of her as a contestant or a place or even an enemy. But the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman, he thought.

Extract 3: [‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’](#) (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

The western wave was all a-flame.
The day was well nigh done!
Almost upon the western wave
Rested the broad bright Sun;
When that strange shape drove suddenly
Betwixt us and the Sun.

...

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

...

I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.

Extract 4: [*Kon-Tiki: Across the Pacific by Raft*](#) (Thor Heyerdahl)

As the troughs of the sea gradually grew deeper, it became clear that we had moved into the swiftest part of the Humboldt Current. This sea was obviously caused by a current and not simply raised by the wind. The water was green and cold and everywhere about us; the jagged mountains of Peru had vanished into the dense cloud banks astern. When darkness crept over the waters, our first duel with the elements began. We were still not sure of the sea; we were still uncertain whether it would show itself a friend or an enemy in the intimate proximity we ourselves had sought. When, swallowed up by the darkness, we heard the general noise from the sea around us suddenly deafened by the hiss of a roller close by and saw a white crest come groping toward us on a level with the cabin roof, we held on tight and waited uneasily to feel the masses of water smash down over us and the raft. But every time there was the same surprise and relief. The Kon-Tiki calmly swung up her stern and rose skyward unperturbed, while the masses of water rolled along her sides. Then we sank down again into the trough of the waves and waited for the next big sea. The biggest seas often came two or three in succession, with a long series of smaller seas in between. It was when two big seas followed each other too closely that the second broke on board aft, because the first was still holding our bow in the air. It became, therefore, an unbreakable law that the steering watch must have ropes round their waists, the other ends of which were made fast to the raft, for there were no bulwarks. Their task was to keep the sail filled by holding stern to sea and wind.