



Keepers of the Reef Helps Children Explore Coral Reef Ecosystems

KRISTEN CRAWFORD

REVIEWS OF BOOKS
OR OTHER MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

This story featuring two young children and a sea turtle takes you on a journey through the coral reef highlighting the species of fish who tend to the reef. The author highlights these fish and the job they do to maintain the health of the reef.

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REVIEW

Keepers of the Reef (Tilbury House Publishers, 2022) is a beautifully illustrated nonfiction book that brings children beyond the vibrant colors of the reef and into the work that is done to maintain this natural wonder. To quote the author, “My goal was to write a kids’ coral reef book that goes beyond the pretty colors and dives deeper to explore the key functional roles reef fish play in keeping the reef healthy.” I believe the author achieved this goal while providing an experience that makes you feel like you are a part of the reef. *Keepers of the Reef* was written by Dr. Sharon Wismer (Figure 1) and illustrated by Alice Wong.

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Figure 1 Dr. Sharon Wismer is a marine biologist and co-founder of SEA Kids Alliance. Her doctoral studies at the University of Neuchatel, Switzerland, investigated the behavioral ecology of coral reef fishes, and her postdoctoral research at James Cook University, Australia, investigated the impacts of mass coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef. *Keepers of the Reef* is her first children’s book.

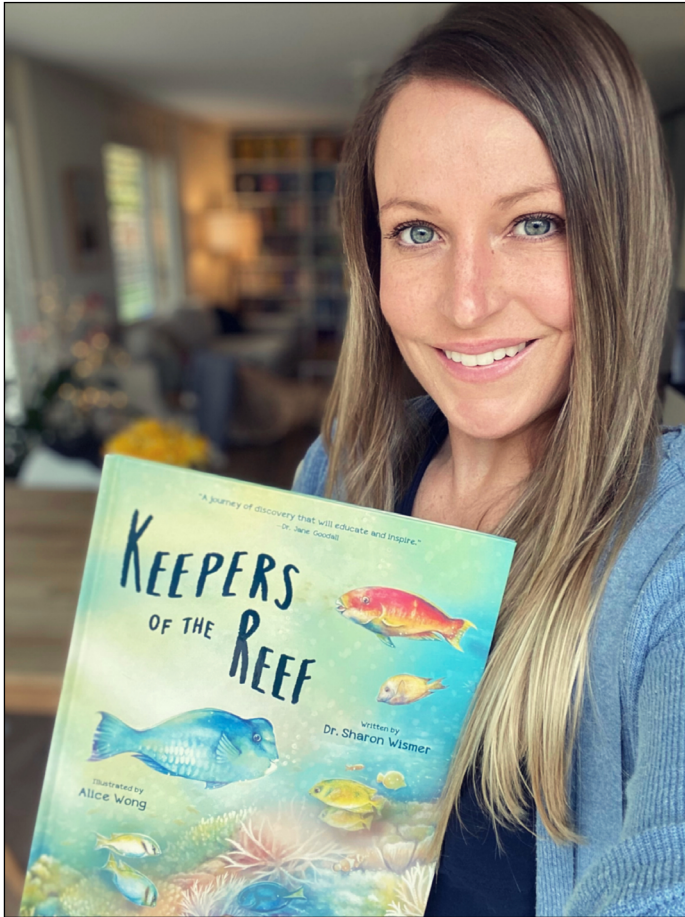


Figure 2 *Keepers of the Reef* explains the life cycle of the coral and the types of corals that inhabit the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

The book follows two children and a sea turtle on an adventure to the coral reef. It is during this adventure that the children discover how a coral reef is created and what makes the reef a delicate ecosystem. The book explains the life cycle of the coral and the types of corals that inhabit the Great Barrier Reef in Australia (Figure 2). The book highlights the relationship that the reef has with algae and how a reef can be affected by too much algae.

The turning point of the story is when the reader is introduced to the Keepers of the Reef, five different types of fish with specific jobs to help maintain the reef. The brushers, croppers, scrapers, excavators, and browsers are all fish with specific jobs to keep the algae groomed and as a result, the reef will thrive. The colorful illustrations of the fish, like the Bumphead Parrotfish, Surf Parrotfish, and the Bluelined Rabbitfish, make you feel a part of the reef as you read about their jobs.

The story ends with a focus on current threats to the Great Barrier Reef including climate change, bleaching, and pollution to make the reader aware of the current status of the reef. The last few pages highlight the work being done by researchers, like the author, to save the reef. It also provides suggestions for action items children can participate in to help save the reef.

This book highlights the fish that maintain the balance of plants and animals in the reef like no other children's book. The explanations of each of their jobs provides students with a perfect picture of the inner workings of an ecosystem. The author does not specify a specific age or grade that the book targets, however, it seems more appropriate for students in the age range of 10–12. The author also provides links to pictures and species cards for the Keepers of the Reef in addition to coloring pages, activity worksheets with content from the story.

Overall, I think this book does a thorough job of highlighting the inner workings of the reef ecosystem and the important role these fish play in the health of the reef.

Find information about where to purchase *Keepers of the Reef* and download free worksheets at seekidsalliance.com.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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