Sable Island — Imagine!
Online Resource

By Nancy Wilcox Richards
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Sable Island is a small Canadian island located 180 km southeast of mainland Nova Scotia in the Atlantic Ocean. This narrow crescent-shaped island is almost 42 km long and at its widest point is no more than 1.5 km. Sable Island is believed to have been formed when large quantities of sand and gravel were deposited on the continental shelf near the end of the last ice age. The island is continuously changing its shape due to the effects of strong winds and violent ocean storms.

Sable Island was named after its sand—sable is French for “sand.” It is covered with grass and other low-growing vegetation. In 1901, the federal government planted over 80,000 trees on the island in an attempt to stabilize the soil. All those trees died. Today there is just one solitary pine that grows near the weather station.

Marram is the most important grass growing on the island because it helps to stabilize the sand dunes. Over time, it has adapted to the climate of Sable Island. Its survival depends on the continuous build-up of sand. More information on marram grass can be found at: http://museum.gov.ns.ca/mnh/nature/sableisland/english_en/nature_na/surviving_su/marram_su.htm.

The island has several freshwater ponds on the south side and in its centre is a small lake called Lake Wallace.

Weather on the island is generally milder than mainland Nova Scotia’s. Winter temperatures range from +5 to -5°C and rarely drop below -13°C. Summers may be as warm as 25°C. Known to be the windiest place in Nova Scotia, Sable Island also has the distinction of having the least amount of annual sunshine and the most fog.

This omnipresent fog, coupled with nearby rocky shoals, has played a significant factor in over 350 documented shipwrecks. This has earned Sable Island the name Graveyard of the Atlantic.

Only a handful of people live year round on the island. Most of these are staff of the Sable Island Station which is managed by Environment Canada. Once known as a weather station, it now has a much broader mandate and ensures that all island activities are monitored and environmental impacts are minimized. The Sable Island Station plays an important role in the long-term protection and conservation of the island’s unique landscape.

Sable Island is perhaps best known for its wild horses. There are approximately 200 to 350 horses on the island. They are among the few wild horse populations in the world that are completely unmanaged. In 1961, the Sable Island horses became legally protected under the Sable Island Regulations of the Canada Shipping Act. This act requires that permission must be obtained from the Canadian Coast Guard to visit the island. Naturalist Zoe Lucas, the only year round resident of the island, has a deep commitment to caring for these horses as well as other wildlife and island plant life. As a result of wide interest, she created the Green Horse Society. Information about Sable Island and its horses can be found at www.greenhorsesociety.com.

There are many mysteries surrounding the origins of the Sable Island horses. One theory is that the horses were descendants from shipwreck survivors. However, this is not true. The present-day horses are descendants of animals brought to the island during the
1700s. Small numbers of domestic horses were also introduced during the 1880s and early 1900s.

Most of the foals are born during May and June. They can be rather unsteady on their feet at first but a foal can usually follow its mother when only a few hours old. Officially, scientists give each foal a four-digit name. The first two digits indicate the birth year. The remaining two digits identify the individual. However, since it is easier to remember names rather than numbers, the foals are often given unofficial names. A few current names include Goblin, Hobbit, Kiwi and Bo. Beautiful photos indicating horse names can be found at the Green Horse Society website.

In general, Sable Island horses are smaller than typical horses. Their heads have a straight or convex profile. Their bodies are short, stocky and of a muscular build. Usually the coat is a dark colour and there may be some white markings. Their shaggy coats provide excellent protection against the cold. The horses have low set, shaggy tails and a mane that is also full and bushy. The horses live together in bands. A typical stallion weighs about 360 kilograms and a mare weighs approximately 300 kilograms.

It is common to see several all-male groups temporarily gathered to mock-fight, chase, groom, graze and drink together. Often, another older male from a nearby family band, may join them. These gatherings can last for many hours.

In 1960, the Nova Scotia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSSPCA) helped save the horses when the Canadian government decided to remove them from Sable Island. The government had planned that the horses would be shipped to mainland Nova Scotia where many would have to work in the coal mines; others would be killed for food or their hides. A lucky few would become children’s riding horses. School children across Canada and the United States wrote to Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, requesting that the sale of the Sable Island horses be stopped. He passed a law protecting the horses.

There are many other forms of wildlife on Sable Island including the Ipswich sparrow, seals, gulls and terns.

An informative and fun website about Sable Island for both teachers and students can be found at: http://museum.gov.ns.ca/mnh/nature/sableisland/english_en/fun_fu/index_fu.htm

Chapter One: Off to Sable Island
You climb aboard the plane, a Britten-Norman Islander for your first trip to Sable Island. Leaving Halifax, you fly with pilot Debbie and get your first peek at the island. The whole island is made of sand and you are amazed that wild horses can live here.

Chapter Two: Sable Island Station
Debbie lands the plane on the beach. The manager of the Station on Sable Island, Gerry, meets you. He drives you in his truck to the Station. He explains that the Station used to be a Weather Station. Now, scientists stay at the Station to study horses, seals, birds, plants and pollution. The Station staff makes sure scientists have the basics such as: water, electricity, sewage, phone internet and emergency help.

Chapter Three: Wild Horses
You meet Zoe, who lives on the island year round. She takes you on a tour of the island. You hike to a pond and discover eight horses. They are all different shades of brown. They are not frightened by your presence. One of the mares even has a foal! Zoe documents this new information, explaining it is an important part of the work she does on Sable Island. As you sit on the dune, the foal approaches you and nuzzles your hand. You are thrilled.

Chapter Four: The History of the Sable Horses
You and Zoe discuss how the first horses arrived on Sable Island. You also learn that Sable Island is nicknamed Graveyard of the Atlantic because of numerous shipwrecks. You notice a horse eating beach pea, part of the legume family. You discover that there are six different kinds of orchids growing on the island. Zoe tells you that the horses don’t have names, only numbers. She gives them each a name, such as Kiwi, because it’s easier to remember than a number.

Chapter Five: More Wildlife
Zoe explains about all the different kinds of wild life on Sable Island. You see a small striped bird the colour of dried grass and learn that it is called an Ipswich sparrow. You also learn there are gulls and terns on the island. You even see two Grey seals. They are each as big as a sofa! It is something you will never forget seeing!
### Plot Synopsis

#### Chapter Six: How Children Saved the Horses
Zoe tells you that in 1960 the Nova Scotia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSSPCA) helped save the horses when the Canadian government decided to remove them from the island. The horses would be shipped to the mainland. Many would have to work in the coal mines; others would be killed for food or their hides. A lucky few would become children’s riding horses. School children across Canada and the United States wrote to Prime Minister John Diefenbaker requesting that the sale of the Sable Island horses be stopped. He passed a law protecting the horses.

#### Chapter Seven: Goodbye to Sable Island
Zoe discovers a deflated balloon on the beach. She explains the hazards that this creates for marine wildlife. It makes you feel so sad that you decide you will not have balloons at your next birthday party. Then just a little farther away, five horses begin to gallop toward you. You are thrilled as the horses sweep around you in a wide circle. You wish you didn’t have to leave Sable Island. As you and Zoe walk towards the Station, she hands you a moon snail shell. When you hold it against your ear, it sounds like waves breaking on Sable’s shores. It will be a wonderful reminder of your visit to the island. You promise to come back again.

### Before Reading

Locate Sable Island on a map. Find out what the children know about islands in general. What do they know about Sable Island? You may need to share some background information about Sable Island if your students are not familiar with it. Tell them that wild horses live on the island. Use a KWL chart to brainstorm facts the children already know about horses. What would they like to know?

Tell the children they are going to read a story called *Sable Island — Imagine!* It is narrative nonfiction. Ask them what they think that means.

Read aloud the blurb on the back of the book. Ask your students to make a prediction about what might happen in the story.

Draw the children’s attention to the Table of Contents. Read the chapter titles. Ask if these titles confirm or change the children’s predictions.

Ask students to look at the feature Introduction. Discuss why an author might include this in a book. Look at the map of Sable Island on page 6 in the Introduction. Discuss the location of the island. It may also be helpful to show a larger map with the entire province of Nova Scotia or the Maritime Provinces. This will help students to gain a better perspective of the location of Sable Island. Invite your children to read the Introduction. Ask them to make a prediction about what Sable Island will look like.

#### WORDS TO INTRODUCE
- marram (p.17)
- blazes (p. 20)
- legume (p. 28)
- poa (p.28)
- orchids (p.28)
- offspring (p.29)
• beasts of burden (p. 35)
• dung (p. 38)
• bachelors (p. 41)

**FOCUSED READING**
Read Chapter One to discover how to get to Sable Island and what Sable Island looks like.

**GUIDED QUESTIONS**
• Why is it necessary to wear a headset when you board the plane?
• Describe Sable Island as you approach it.

After the children have read Chapter One, ask them to confirm their predictions about the island.

**GUIDED QUESTIONS**
• What is the airplane like?
• How do you feel when you get your first glimpse of Sable Island?

Tell the students to continue reading Sable Island—Imagine until they reach Chapter Four.

**GUIDED QUESTIONS**
Chapters Two to Four:
• What are some of the difficulties landing the plane?
• What is marram grass?
• Describe some of the activities at the Sable Island Station.
• How do the wild horses surprise you?

While the children are reading, I find it helpful to have a brief conversation with individual students. I usually initiate the discussion with statements like, “Tell me a bit about what you are reading,” or “Tell me what’s happening in your book right now.” This is a quick indicator as to whether or not the child understands the book.

Depending on your students’ interests and abilities and your own time schedule, you may wish to stop the guided reading at the beginning of Chapter Four and finish the novel another day. When this is done, it is helpful to begin the next reading by recappping what had already happened in the book. Have the children predict what will happen next.

**GUIDED QUESTIONS**
Chapters Four to Seven:
• Why is Sable Island called Graveyard of the Atlantic?
• How did the horses first arrive on Sable Island?
• Name some facts you learned about the Sable Island horses.
• What other animals live on the island?
• In 1960, the Canadian government decided to remove the horses from Sable Island. What would have happened to many of these horses?
• How did school children from Canada and the United States help prevent the sale of the Sable Island horses?
• Litter causes a big problem on Sable Island. Describe some of the problems.
• Why is Sable Island unforgettable?

Ask the children to finish reading Sable Island—Imagine.
MAKING CONNECTIONS

Text to Self
Example: *Sable Island—Imagine!* reminded me of my trip to a different island: Prince Edward Island.

Text to Text
Example: I read a book about wild horses last month.

Text to Real World
Example: I saw a model of a Sable Island horse at a coal mining museum in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

RETHINKING

Revisit the predictions made about Sable Island prior to reading the book. Are your thoughts the same? If not, how have they changed?

DECODING UNFAMILIAR WORDS

Provide each child with some sticky notes. Tell the children to use them to mark any unfamiliar words they encountered while reading. This can be used for a guided reading or independent reading practice. When the children have finished reading, discuss the reading strategies they used when faced with an unfamiliar word in the text.

Here are some questions which you might use to help guide your students’ thinking:

- Did the illustration help you with your unfamiliar word?
- Is there a smaller word inside the word that you already know?
- Did you skip the word, read ahead and then try a different word that would make sense?
- Can you ‘chunk’ the word?
- Did you use what you already know about the topic?
- Can you take off any beginning or ending sounds, such as *re* or *ly*?
- Did you backtrack?
- Did the punctuation of the sentence help you to make sense of what you were reading?
- Did you make a link between a word you already know and the new word?

Encourage the readers to expand on their answers by asking themselves, “How did this strategy help me?”

Once students have decoded the unfamiliar word, they need to ask themselves, “Does this make sense?” If it doesn’t, they will need to try it again.

You may wish to choose from some of these additional activities:

TEACHER TIME-SAVING BOOK RESPONSE

This activity can be reused with any books the children have read, whether it is for guided reading or independent reading practice. Once the Reading Dice are made, it is a real time-saver in a teacher’s busy day. Also, it is an active and valid way for students to respond to a book.

Each group of children will need a Reading Die. In my classroom, the children are in groups of four. I use a wooden block with one typed question glued on each face. (A pattern [BLM #1] is included for a cut-out paper one.) One child from each group rolls the Reading Die to determine the question to which the entire group will respond. Children take turns responding to the question with other members of their group. It is helpful to circulate among the groups, listening to the conversations the children are having. Then ask a student from each group to tell the class what question they responded to on the Reading Die and give a sample answer.

WRITTEN BOOK RESPONSES

Have the children complete a book response from the list. Remind them to explain “why”.

- My favorite part of the story was . . .
- I was most surprised/disappointed/afraid/etc. when . . .
- If I could ask the author one question, it would be . . .
- I would recommend this book to ___________ because . . .
- The story made me feel . . .
- When I read the story, I visualized . . .
- I think the story . . .
- If I could give one character in the story some advice, it would be . . .
- This story reminded me of . . .

CROSS-CURRICULAR LINKS

Select a cross-curricular way for your students to respond to *Sable Island—Imagine!*.

Assessment

Have each student complete the Student Self-Assessment. BLM #2
Cross-Curricular Links

LANGUAGE ARTS

WRITING

• *Sable Island—Imagine!* is filled with facts about wild horses. Reread the book and jot down any interesting information about the horses. Create your own nonfiction book. Note to teachers: It will be very helpful, if prior to doing this activity, your class has had lots of exposure reading nonfiction. Look at other nonfiction books and highlight common features on chart paper. These features might include: a table of contents, an index, labeled drawing, maps, use of different styles of font such as bold and italics, insets, diagrams, etc. Ask the children to use at least three different features when creating their own books.

• *Sable Island—Imagine!* informed us that children wrote to Prime Minister John Diefenbaker asking him to save the Sable Island horses. Write a letter asking for help to change something important to you or asking for help in saving an endangered animal. You could address this letter to your principal, a teacher, a parent, a wildlife organization or someone else.

• Create a class book called “Sable Island Horses.” Each child illustrates a page in the book and highlights a fact about the horses.

• Send a postcard to a friend. Describe Sable Island and some of the things you saw on your visit. Remember to tell about things you found most surprising, sad or interesting. (See Post Card BLM #3.)

• Write haiku poetry about horses. Haiku is a form of Japanese poetry. It often centers on nature. Haiku poems don’t rhyme but they do follow a pattern. The pattern for haiku is:
  Line 1: 5 syllables
  Line 2: 7 syllables
  Line 3: 5 syllables

  First, brainstorm words about Sable Island and the horses. Choose your favourite words from the list. Count the syllables and put them together in a poem.

  Example: Glorious stallions
  Freely roaming the island
  Pound across the sand.

  (See Haiku Poetry BLM #4.)

ART

Mural

*Sable Island—Imagine!* is rich in imagery. Reread descriptive sections to your students or have them locate strong imagery independently. Design a class mural using this information.

Clay or Plasticine

Using clay or plasticine, create horses or other animals found on Sable Island.

You may want to use the recipe below to make your own clay. Once the clay is baked and hardened, it can be painted.

**Easy Modeling Clay**

- 3/4 cup water
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 1/4 cups flour
- 1 1/4 cups salt

Mix all ingredients together until you have a soft ball of dough. If it is too dry, add a bit of water. Sprinkle some flour on flat surface and knead the dough until smooth and stretchy. Shape the dough to form animals. Bake at 250 °F approximately 30 minutes. (Time varies according to the size of the piece of artwork.) Cool. Paint.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Design a Treasure Map

Look at the map of Sable Island in the Introduction. Discuss characteristics of an island. Review the cardinal directions: north, south, east and west, explaining that these are commonly denoted with their initials (N, S, E, and W). Have students design a fictitious island with a buried treasure. Give the island a name. Have the students write directions (such as go north from the fir tree, then head east to the pond) to locate the buried treasure. You may wish to have students exchange maps with a friend and try to find the treasure.

Using Your Knowledge

Draw a map of Sable Island based on information gleaned from *Sable Island—Imagine!* Include items such as the pond, the Station and so on. Label the four cardinal directions. Add a legend.
Transportation
Visitors to Sable Island arrive by chartered plane and travel across the island by truck. There are many different modes of transportation worldwide, ranging from walking to bicycles to cars to dogsleds. You might enjoy researching some of the more unusual types of transportation such as tuk-tuks and becaks. A good resource to use, other than the Internet, is a variety of travel magazines.

Ask your students to think of different modes of transportation. Complete BLM #5, “Transportation Everywhere!”

SCIENCE
Build a Weather Station
The Weather Station is a vital part of Sable Island. Research weather stations. Build a class weather station. A useful link is http://familyfun.go.com/. In the search bar, type “weather station.” This excellent site will show you how to make a barometer, a wind vane and a rain gauge using everyday materials from home.

HEALTH
Safety First!
The Weather Station staff needs to be prepared for all kinds of emergencies. Review the importance of knowing how to dial 911. If you read Sable Island—Imagine! in the fall, link discussions to “Fire Prevention Week”; during the winter months, discuss “Ice Safety” or “Snow Plow Safety”; the spring is a good opportunity to discuss “Swimming Safety”.

Hearing Protection
When you begin your journey by plane to Sable Island you need hearing protection. Discuss the importance of taking good care of our ears. Brainstorm situations, such as mowing the lawn with a power mower, where children and adults might need to wear hearing protection. Your students might enjoy trying to identify various mystery sounds at the following website: http://www.3vi.com.au/sounds.htm

You may want your students to learn about the ear, by discussing, for example the drawing found at this site: http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/antibiotic/ear.gif

MATH
Problem Solving
See BLM #6

Weather and Data Management
See BLM #7

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Other Links

Other Books in the Porcupine Series:
Claire’s Race
Lost in the Blizzard
Making Choices
The Great Raccoon Adventure
Danger – Keep Out!
Cube Pattern
(cut on solid lines
fold on dotted lines)

- Read your favourite part of the book.
- Explain what your book is about.
- Find a tricky word.
- How did you figure it out?
- Who would you recommend this book to?
- Why?
- Make a connection to the story.

What did you learn about yourself as a reader today?
Student Self Assessment

Book title: _____________________________

Student Name: _____________________________

Draw a ☺ after the statement, if you did something well.

Draw a ☹ after the statement, if you didn’t do the activity well.

Draw a ☹ after the statement, if you did a so-so job.

1. I stuck to the job and read quietly to myself.

2. If I had an unfamiliar word, I tried to figure it out.

3. I re-read the words if they didn’t make sense.

4. While I was reading, I made pictures in my mind.

5. I understood this book.

Rate this book using stars

Not very good ★

Pretty good ★★★

Good ★★★★★

Awesome ★★★★★★

Your Rating

BLM 2
Postcards

Cut out the postcard. On the plain side draw a picture of Sable Island. Then, turn the card over and write a message to a friend describing some of the things you saw on your visit. Remember to tell about things you found most surprising, sad or interesting. Don’t forget to add the address.
Brainstorm words about Sable Island and its horses. Sort the words according to syllables. Create a haiku poem using this pattern: first line: 5 syllables, second line: 7 syllables, third line: 5 syllables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words with 1 syllable:</th>
<th>fœal</th>
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<tr>
<td>Words with 2 syllables:</td>
<td>nuzzles</td>
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<td>Words with 3 syllables:</td>
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<td>Words with 4 syllables:</td>
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Create your poem:

_____________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________
**Transportation Everywhere!**

Think about the different kinds of transportation in the world. Transportation on Sable Island is very different from Toronto. Toronto’s transportation is different from the northern community of Inuvik. Imagine if you lived in a hot desert community!

Draw or print the names of different forms of transportation found in these communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sable Island</th>
<th>My Community</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cold, Snowy Northern Community</td>
<td>Hot, Dry Desert Community</td>
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Bonus: There are many unusual forms of transportation such as a gondola, rickshaw, becak and tuk-tuk. Print the forms of transportation in alphabetical order.

________________, ____________, ____________, ____________

Can you guess where these are found?
## Planning Ahead

When the ocean floods the beach on Sable Island, planes aren’t able to land for weeks. This means you need to carefully plan how much food you need to buy. It also means you must plan to never run out! If a plane is unable to land for 6 days, how would you ration the following supplies evenly?

- 12 kilograms of potatoes
- 3 kilograms of turnips
- 6 kilograms of carrots
- 2 dozen cookies
- 18 apples
- 6 litres of milk

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Temperatures on Sable Island

Scientists at the Weather Station keep accurate data on the weather. Look at the data for the average high temperatures in 2009. The degrees are given in Celsius. Create a graph to show this information.

January 3˚    February 2˚    March 3˚    April 6˚    May 10˚    June 14˚    July 18˚
August 21˚    September 18˚   October 14˚   November 10˚  December 5˚