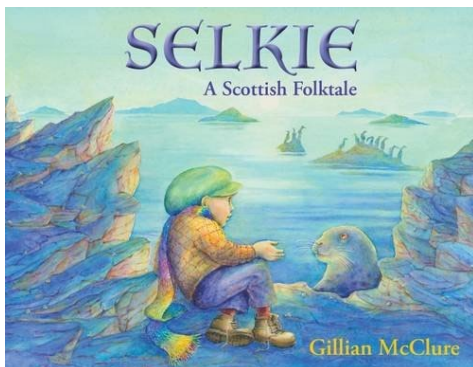


Selkies and Mermaids

Selkie Stories

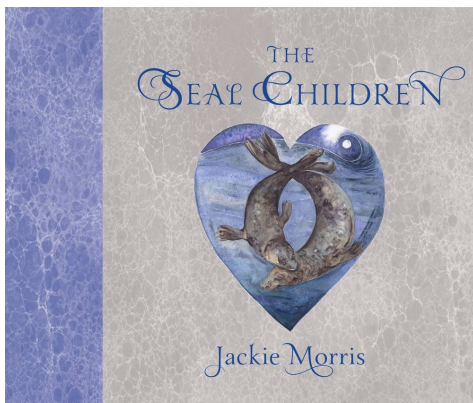
There are many stories about selkies – half-human, half-seal - and these are especially strong around the coasts of Scotland and Ireland. When a selkie sheds her, or sometimes his, sealskin, so that she can live with a human partner and have children, it is inevitable that one day the desire to don the sealskin again and return to the sea will be too strong to resist.



Selkie: A Scottish Folktale by Gillian McClure

Troika 9781909991262

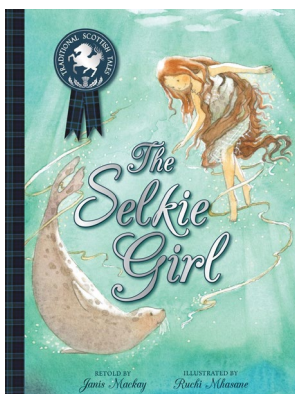
Peter lives with his granny by the edge of the sea in Scotland. Longing to visit the nearby Seal Island, he follows the oysterman who knows a safe way to cross when the tide is low. Peter discovers that the oysterman is plotting to catch a Selkie, believing that she will teach him the language of the sea and reveal to him its riches. Will Peter be able to help Selkie escape from the oysterman's clutches? This picture book version of the story is about friendship rather than romance and also about trust and co-operation between beings of the land and of the sea. The entrancing illustrations, frequently framed by seashells and sea creatures, emphasise the overlapping of watery and terrestrial worlds.



The Seal Children by Jackie Morris

Otter-Barry Books 9781910959473

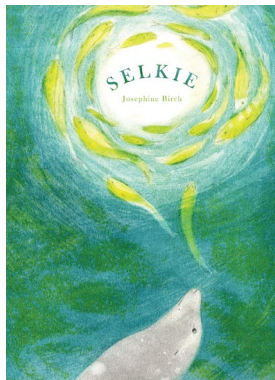
Jackie Morris sets her picture book version in a Welsh coastal village close to where she lives. The selkie in this story never forsakes her children Ffion and Morlo and both emerge into new lives as a result of their mother's love. Blues, mauves and greens blend as land, sea and sky merge in the evocative illustrations of this beautiful new hardback edition of a book which won the Tír na nÓg Welsh children's book award. For more books by Jackie Morris see <https://clpe.org.uk/clpe/library/booklists/jackie-morris-booklist>



The Selkie Girl by Janis Mackay and Ruchi Mhasane

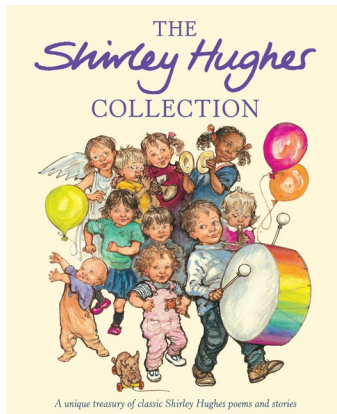
Kelpies 9781782501305

Fergus, son of a Scottish fisherman, finds 'a dark shiny fur speckled with silver' on the shore and takes home his treasure, not realising it belongs to a selkie girl who has shed it while on land. She seeks him out and he returns her special skin. The two children become fast friends and selkie Shonagh ensures Fergus's father's fishing nets are always full.



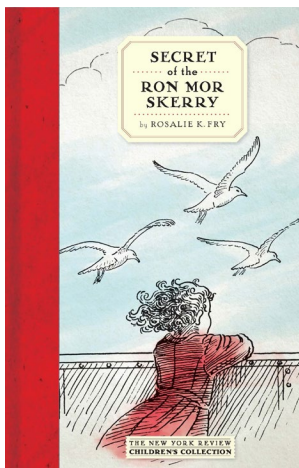
Selkie by Josephine Birch
Starfish Bay Publishing 9781760360542

This wordless picture book, bathed in subtle shades of green, blue and yellow, shows the story of a fisherman who pitches overboard into the sea, becoming enmeshed in one of his own nets. He is rescued by a seal and temporarily transformed into a creature of the same shape.



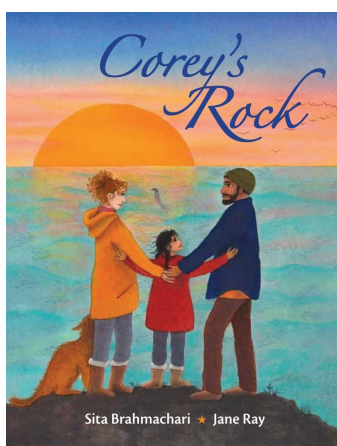
'Sea Singing' by Shirley Hughes included in **The Shirley Hughes Collection**
Bodley Head 9780370326825

A girl staying with her mother's artist friend Morag hears what sounds like a woman's voice coming from the sea. This leads to Morag telling her the haunting story of a seal woman who sheds her skin, takes human form, becomes a fisherman's wife and bears him children. Fearful of losing her, the fisherman hides his selkie wife's sealskin, moving it from place to place, but allowing her to hold it from time to time, with the eventual inevitable consequences. First published in *Stories by Firelight* by Shirley Hughes.



Secret of the Ron Mor Skerry by Rosalie K. Fry
New York Review of Books 9781681371665

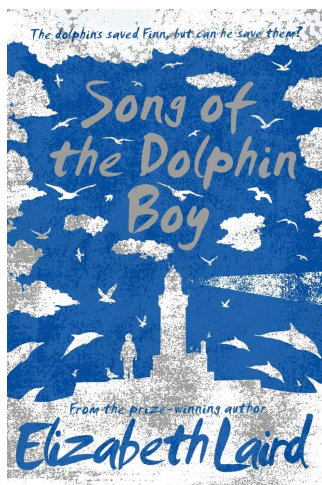
Ten-year-old Fiona is returning to the Scottish isles, where she spent her early years, to stay with her grandparents who have always lived there. There is a deep sadness in the family as Fiona's little brother Jamie is believed to have been lost at sea some years before. The strong connection to people and place is important in her determination to find Jamie and retain their island home, as is their mysterious ancestry related to the seal people. This evocative short novel is the book on which the film *The Secret of Roan Inish*, which transposes the setting to Ireland, is based.



Corey's Rock by Sita Brahmachari and Jane Ray
Otter-Barry Books 9781910959978

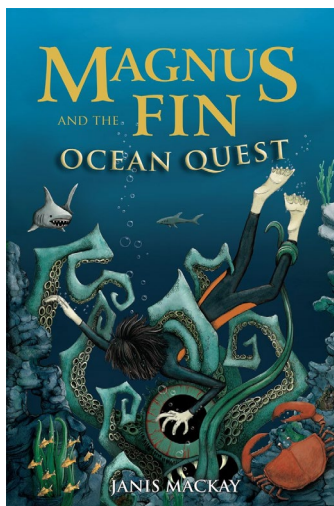
Sita Brahmachari subtly and skilfully weaves a selkie skin into this story which has a contemporary setting in the Orkney Islands. Jane Ray's luminous illustrations evoke the aquatic environment and the liminal space between sand and sea where Isla and her family are seeking a new beginning following the loss of her brother Corey. Halfway through the story a Celtic knot design common to Isla's father's Yoruba heritage and her mother's Orcadian one twines across the page visually uniting the strands of her dual heritage. A beautiful collaboration between an author

and illustrator which brings together themes of loss and new beginnings, friendship and cultural heritage. A CLPE core book <https://clpe.org.uk/corebooks/coreys-rock> A teaching sequence for this book is available to Power of Reading subscribers.



Song of the Dolphin Boy by Elizabeth Laird, illustrated by Peter Bailey
Macmillan 9781509828234

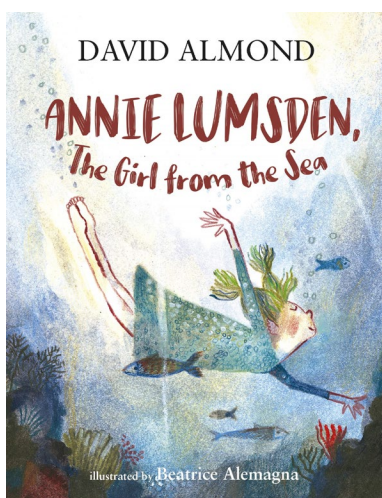
Finn lives with his father in a small coastal community in Scotland and is initially rejected by the other children in the village. After accidentally falling into the sea, he discovers why he feels different. In this story the shapeshifting mother is a dolphin rather than a seal but the link with the selkie storytelling tradition is clear. There is a strong environmental theme in this book. For more books by Elizabeth Laird see <https://clpe.org.uk/library-and-resources/booklists/author-month-elizabeth-laird>



Magnus Fin and the Ocean Quest by Janis Mackay
Kelpies 9780863157028

Magnus Fin leads a rather lonely life in a northern Scottish coastal village. He and his family are regarded as strange, especially by other children. Magnus's parents appear to be aging extremely rapidly and this is a cause for comment and estrangement. On his eleventh birthday his father reveals that Magnus is half selkie and this becomes a turning point as he comes to know his underwater family and has to use his wits and empathetic understanding to help them in an adventure which has environmental as well as supernatural elements. Magnus's story continues in:

Magnus Fin and the Moonlight Mission 9780863157967
Magnus Fin and the Selkie Secret 9780863158650



Annie Lumsden, The Girl from the Sea by David Almond, illustrated by Beatrice Alemagna
Walker 9781406377590

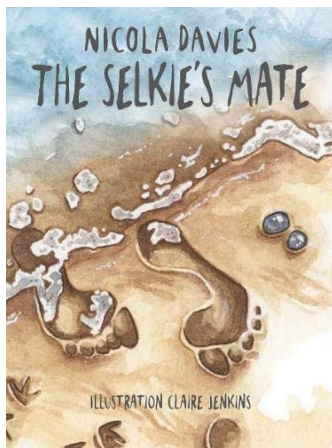
Annie Lumsden lives by the sea with her mother who sells models made from shells and sings shanties in the Slippery Eel. Annie finds conventional learning hard to fathom and often falls and tumbles but when she enters the water she feels she has become 'truly as I am – Annie Lumsden, seal girl, fish girl, dolphin girl'. She wants to know where she came from and who her father is and one day, as they sit on the shore, her Mam tells her a story. Touchingly told from Annie's own point of view, this story previously appeared in David Almond's short story collection *Half a Creature from the Sea* (Walker 9781406365597), and is here beautifully blended with Beatrice Alemagna's pictures that

capture both its human warmth and its aquatic mystery. A CLPE core book <https://clpe.org.uk/corebooks/annie-lumsden-girl-sea>



A Stranger Came Ashore by Mollie Hunter
 Kelpies 9780863158834

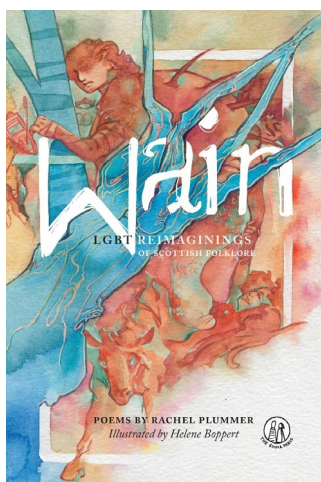
When Finn Learson appears in Black Ness, a village in the Shetland Isles, everyone assumes he is the survivor of a shipwreck. As the stranger insinuates himself into the community, twelve-year-old Robbie starts to suspect that Finn is not who he appears to be and that his motives may be malign. A modern classic of Scottish children's literature that draws hauntingly on selkie folklore.



The Selkie's Mate by Nicola Davies illustrated by Claire Jenkins
 Graffeg 9781913733483

In Nicola Davies' version, one of the Shadow & Light series of illustrated short stories from folklore, a Selkie entrusts a young crofter with her sealskin, on condition that he takes care of it and returns it to her if she asks. After seven years of happiness during which time she gives birth to twins, the Selkie asks the crofter to give her back her skin. Three times she asks him, but each time he procrastinates, crafting gifts that combine natural elements of land and sea. The loss of trust wears away at their relationship until one day their children become the agents of their mother's restoration to her old life. Claire Jenkins' illustrations, with their partial revelations, encapsulate the mystery underlying the tale – for example, never showing the faces of the characters. For more books by Nicola Davies see

<https://clpe.org.uk/clpe/library/booklists/nicola-davies-booklist>



Wain. LGBT Reimaginings of Scottish Folktales by Rachel Plummer,
 illustrated by Helene Boppert
 The Emma Press 9781910139479

These poems bring Scottish folklore into the modern age while still retaining their ancient beauty and timeless quality. They demonstrate that the old stories have transformative power and the fairy creatures they speak of can be mutable and shapeshifting. Readers are transported to the Scottish landscape and its surrounding sea where they meet selkies, kelpies, brownies, nimblemen and finfolk. Shortlisted for CLiPPA 2020 a teaching sequence designed for upper Key Stage 3 which includes the poems 'Selkie' and 'Blue Men of the Minch' can be found here:

<https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/teaching-resources/clippa-teaching-sequences/wain-lgbt-reimaginings-scottish-folklore>

Films Featuring Selkies:

The Secret of Roan Inish directed by John Sayles (1994)

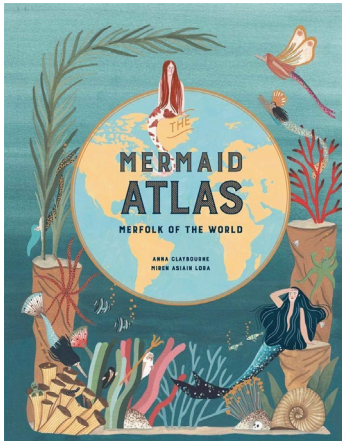
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0111112/?ref=vp_back

Song of the Sea directed by Tomm Moore (2014)

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1865505/>

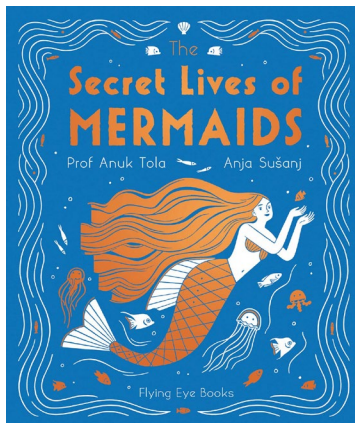
Mermaids

There are many stories about mermaids in children's literature. Here is a selection of picture books and novels in which they appear.



The Mermaid Atlas by Anna Claybourne and Miren Asiain Lora
 Laurence King 9781786275844

Merfolk can be found in myths and legends around the world. They are introduced here continent by continent with maps showing where they are said to be located and snippets of their stories which invite further exploration. Readers can meet Lasiren a trumpet-playing mermaid from Haiti, the deadly Siyokoy and Sirena from the Philippines, Sinjike who guards a Korean island, Mami Wata a water spirit known throughout much of Africa, Syrenka who is the symbol of the Polish city Warsaw and many more.



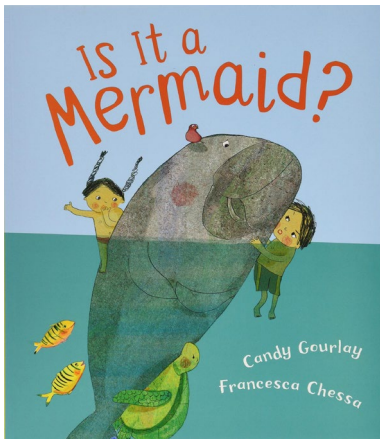
The Secret Lives of Mermaids by Anuk Tola and Anya Susanj
 Flying Eye 9781911171874

Written as though it were a factual guide by an expert on merpeople who is a professor at the School of Merology, this inventive book mines myths and legends from around the world and invents new ones. The format mimics the style and language of a non-fiction book and encourages children to use their imaginations and become merologists themselves.



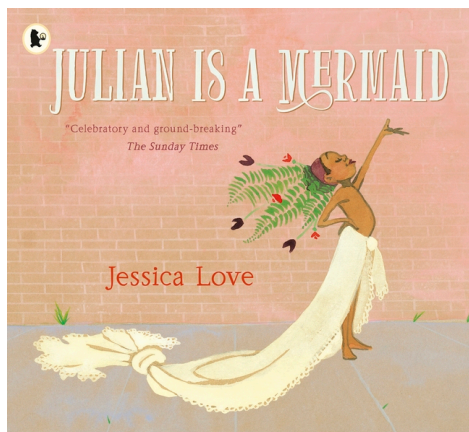
Can You Catch a Mermaid? by Jane Ray.
 Orchard 9781841212968

A deep friendship develops between Eliza, who lives by the sea with her fisherman father who affectionately calls her Little Dolphin, and Freya, a mysterious girl who Eliza comes to realise is a mermaid. Freya loses a talismanic object without which she cannot return home. Will Eliza be able to help her find it? The blues and greens which dominate the illustrations reflect the light and dark moods of this haunting seaside story. For more books by Jane Ray see <https://clpe.org.uk/clpe/library/booklists/jane-ray-booklist>



Is it a Mermaid? by Candy Gourlay, illustrated by Francesca Chessa
Otter-Barry Books 9781910959732

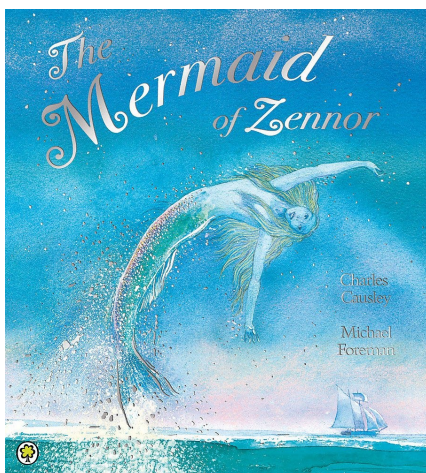
Bel and Benji encounter a creature on the beach who declares she is a mermaid. Benji insists she is a Dugong. As they play throughout the day, these alternative perceptions around her identity become blurred. An explanatory note at the end of this picture book explains the history of people believing that Dugongs, now a threatened species, might be mermaids.



Julian is a Mermaid by Jessica Love
Walker 9781406386424

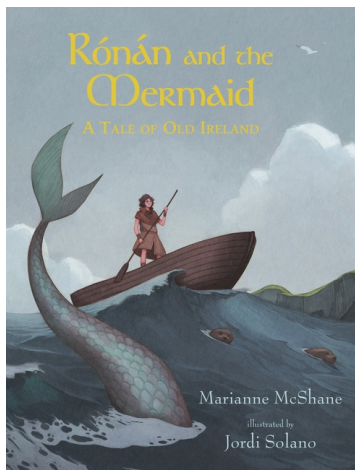
Captivated by the sight of three women dressed as mermaids he sees on the train, Julian declares to his Nana that he is a mermaid too. While Nana takes a bath, Julian creates his own mermaid costume, and then the pair of them join a joyous parade of people dressed as sea creatures. At the heart of this picture book is the understanding between Julian and his Nana about freedom to be who you desire to be. The text is minimal and much of the subtlety of the story and its message is conveyed through the facial expressions and body language of the two main protagonists.

A CLPE core book <https://clpe.org.uk/corebooks/julian-mermaid>
Teaching notes written by CLPE staff for this book can be found here: <https://clpe.org.uk/teaching-resources-cilip-kate-greenaway-medal-2019>



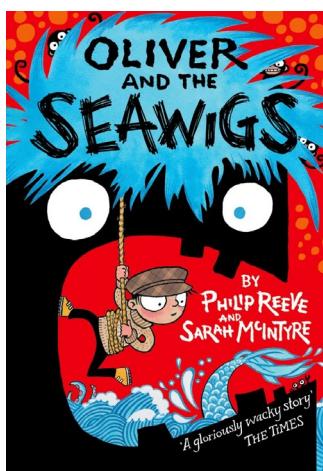
The Mermaid of Zennor by Charles Causley and Michael Foreman
Orchard 9781408319543

In the parish church of Zennor there is a carved figure of a mermaid or merrymaid as they are known in Cornwall. This picture book explores a possible story behind this, of a tin miner named Tom Taskis who one day runs away with a beautiful woman who appears in the church. His friend Zachy Pender is a singer and storyteller who later in life has encounters which explain Tom's disappearance. Michael Foreman's signature palette of merging shades of blue and green make him the perfect illustrator for this tale. For more books by Michael Foreman see <https://clpe.org.uk/clpe/library/booklists/michael-foreman-booklist>



Rónán and the Mermaid. A Tale of Old Ireland by Marianne McShane and Jordi Solano
Walker 9781406392043

A monk, Brother Declan, finds a boy seemingly washed up on the seashore and takes him back to the abbey. The boy Rónán tells the monks that a ring clutched in his hand was given to him by a lady with golden hair. Could she be the legendary mermaid Líban and will Rónán ever have the chance to repay her for rescuing him from a storm? An Author's Note describes how Rónán and Líban are commemorated in the Abbey at Bangor on the northeastern coast of Ireland.



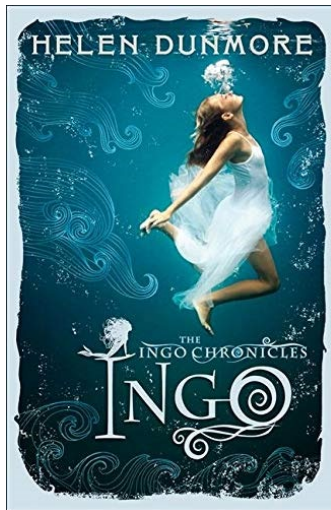
Oliver and the Seawigs by Philip Reeve and Sarah McIntyre
Oxford University Press 9780192734884

Along with his new friends, a grumpy old albatross, a short-sighted mermaid and a friendly island called Cliff, Oliver goes off in search of his missing parents. But before he can put his rescue plan into action there's the evil Stacey de Lacey and an army of greasy, green sea monkeys to contend with ... A short novel with words and pictures that work integrally. A CLPE core book <https://clpe.org.uk/corebooks/oliver-and-seawigs> A teaching sequence is available for Power of Reading subscribers.



The Tail of Emily Windsnap by Liz Kessler, illustrated by Lisa Horton
Orion 9781444015096

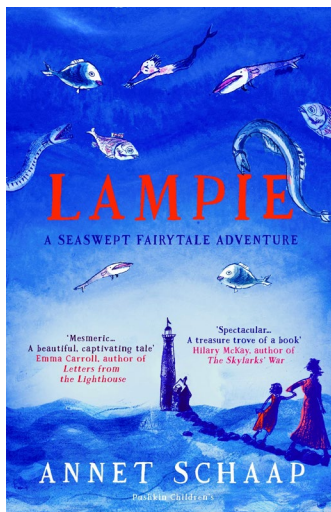
Although they live on a boat, Emily Windsnap's mother is very averse to her swimming. One moonlit night Emily decides to take a dip in the sea and, to her astonishment, she turns into a mermaid. Here begins her search for her true identity. Why will her mother never speak about her father and why does she think it's necessary to keep entertaining a grumpy neighbour to tea? First in a series numbering nine titles.



Ingo by Helen Dunmore
HarperCollins 9780007464104

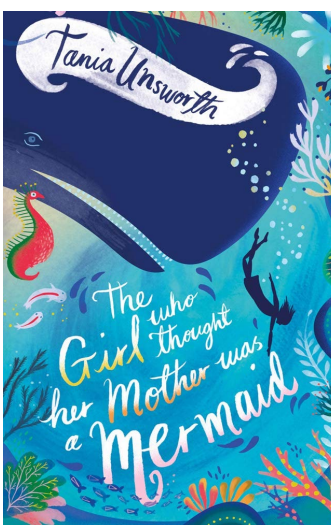
This engaging novel opens with a girl and her father examining the wooden carving of a mermaid in the church at Zennor in Cornwall and their musings about the story behind this. From the start there is an element of mystery about why Sapphire's father has the same name as the man in the tale, Mathew Trehwella. Then Mathew disappears, presumed drowned, even though he has always been in tune with the sea. Life must go on for Sapphire, her brother Conor and their mother. However, it's not long before sister and brother encounter the Mer people and experience the underwater world of Ingo.

The first of the Ingo Chronicles. The other titles are:
The Tide Knot 9780007464111; *The Deep* 9780007464128; *The Crossing of Ingo* 9780007464135; *Stormswept* 9780007424917



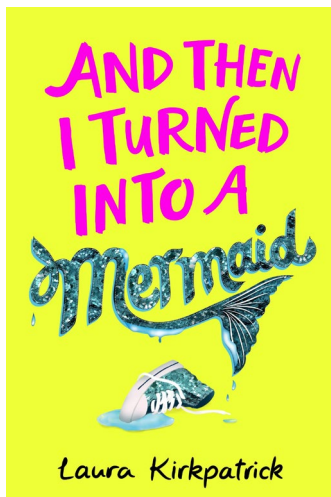
Lampie by Annet Schaap, translated from Dutch by Laura Watkinson
Pushkin Children's 9781782692621

Merpeople – two in particular - play significant roles in this novel that has links to the story of 'The Little Mermaid' and that raises important questions about human rights and inclusion within the framework of a 'seaswept fairytale adventure'. The first translation to be shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal – resources for sharing the book with children can be found here <https://carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/archive/2020-shortlist-resources>



The Girl Who Thought Her Mother Was a Mermaid by Tania Unsworth, illustrated by Helen Crawford-White
Zephyr 9781788541688

Stella is still grieving for her late mother and her father is distant, leaving her principally in the care of a housekeeper. A combination of circumstances and clues lead her to believe that her mother may have been a mermaid and she runs away to a place by the sea to try and find out the truth.



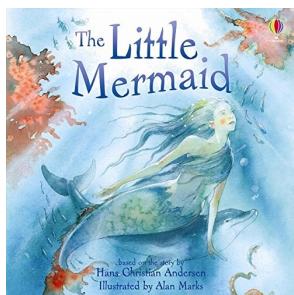
And Then I Turned into a Mermaid by Laura Kirkpatrick
Egmont 9781405295031

Molly and her four sisters live by the sea with their mother who is fond of skinny-dipping and runs a fish and chip shop where her daughters are expected to help out. On Molly's thirteenth birthday the family go for a swim and she finds to her complete dismay that, like her mother and older sisters, from now on she will turn into a mermaid when her body comes into contact with water. The comedy that ensues from her efforts to disguise this combines with the usual agonies and joys of reaching adolescence. First in a proposed series of which the second title is: *Don't Tell Him I'm a Mermaid* Egmont 9781405296922



The Little Mermaid by Hans Christian Andersen

Hans Christian Andersen's story has been retold and adapted many times. Many retellers of the tragic story of the little mermaid, who painfully exchanged her fish tail for legs and sacrificed her beautiful voice to the Sea Witch as recompense for this in an attempt to win the love of a human prince she rescued from drowning, have often been tempted to substitute a happy ending, not least in the Disney animated film.

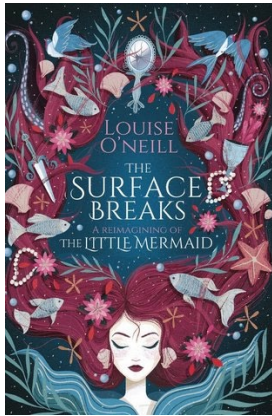


Jane Ray in ***The Little Mermaid and Other Fishy Tales*** (Boxer Books 9781907152740) has altered the ending so that it has an ambivalence that is left open to interpretation as to whether spiritual union might have been achieved. The pictures illustrating the story are etched and cross-hatched using various subtle shades of blue for the watery environment and colours of earth and fire for the world above.



In Alan Marks' delicate illustrations for a version retold by Katie Daynes (Usborne 9780746067765/9781409555902) waves and seaweed fronds weave around a text which doesn't shy away from sadness.

Other recent adaptations include a graphic version by Metaphrog (Papercutz 9781629917399) in which the mermaid views her transformation into sea foam as a new beginning. There is a version by master of pop-up books Robert Sabuda (Simon and Schuster 9781416960805). Geraldine McCaughrean has done a retelling illustrated by Laura Barrett (Orchard 9781408357248) and there is a version illustrated by Bernadette Watts (North-South Books 9780735844193)



The Surface Breaks by Louise O'Neill (Scholastic 9781407180410) is a Young Adult novel which is a reimagining of the story seen through a feminist lens.

For more information on different versions of this story see: <http://surlalunefairytales.com/littlemermaid/index.html>

There are several YA titles featuring selkies and mermaids. These include:

The Mermaid, the Witch and the Sea by Maggie Tokuda-Hall. Walker 9781406395501

Mermaid Moon by Susann Cokal. Candlewick Press 9781536209594

The Brides of Rollrock Island by Margo Lanagan. David Fickling Books 9781849921121

Lorali by Laura Dockrill. Hot Key Books 9781471404221

Aurabel by Laura Dockrill. Hot Key Books 9781471404245

Further reading for adults

To dive deeper into the watery world of mermaids and selkies, here are some sources:

Tales of the Seal People: Scottish Folk Tales by Duncan Williamson. Interlink Books 9781623719333

The People of the Sea: Celtic Tales of the Seal-Folk by David Thomson, introduction by Seamus Heaney. Canongate 9781786892461

The Penguin Book of Mermaids edited by Cristina Bacchilega and Marie Alohani Brown
Penguin 9780143133728

Explore this list of 'Top 10 books about mermaids' chosen by Monique Roffey, winner of the Costa Award for her novel *The Mermaid of Black Conch*:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/dec/09/top-10-books-about-mermaids-monique-roffey-the-mermaid-of-black-conch>