

Opinion: What Have Other People Thought About *Island of the Blue Dolphins*?

It's an award winner!

Winning the Newbery Medal for *Island of the Blue Dolphins* was a great honor for Scott O'Dell. The Newbery Medal was the first and most important award the book won, but it was not the only one. Since then, *Island of the Blue Dolphins* has won at least twelve other awards from national and international groups.

Book critics loved the book, too. A writer for *The New York Times* called it “haunting” and said that O'Dell's writing style was “beautifully fitted to his subject.” A critic writing in *The Times* of London called it “a novel of the highest excellence.”

But as exciting as it was to have adults praise his work, O'Dell was also pleased that children loved his book. *Island of the Blue Dolphins* has been read by children all around the world, and has been translated into at least twenty-three languages.

Is this a true story?

This kind of question often comes up with a work of historical fiction. How is the reader to know what is fact and what is fiction? Sometimes the reader can only find out by learning more about the historical time described. Often, though, the author

will include a section that helps explain what is real and what comes from his imagination, as O'Dell does in his Author's Note at the end of *Island of the Blue Dolphins*.

Scott O'Dell used even more facts than the ones he mentions in his Author's Note. For instance, many details about the islanders' everyday lives came from facts about the real Channel Island Indians.

What we consider to be the "facts" of history sometimes changes over time, too. Since O'Dell wrote *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, a number of researchers have questioned certain facts about the Lost Woman's life. For instance, some think that she might have been in her twenties when she was left behind and that the child she went back for was her son, not her brother. Nevertheless, O'Dell used the facts as he understood them at the time. From the information he had, he wrote a powerful story that realistically describes what it must have been like for a young woman to be left alone on an island for eighteen years.

Is the story too sad for children?

Many sad things happen in *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, from the deaths of Chowig, Ramo, and the other tribespeople to Karana's loss of Rontu, Tutok, and, finally, her island home. Is this too much sadness in a story for children? Some people think so. Others say that the sadness is brightened by Karana's brave spirit, her exciting adventures, and her final success in leaving the island to be with other people again.

**Thinking about what others think about
*Island of the Blue Dolphins***

- Why do you think *Island of the Blue Dolphins* has won so many awards? What makes it special? Did you like it as much as other people seem to like it?
- Do you like historical fiction? When you read historical fiction, do you want to know which part is fact and which part is fiction?
- Overall, did the novel seem too sad to you? Or were only some parts of the novel too sad? If so, which ones?

Glossary



- bales** large bundles tied tightly together
- brush** land covered with shrubs and short trees
- canyon** a deep narrow valley with steep sides
- carcass** a dead body of an animal
- cove** a small sheltered bay or inlet along a coast
- crevice** a crack or split in something
- fledglings** young birds
- gruel** a thin meal made by cooking food in water; watery porridge
- headland** a point of land high above the sea
- kelp** large brown seaweed
- lair** a place where wild animals live and rest
- league** a measure of distance, about three miles (five kilometers)
- lure** an attraction
- mesa** a steep hill with a flat top
- omen** a sign or warning about something that will happen in the future
- paces** footsteps used to measure distance

parley to discuss something you disagree about

pelt an animal skin with the fur or hair still attached

pitch a dark, sticky substance made from wood or other materials

planks thick wooden boards

ponder to think carefully about

ravine a deep, narrow valley that is smaller than a canyon

rites acts done for a ceremony

shirkers people who avoid doing what they should do

shrouded covered

sinews tough cords of tissue that connect muscles to bones or other body parts

snare trap

spit a narrow strip of land that juts out into the water

stunted has not grown properly

trinkets jewelry worth very little