Sarah Case

*Dare the Wind* transports readers to 1850s America in a time of adventure and exploration. Emily Arnold McCully’s illustrations allow students to step into history with her rough sketch style; her use of watercolor makes the waves and the wind fairly leap off the page, lending a sense of reality to Tracey Fern’s authentic dialogue and detailed descriptions. This story is both informational and engaging, drawing readers into the story in such a way that they will not even realize they are learning.

Drawing from historical fact, Fern tells the engaging and inspirational life story of Ellen Prentiss, a woman who navigated her husband’s ship safely from New York down to Cape Horn in South America and then back up to San Francisco in only 89 days. Her story comes to life through detailed and specialized exposition and dialogue paired with colorful and whimsical illustrations by McCully. The detailed map and compass rose in the front inside cover is a great resource for readers to check for understanding and the costumes and illustrations help to convey a sense of the time period for students living more than 150 years in the future.
As an English as a Second Language instructor, I analyzed this story with particular thought to how this book would be received by English Language Learners (ELLs). There are a multitude of special challenges that come with choosing reading material for ELLs which makes finding appropriate resources difficult. To help me with my analysis, I read this story to two of my fifth grade English Language Learners, a male student from Saudi Arabia and a female student from Mexico.

While *Dare the Wind* does lend itself to young readers with its exciting illustrations and story (it even has an AR test!), it might be best served as part of a unit on women’s history or inspirational stories. If I were teaching it, I might include it in a selection of biographies, or use it as a read-aloud to introduce a unit on narrative writing.

However, I would not recommend giving it to an ELL without adequate preparation. This is definitely a book meant to be read by someone familiar with sailing vocabulary, which my students are not. The illustrations do offer great visual representations of tricky vocabulary, but most of the vocabulary is very specialized. For example, when Ellen is describing her father’s lessons she talks about using a *sextant* and the illustration above shows her using a sextant (unpaged, Fern). When the *mainmast* breaks there is a vivid picture for elaboration. The pictures really helped my students comprehend the story, but I know they did not understand the words individually. My students and I took turns reading a few times and I noticed immediately that most of the ship terms were completely incomprehensible to them as well as a few of the more embellished descriptions. However, while reading I constantly used the visual cues in the illustrations to help my students understand the more complex vocabulary in context, and comprehension of the story as a whole was not impeded.

Before reading, my students and I simply looked at the book. We noticed the clothing and the ships and talked about what time period we thought it was set in. One student really enjoyed learning about the past and couldn’t wait to tell her brother how life was like 150 years ago. Before starting, we also discussed what a navigator is. These children are growing up in the age of satellite navigation systems and google maps so the concept of a paper map and non-electric tools was foreign to them, although, they were very familiar with the idea of a wife giving her husband directions while he drives! My female student also mentioned that her grandmother was born in 1950, and we talked about how this story is still 100 years older than her grandmother. Relating the story to their own lives really helped engage their attention and gave them a frame of reference from which to understand the story.

The text itself was interesting, if a little dry. My female student was very engaged in the story, making predictions and references to her own life, but my male student seemed much less engaged. He said he was not interested in sailing or the ocean, and so the story was not engaging for him. However, I noticed that when he learned that there was an AR test for the book he jumped right up to take it, and, despite the complex vocabulary and dense sections of specialized text, both students passed their AR tests and showed good comprehension of the material.
Regardless of individual student interest, I do believe that this was a very good story to read to younger students. *Dare the Wind* is a fun, engaging, and inspirational story that offers a glimpse not only into an extraordinary woman’s life but also an important time in our nation’s history. It opens students’ minds to vocabulary and viewpoints that they may never have encountered. It also has a strong underlying theme of perseverance, daring, and gender equality that is so subtly woven into the matter-of-fact prose that enables students to learn something new to them without even being aware.

**Works Cited**


**About the Author**

Sarah Case is a second year English as a Second Language teacher for Mount Pleasant Public Schools. Sarah teaches one class of English Language Support at the high school and then spends most of her day providing language support to students from 5th to 12th grades in three different buildings across the district. She firmly believes in the importance of extensive reading for pleasure and its impact on reading comprehension. She is also constantly in search of new and engaging texts for her ELL students.