

Notes for teachers and librarians on
Swimming Against the Storm
by Jess Butterworth

INTRODUCTION

Swimming Against the Storm by Jess Butterworth is suitable for teaching to children aged 9–11, either in class or during allotted extra-curricular sessions. The reading questions and activities suggested here cover literacy objectives, focusing on reading comprehension and inference, but also provide suggestions for cross-curricular links. They work as an introduction to the themes and ideas within the book, taking students' understanding of the text to a new level and inspiring them to read further.

ABOUT THE BOOK

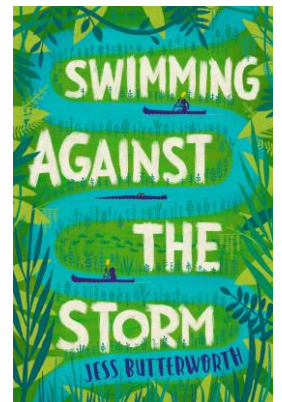
Our land is sinking. It's disappearing into the water. And no one knows how to save it.

Twelve-year-old Eliza and her younger sister Avery have lived their entire lives in a small fishing village on the coast of Louisiana, growing up alongside turtles, pelicans and porpoises. But now, with sea levels rising, their home is at risk of being swept away.

Determined to save the land, Eliza and Avery secretly go searching in the swamp for the dangerous, wolf-like *loup-garou*. If they can prove this legendary creature exists, they're sure that the government will have to protect its habitat – and their community.

But there's one problem: the *loup-garou* has never been seen before. And with a tropical storm approaching and the sisters deep, deep in the swampland, soon it's not just their home at risk, but their lives as well...

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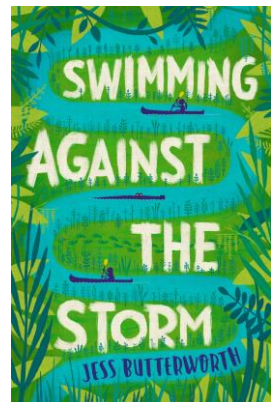


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READING GROUP QUESTIONS

- Why do you think the author has started the book with a poem? What effect does it have on you as a reader? How do you think this might be referenced later?
- In chapters 1 and 2, how do Eliza's feelings about accompanying her parents on the shrimping trip change? Why have her illusions of the trip been shattered? What can you tell about her as a character from this?
- In chapters 1 and 2, why does Eliza feel the need to lie to her sister about the shrimping trip? What can you infer about their relationship from this?
- How would you describe the relationship Eliza shares with her sister Avery? In the beginning of the book we see that she is desperate to spend some time with her parents away from Avery. Why is this? What clues are there in the first five chapters of the book regarding how Eliza and Avery feel towards each other?
- How can you tell that there is a strong sense of community in Côteville, the town that the girls live in? What do they do together to show this? Draw similarities/differences from your own community.
- In chapter 18, who or what do you think lifts Eliza up and away from the alligator? Their identity is never confirmed. Do you think there really was something or someone there?
- What effect does it have on you as a reader that the author chooses to end most chapters with a cliff-hanger? Why do you think she has chosen to do this? Find an example and discuss how effective it is with a partner.

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READING GROUP QUESTIONS (Cont.)

- In chapter 21, identify the powerful, descriptive vocabulary the author has used to describe the hurricane and the effect it has on the children. Discuss the choice of words together.
- In chapter 25, we learn that Grace orchestrated the whole loup-garou mystery and footprint trail. What do you think about how her friends react to this? How would you have reacted?
- In what ways does the title of the book connect to the different themes covered in it? What do you think the title is referring to?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

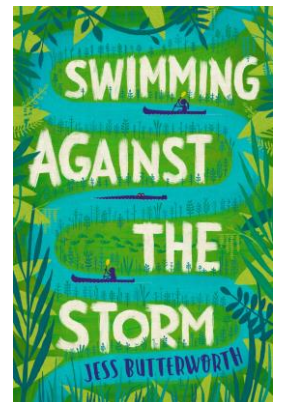
Literacy

- Write a diary entry from the perspective of Eliza on the night she loses Avery in the swamp.
- We see Avery's disappearance through the eyes of her sister and friends. Adopting the style of the author, write the missing scenes of the book from Avery's perspective – from when she leaves her friends to hang the net, to when she is finally discovered with her beloved pet cat Monsieur Beau Beau.
- Would you like to live in a place like Côteville?

Science

- There are lots of animals that are native to the swamp discussed in the book. Display some of these and identify together the way they have adapted to life in marshland/swampland.

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Music

- Huy is passionate about music, and in chapter 13 he describes how the swamp makes its own music. Experiment with different musical instruments to make the noises and animal sounds you might hear in a swamp. In groups, compose a musical piece layering these sounds to create your own 'swamp rhythms'.
- After researching the *loup-garou*, write your own song lyrics about this creature and compose a soundtrack to accompany them. Perform your songs to the class!

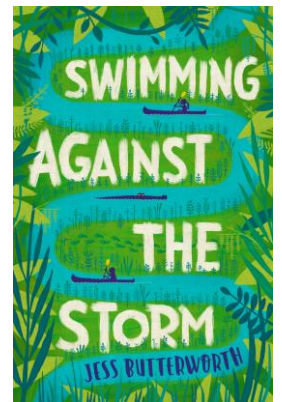
History

- In the book, it's mentioned that the community lived through Hurricane Katrina. Research this hurricane and the effects it had on the residents of central Florida and eastern Texas.

Geography

- The book is set in the American state of Louisiana. Identify this place on a map and spend some time researching it. Draw comparisons with the UK. How have the characters in the book adapted to living in this area?
- In chapter 6, the family receives a tornado alert. What is a tornado? What are the differences between hurricanes and tornados? Carry out research and discuss with a partner, looking at some particularly notorious examples of each that have hit America.
- Marshland and rivers are obviously an important theme in the book and integral to the lives of the community of 'Côteville'. Look at the way houses are built in these areas and compare them with the structures of houses in your local area.
- Discuss some of the physical attributes of rivers and marshland and how they are formed over time.
- In chapter 17, the children discover a hidden sinkhole. What is a sinkhole? How is a sinkhole formed?

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Geography (Cont.)

Present information about one of the geographical themes in the book:

- Sinkholes
- Tornadoes
- Hurricanes
- Swamps

Ensure that your presentation includes examples from around the world of occurrences.

Art & Design

- Sunsets are mentioned a few times in the early stages of the book. Using the author's descriptions, create watercolour wash pictures depicting these sunsets. Then use black sugar paper or card to create a silhouetted scene over the sunset.
- Choose one of the animals from the book, perhaps one that you have not heard of before, and draw a picture of it. Use details from the book to help you visualise the animal.

MFL: French

- The French language is referenced a lot in the book. Make a note of any French words you are unsure of and try to make sense of them from the context or use an English/French dictionary to translate. Focus on the French word 'Loup-garou'. What does it mean?

PSHE

- Consider how the lives of the characters in the book are different from your life. How does the environment in which someone grows up have an impact on his or her everyday life? Produce a table with similarities and differences between the characters' lives and your own.

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