

**An Educator's Guide for *Down Under the Pier*** by Nell Cross Beckerman, illustrated by Rachel Sumpter

## **ABOUT THE BOOK**

There's lots of fun to be had up on the pier—the Ferris wheel, the rollercoaster, Skee-Ball and Whac-A-Mole, cotton candy, copper coins, the carousel. But it's down under the pier, at low tide, where the real magic can be found. The best part? It's free. Nell Beckerman's poetic text and deep love of the intertidal zone, and Rachell Sumpter's dreamy, "endless summer" art make this the perfect beach book.

"A dreamy tribute to summer days—and sea life and the spaces in-between."—*Kirkus*

"This colorful celebration of nature's wonders and children's curiosity showcases the beauty of the outdoors, and its sight words and easy-to-understand language make it ideal for newly independent readers." —*Booklist*

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Nell Cross Beckerman** writes picture books inspired by the magic of nature and the human spirit. She has produced, written, and directed shows for VH1, MTV, MSNBC, and the Discovery Channel. She lives in Venice Beach with her husband and two daughters. Visit her at [nellcrossbeckerman.com](http://nellcrossbeckerman.com)

## **ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR**

**Rachell Sumpter** is a painter and illustrator whose work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *McSweeney's*, the *Boston Globe*, and *O Magazine*. She also is an art professor, shows her work in galleries, teaches workshops at museums, and enjoys reading, observing nature, and spending time with her partner and their two children. She lives in Seattle. This is her first children's book.

## **ABOUT THIS GUIDE**

**About this resource: All of the following activities are designed with students in Kindergarten-Third Grade in mind. They can be adapted and differentiated for other grade levels and student needs. Common Core Standards and Next Generation Science Standards connections are listed at the end. Educators' Guide created by Kari Allen. Visit her website [kariallenwrites.com](http://kariallenwrites.com) for more information.**

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **Before reading:**

1. Discuss the title. What do you think is going to happen in the book? Why do you think the author used both the word *down* and *under*?

2. Look at the cover and endpapers. What predictions do you have before reading?

**During/after reading:**

1. Have you ever been to a pier? Where are there piers? What do you know about them?
2. Have you been to the ocean? What is it like? Describe it using your senses. (Highlight the sensory language used throughout the text.)
3. How does the author use sensory language to draw you in?
4. The background color of the illustrations changes throughout the text. What do you notice? Why do you think the color changes?
5. Explore the backmatter. What do you notice?
6. The author donates some of the money *Down Under the Pier* makes to Heal the Bay. Why do you think the author chose to do this? Why would the bay need help?

## WRITING/LITERACY CONNECTIONS

1. In *Down Under the Pier* the children explore a secret world. Is there a place you know about that feels similar? Describe this place. (See printable writing page.)

For example, have you ever lifted up a rotting log or explored under a lifted stone? Have you ever dug under the snow and seen what's there? Is there a spot that few people know about, but you've taken the time to look and explore?

2. *Down Under the Pier* uses the same repeating phrase as the title throughout the book. Write a class (or individual) piece with a similar refrain about a place you know well. (See printable writing sheet.)
  - Down Under the Slide..
  - Over Behind the Bookshelf...
  - Up Above in a Tree
3. Compare and contrast *up on the pier* and *down under the pier*. (See printable Compare and Contrast sheet.)
4. Use the title and the text to teach about prepositions.

## SCIENCE

1. *Down Under the Pier* lists many interesting creatures. Research one of the animals listed. Write a nonfiction piece about the animal. Use the backmatter to help you!

List of animals in the book:

- Acorn Barnacles

- Gooseneck Barnacles
- Anemones
- Mole Crabs
- Mussels
- Sea Stars
- Snails

Extension: Look at a sampling of field guides. What do you notice about this kind of book? (explore the idea of active nonfiction created by Melissa Stewart ([link it here](#)). Create a field guide for *Down Under the Pier*. Or create a field guide for a microhabitat that you might be able to find in your area. (For example, a vernal pool, a pond, a forest, a swamp, a park). (See printable resource for making your own guidebook.)

2. Go on a nature walk. Record your observations using your senses. (See printable recording sheet.)

Extension: Gather samples in a responsible, safe and eco-friendly way. Using the questions (or make up your own list of questions) from the book, think about and explore what you have found.

“Is it alive?  
Will it bite?  
Will it pinch?  
Will it pierce?  
Will it do anything at  
all if we just gently  
poke it?”

## **OTHER:**

1. Seashell Watercolor Craft- display a collection of seashells. Each student should pick a seashell and spend a few minutes observing it. What do they notice? What patterns do they see? Have students draw the seashell first with permanent marker and then watercolor over the outline. Label the drawing with descriptive words. Options: Brainstorm a list of descriptive words as a whole group.

## **VOCABULARY:**

Words to Explore:

- pier
- gobble
- dash
- inhale
- festoon
- pilings
- scamper
- souvenir
- goosebumps

Vocabulary Activities:

- Define the words
- Look for common spelling patterns
- Think of rhyming words
- Clap/tap syllables

## **Other Picture Books that Connect to *Down Under the Pier* to create text sets:**

- *Over and Under the Snow* written by Kate Messner, illustrated by Christopher Silas Neal (You could use any book from this series.)
- *Hum and Swish* written and illustrated by Matt Myers
- *My Ocean is Blue* written by Darren Lebeuf and illustrated by Ashley Barron
- *Swashby and the Sea* written by Beth Ferry, illustrated by Juana Martinez Neal
- *Wonder Walkers* written and illustrated by Micha Archer
- *Grand Canyon* written and illustrated by Jason Chin

## **COMMON CORE and NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS connections for *Down Under the Pier* and the activities in this guide:**

### **K-LS1-1 From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes**

Use observations to describe patterns of what plants and animals (including humans) need to survive.

### **K-ESS3-1 Earth and Human Activity**

Use a model to represent the relationship between the needs of different plants and animals (including humans) and the places they live.

### **K-ESS3-3 Earth and Human Activity**

Communicate solutions that will reduce the impact of humans on the land, water, air, and/or other living things in the local environment.\*

### **2-LS4-1 Biological Evolution: Unity and Diversity**

Make observations of plants and animals to compare the diversity of life in different habitats.

### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.4**

Ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.

### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.9**

With prompting and support, compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in familiar stories.

### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.4**

Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.

### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.4**

Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K.2** Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic.