

# Let's explore... mermaids

Mermaids (and mermen) provide play and learning inspiration for children, writes *Marianne Sargent*

**T**hey may be mythical creatures, but mermaids are an endless source of fascination for young children and present many opportunities for creative projects and fantasy play. Here are some ideas to introduce the theme and engage children's interest.

## UNDER THE SEA

Start by joining the sand and water trays together and setting up a small-world mermaid scene:

- Drop some sand, pebbles and shells into the bottom of the water tray and add some plastic fish tank plants for seaweed.
- Place some large rocks in both trays, on the sand and with their tips sticking out of the water.
- Sit some toy mermaids on the rocks.
- Add some fish and sea creatures to the scene.

## Learning opportunities

**PSED** Can play in a group, extending and elaborating play ideas

**CL** Uses language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences in play situations

**EAD** Plays co-operatively as part of a group in order to develop and act out a narrative

## THE SINGING MERMAID

Read *The Singing Mermaid* by Julia Donaldson and Lydia Monks with the children. The story provides inspiration for a range of imaginative play scenarios; for example, setting up a mermaid-themed role-play area:

- Arrange and hang blue, green, turquoise and sparkling silver drapes to create a sea-water effect.
- Loosely stitch circles of light-coloured fabric into the drapes to signify bubbles.
- Ask the children to paint pictures of brightly coloured fish. Cut these out and stitch them onto the drapes too.

- Cover the floor in yellow fabric and scatter pebbles and shells.
- Cut strips of green crêpe paper and hang them to look like seaweed.
- Place toy sea creatures in nooks.
- Provide mermaid and merman costumes for the children to dress up in.

The mermaid in this story is tempted away from her home to join the circus, but while the audiences love her, the wicked circus owner keeps her in a tank and soon she is longing to return to the freedom of the sea.

Find out more about circus life:

- Find out if any of the children have ever been to a circus and ask them to share their experiences.
- Use information books and the internet to find out what happens at a circus.
- Set up a small-world circus.
- Mark out a circus ring and set up some circus activities in the outdoor area; for example, juggling, tight-rope walking (on an upside down bench), ribbon sticks, hoops and stilts.

## Learning opportunities

**PSED** Can play in a group, extending and elaborating play ideas

**CL** Uses language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences in play situations

**UW** Talks about past and present events in their own lives; talks about why things happen and how things work

**EAD** Plays co-operatively as part of a group in order to develop and act out a narrative

## SCALY PRINTS

Ask the children to imagine what they think a mermaid's tail would feel like to touch. Model the use of vocabulary such as scaly, slimy, smooth, wet, bumpy and rough.

Present the children with some whole fresh fish and invite them to feel the skin. Ask the children to



The Singing Mermaid by Julia Donaldson and Lydia Monks provides inspiration for play scenarios



describe how it looks, feels and smells. Take a close look and introduce vocabulary such as shiny, iridescent, sparkly and shimmering.

Explain you are going to use the fish to make some prints. This is a take on an old Japanese art technique called gyotaku ([www.gyotaku.com](http://www.gyotaku.com)):

- Thin down some poster paint with water and PVA glue.
- Invite each child to paint one side of a fish with the colour(s) of their choice.
- Help them to lay the fish on a piece of white paper and lightly press all over so the whole of the fish makes contact.
- Carefully remove the fish so see the result. The scales and fins should be clearly visible in the print.
- Ensure the children wash their hands thoroughly.

## Learning opportunities

**UW** Talks about some of the things they have observed such as plants, animals, natural and found objects; talks about why things happen and how things work

**EAD** Safely uses and explores a variety of materials, tools and techniques, experimenting with colour, design, texture, form and function



## MORE INFORMATION

- [www.lydiamonks.com](http://www.lydiamonks.com)
- [www.julia-donaldson.co.uk](http://www.julia-donaldson.co.uk)

# Book corner



Alternatively, if you live near a beach and have access to plenty of free shells, draw out the shape of a mermaid on a large thin piece of MDF and invite the children to use paint and craft materials to colour her skin and create her golden hair. Then provide them with PVA glue and a variety of shells in different colours, shapes and sizes to create a collage for her tail.

### Learning opportunities

**CL** Listens to stories, accurately anticipating key events and responding to what they hear with relevant comments, questions or actions

**EAD** Safely uses and explores a variety of materials, tools and techniques, experimenting with colour, design, texture, form and function; plays co-operatively as part of a group to develop and act out a narrative

### LUTEY AND THE MERMAID

Find inspiration in some of the traditional tales about mermaids. There are various versions or adaptations of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, including that by Ian Beck. Alternatively, tell children the story of 'Lutey and The Mermaid'.

In this traditional Cornish tale, a fisherman becomes victim to the charms of a mermaid and is lured into the ocean. A picture book version of this story by Will Coleman is available from Hope Education ([www.hope-education.co.uk](http://www.hope-education.co.uk)). There are also many versions available online.

In the story, Morwenna the mermaid is described as having clear green eyes, a silver fish's tail, rich gold hair and delicate pink skin. Use these descriptions as inspiration to create some artistic impressions of mermaids. Provide the children with pencils, paints, glitter, glue and other craft materials in order to create pictures of mermaids.

### MERMAID DASH

Set up this energetic running game in a wide open space outdoors. Draw a long white line on the floor using playground chalk. Then draw two parallel lines approximately 5m away on either side of this line using two different-coloured chalks (blue and yellow).

Ask the children to line up on the white line in the centre. Explain the blue line is the sea and the yellow line is the beach. When you shout 'swim to the beach', the children must run to the yellow line, and when you shout 'race for the sea' they must run to the blue line. When you shout 'return to the rocks' they must head back to the centre. Any children who run in the wrong direction are out. ■

*Marianne Sargent is a Foundation Stage teacher turned writer. Find more early years resources on her website, [www.earlyyearsclassroom.com](http://www.earlyyearsclassroom.com)*



### Mermaid by Cerrie Burnell and Laura Ellen Anderson

A heartwarming story about the friendship between a little boy and a girl who uses a wheelchair.



### The Very Messy Mermaid

by Tracey Corderoy and Kate Leake  
An amusing tale about a little mermaid's battle with her parents over their neat and orderly birthday party plans.



### Dear Mermaid

by Alan Durant and Vanessa Cabban  
When a little girl finds a mermaid's purse on the beach she writes a letter to find its owner and gets a lovely surprise.

### Under the Sea

by Fiona Patchett  
Clear and simple information book for young children about creatures that live in the ocean.

### See Under the Sea

by Kate Davies and Colin King (Usborne See Inside series)  
Lift-the-flap board book packed full of information and colourful illustrations.



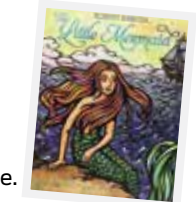
### A Hole in the Bottom of the Sea

by Jessica Law  
With accompanying CD, this is an illustrated version of the cumulative song where each sea creature is bigger than the last.



### Can You Catch a Mermaid?

by Jane Ray  
Find this second-hand book full of sparkly pictures online.



### The Little Mermaid by Robert Sabuda

Pop-up book version of the classic fairy tale.

### RESOURCES

- Disney Princess Ariel Little Mermaid costume (<http://direct.asda.com>)
- Underwater Scene Kit ([www.yellow-door.net](http://www.yellow-door.net))
- Sea Fantasy Wooden Characters and Story Pack ([www.earlyyearsresources.co.uk](http://www.earlyyearsresources.co.uk))
- Small-world sea creatures ([www.tts-group.co.uk](http://www.tts-group.co.uk))
- Active World Tuff Tray Below the Sea Mat ([www.tts-group.co.uk](http://www.tts-group.co.uk))
- Mermaid Colouring Sheets, printable Role Play Masks, Display Posters, Stick Puppets and The Little Mermaid eBook and Story Sequencing Cards ([www.twinkl.co.uk](http://www.twinkl.co.uk))
- Under the Sea two- and three-piece puzzles ([www.orchardtoys.com](http://www.orchardtoys.com))
- Small and large shells ([www.hope-education.co.uk](http://www.hope-education.co.uk))
- Shell Treasure Basket ([www.reflectionsonlearning.co.uk](http://www.reflectionsonlearning.co.uk))