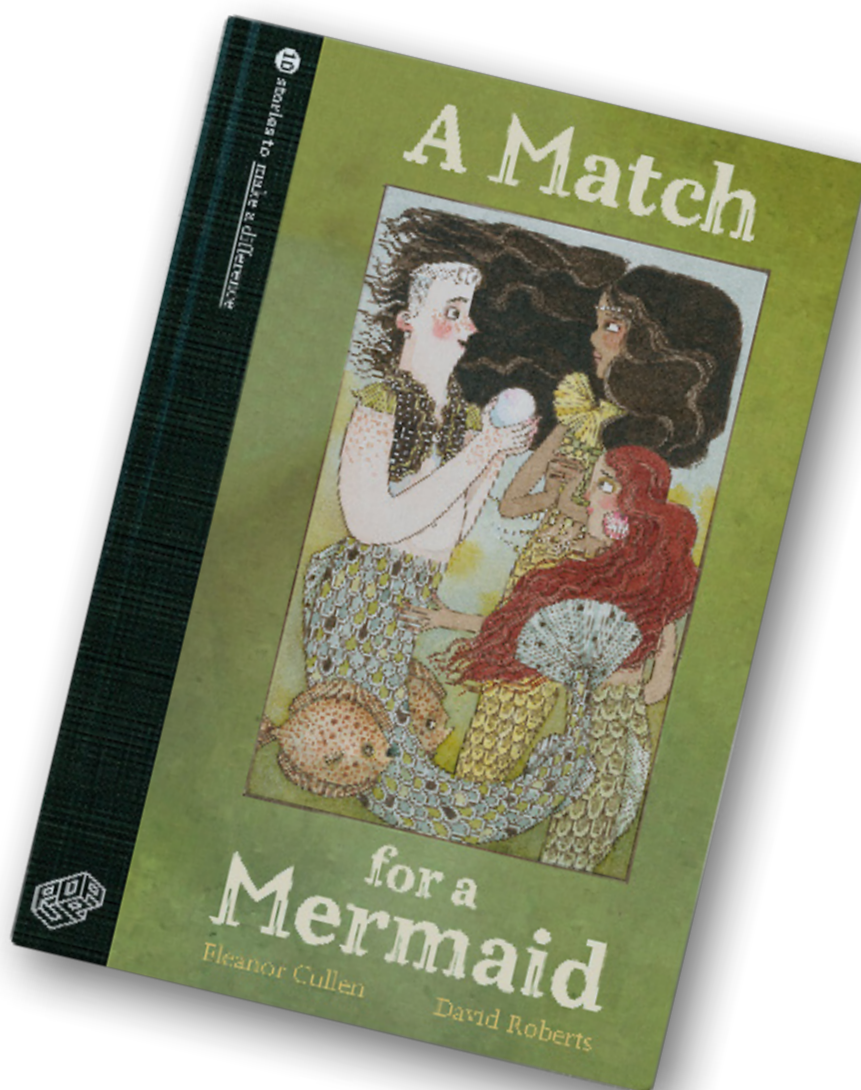


Teacher

# Resources

*A Match for a Mermaid*

by Eleanor Cullen and David Roberts



**10** stories to make a difference

Dear Teachers,

We are delighted that you are interested in sharing ***A Match for a Mermaid*** with your class. ***A Match for a Mermaid*** is part of our **10 Stories to Make a Difference** collection, which has ten inspiring stories for young readers that celebrate difference and individuality.

Inside these pages you'll find activities and prompts for KS1 and LKS2 teachers creating lesson plans inspired by ***A Match for a Mermaid***, sharing ideas for making the most of the rich potential offered by this book.

A strong suggestion is to read the book aloud once for the story, then again to focus on particular aspects, passages or themes. The following activities are grouped by desired outcome and are aimed for a range of abilities and additional needs of a class. Some extension activities are included, but all the materials can be adapted beyond the target audience according to the interest and abilities of your class.

The following activities would be suitable for the allocated age group:

- Reading independently or as group **5+ years**
- Exploring through the creative learning activities in this pack **5 - 9+ years /  
KS1 and LKS2**

All the books in our **10 Stories to Make a Difference** collection are beautifully illustrated and perfect for children aged 5 and up. They reflect the need for greater inclusivity and more diversity in children's books with the stories including characters of colour, LGBTQ+ and disabled characters.

The **10 Stories to Make a Difference** collection is available to buy from [www.pop-up.org.uk/shop](http://www.pop-up.org.uk/shop). Teacher and Parent/Carer Resource packs are available to download from [www.pop-up.org.uk/shop](http://www.pop-up.org.uk/shop). This Resource pack is written by Carey Fluker Hunt and published by Pop Up Projects CIC.  
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# 1

## About this resource pack

### There are six sections:

1. About this resource pack (includes themes and curriculum links)
2. About this book (includes insights from the writer and illustrator): Page 4
3. Discussion Activities:
  - 3.1 Every merman is different!: Page 5
  - 3.2 What do you look for in a friend?: Page 8
  - 3.3 Thinking for yourself and making your own choices: Page 9
4. Illustration Activities:
  - 4.1 Using patterns to add detail and character: Page 10
  - 4.2 Expressing yourself: Page 13
  - 4.3 Which underwater creature will you be?: Page 16
5. Writing Activities:
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  - 5.2 Exploring Malu's choice from different points of view: Page 18
  - 5.3 Bringing the onlookers to life: Page 19
6. Glossary: Page 20

### Themes and ideas include

- Knowing, valuing and expressing yourself
- Individuality
- Making the right decisions
- Following your heart
- Valuing and celebrating differences
- Looking after each other

### Curriculum Links

Share and enjoy *A Match for a Mermaid* as part of **Literacy** and **English**, and use it to explore the key characters and their relationships (3.1, 5.3), points of view (5.2) and facts, opinions and decision-making (5.1, 5.2). Build on your discussions with activities focusing on roleplay and oral presentation (5.1, 5.2, 5.3), character profiles and dialogues (5.3), writing to explain (5.2) and writing to inform (5.1).

*A Match for a Mermaid* makes a great starting point for discussions in **PSHE** and **Circle Time**. Talk about individuality and self-expression (3.1, 3.3, 4.2, 4.3), decision-making (3.2, 5.1, 5.2), following your heart (3.2, 5.2) and valuing and celebrating differences (3.1, 3.3, 4.1).

Links to other areas of the curriculum include **Art and Design** (4.1, 4.2 and 4.3) and **Science** (4.3).

## 2

## About this book

In this entertaining tale about self-expression and finding your own path, Malu, the mermaid princess rejects a crowd of suitors and marries her best friend Brooke instead.

Malu's gradual discovery of herself is described in rhyming verse with humour and insight, and reflects the journey many LGBTQ+ people make. As David Roberts observes, "we often default to the relationships we see around us, but many queer people don't really see queer relationships represented," so illustrated children's books for children have an important role to play. Malu's journey doesn't only speak to queerness, though: her underwater world is brought to life in a joyful celebration of diversity where everyone feels comfortable to be exactly who they are.

"Loving someone is brave, especially when you love someone the world doesn't expect you to love," observed Eleanor Cullen, who would have welcomed stories about choosing what kind of family to create when she was growing up. "It would have been eye-opening for me to see that I didn't need to search for the perfect guy," she said, and hopes her story will help everyone "appreciate the beauty of being different".

### About the author and illustrator



As one of the winners of Pop Up's tenth birthday writing competition, **Eleanor Cullen** was excited to see her underwater world being brought to life on every page. "David made it a hundred times more inclusive and accepting of so many more gender identities," she said, and described the final book as "an even bigger and greater celebration of humanity than I could ever have imagined."

#### **From an interview with CILIP**

[www.cilip.org.uk/  
blogpost/1637344/372489/Introducing-  
A-Match-for-a-Mermaid-by-Eleanor-  
Cullen](http://www.cilip.org.uk/blogpost/1637344/372489/Introducing-A-Match-for-a-Mermaid-by-Eleanor-Cullen)



**David Roberts** studied fashion design before becoming a children's book illustrator, and has illustrated over seventy titles, including the New York Times #1 bestseller *Ada Twist, Scientist* and *The Bolds* with Julian Clary.

## 3

## Discussion Activities

If you're discussing these topics during Circle Time, a beautiful piece of coral or a shell would make a great 'talking object' to be passed around.

### 3.1 Every merman is different!

These discussion points link to the illustration activity in 4.2

The mermen's freedom to express their individuality and wear what they please reflects Malu's freedom to choose Brooke as her queen, and ensures that each character in this book is visually distinctive. There's a lot going on in the pictures that isn't mentioned in the text!

Their appearance makes a good starting point for discussions about individuality and personal style, and David Roberts' detailed artwork is great for inspiring imaginative character-building and storymaking.

Look carefully at the pictures of the mermen in this book. Talk about what they're wearing and how they've dressed their hair. Are they expressing their individuality in other ways? How?

Show children the endpapers from this book. In what ways are these mermen alike, and how do they differ? *For example, they all have tails, they all have different haircuts....* Ask children to pick a merman and describe him. How quickly can everyone else guess which merman has been chosen?

Focus on the mermen's visual similarities and differences by playing **The Memory Game**.

To create your playing cards, print two copies of the downloadable sheet and cut the pictures out, creating a pair of cards for each merman. Shuffle the cards, place them face down on a table and ask each player to turn over two cards. If they match, the player keeps them and has another go. If they don't, the player should allow others to see the pictures before replacing the cards face down in the same position.

Use your cards to prompt discussions about the characters. Invent names for them and invite your children to tell stories about how their merman came to be at Malu's meeting.

Apart from Malu, do your children think anyone's telling these merman how they ought to look? Who tells your children what to wear, and how to do their hair? What choices do they make for themselves?



### 3.1 continued

#### Extend for children in KS2

by drawing attention to the way the mermen are more vividly depicted in the pictures than the text. What do the pictures tell us? What do we find out from the text?

Do your children think these mermen enjoy expressing themselves? Do they value their differences? Work together to find evidence in the text and pictures to back up your answers.

#### Taking a broader look

- Do you like looking the same as everyone else, or do you prefer to stand out?
- How do you express your individuality?



Endpaper

### 3.1 continued



4x4 grid with 16 visually distinct pictures of mermen



### 3.2 What do you look for in a friend?

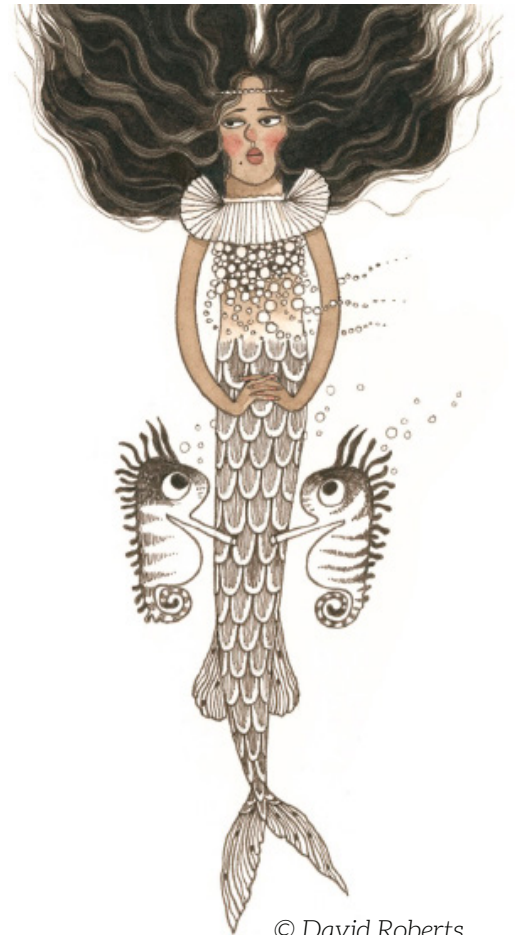
Work together to describe what you can see in each image. Ask children how they think Malu is feeling in the first picture, and why she wants to share her throne. How do Malu and Brooke feel in the final picture?

Ask children what they like doing on their own, and what they prefer doing with a friend. Revisit the text and talk about the choices Malu made. What does this tell us about what she values in a friend?

Do your children look for the same things as Malu in their friends? Or do they value other qualities? As a class, talk about the things you enjoy and value about your friends.

#### Taking a broader look

- Are there qualities that *everyone* should value in a friend?
- Do you enjoy your own company?
- What do you value about yourself?



© David Roberts

Malu, p. 3



© David Roberts

Malu and Brooke, p. 24



### 3.3 Thinking for yourself and making your own choices

Clothing, hairstyles and friendships are not the only personal choices explored in the book. Malu expects to choose a merman to rule alongside her, but decides to marry Brooke instead.

Show children the illustration of Brooke proposing to Malu. Ask what Brooke is saying, and talk about how the mermaids feel. Why does Brooke make this offer?

Ask children about their own choices. Do they make up their own minds? Do other people help them, or tell them what to do? Work together to think of everyday choices your children face.

#### Taking a broader look

- Should other people tell us what to do?
- Can it be difficult to make a choice that's right for you?



*Mermaids, p. 21*

# 4

## Illustration Activities

### 4.1 Using patterns to add detail and character

**This activity requires** thin black fineliner pens, white drawing paper, the endpapers, an outline merman template

Look at the endpapers and talk about the patterns you notice in the mer-people's tails, hair and fins. What other kinds of lines, shapes and marks have been used to create this picture?

Work together to spot different patterns, lines and marks in any other pictures in this book.

Using a black fineline pen on white paper, ask children to copy some of these patterns and marks.

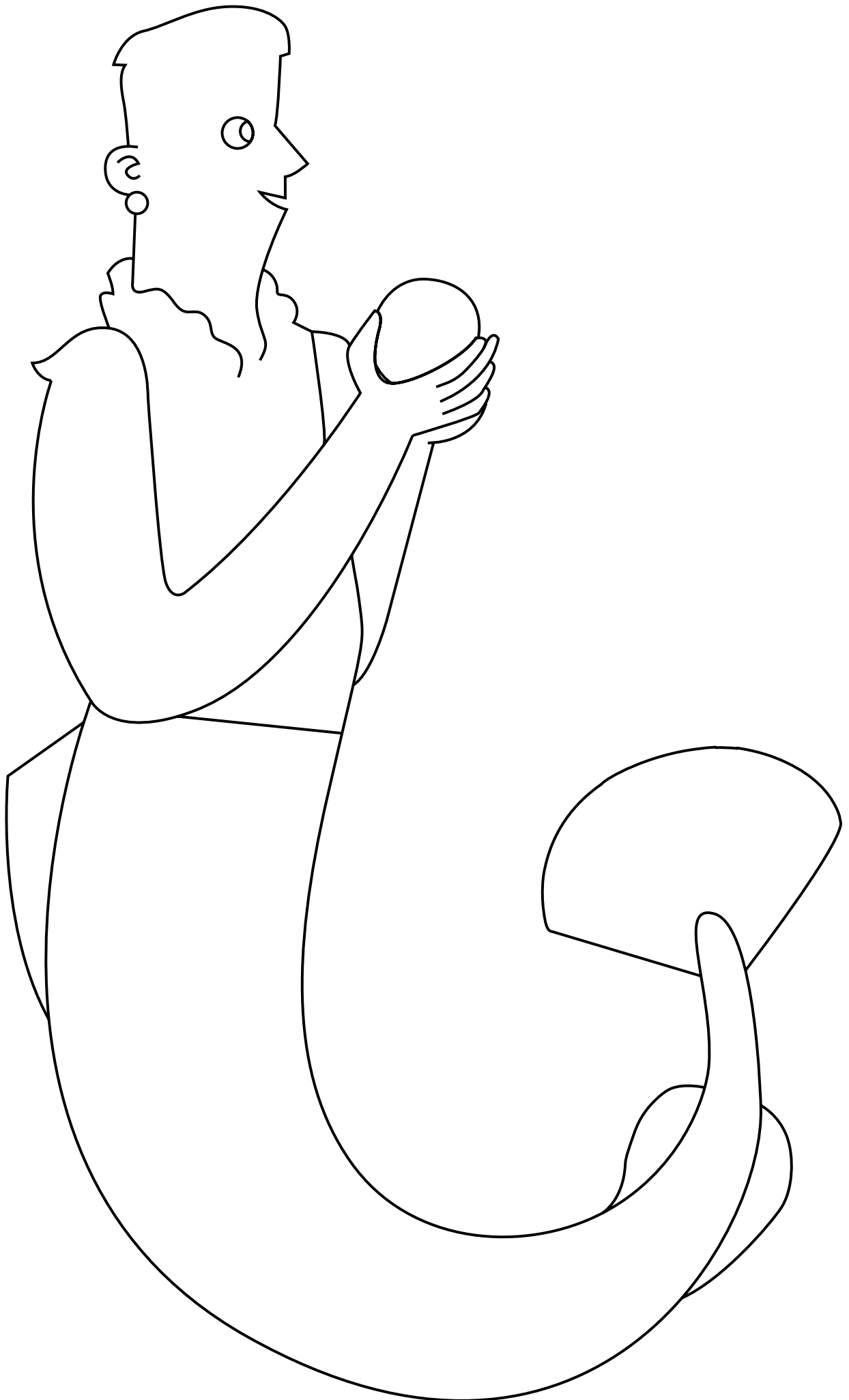
Fill a large bowl with water and invite children to put their hands in it and gently move the water. What does it feel like? Sound like? Look like? How could they represent bubbles or waves as marks on the page? Do they notice any patterns?

Try drawing them.

Using ideas from the book and from this exercise, ask children to explore new patterns and marks, then choose their favourites to decorate their merman.

Showback and discuss. Which patterns do you like best? Which merman is easiest to recognise? How do your patterns help each merman to stand out?





*Template 1: one A4-size outline figure taken from the merman on the cover*



## 4.2 Expressing yourself


■ These discussion points link to the illustration activity in 4.2

**This activity requires** black-and-white outline merman templates printed on card, white paper, drawing and colouring materials, scissors, coloured and patterned collage papers, gluesticks.

Look at the mermen on the endpapers and talk about the way they're expressing their personality and style.

Hand out the merman templates, and ask children to add a face and tail-scales. Start dressing the mermen by asking each child to tear or cut a shape from collage paper and glue it to their merman, then pass it to a neighbour. Repeat the process, with each child adding a different shape/item to the second merman. Continue until each merman's outfit is complete.

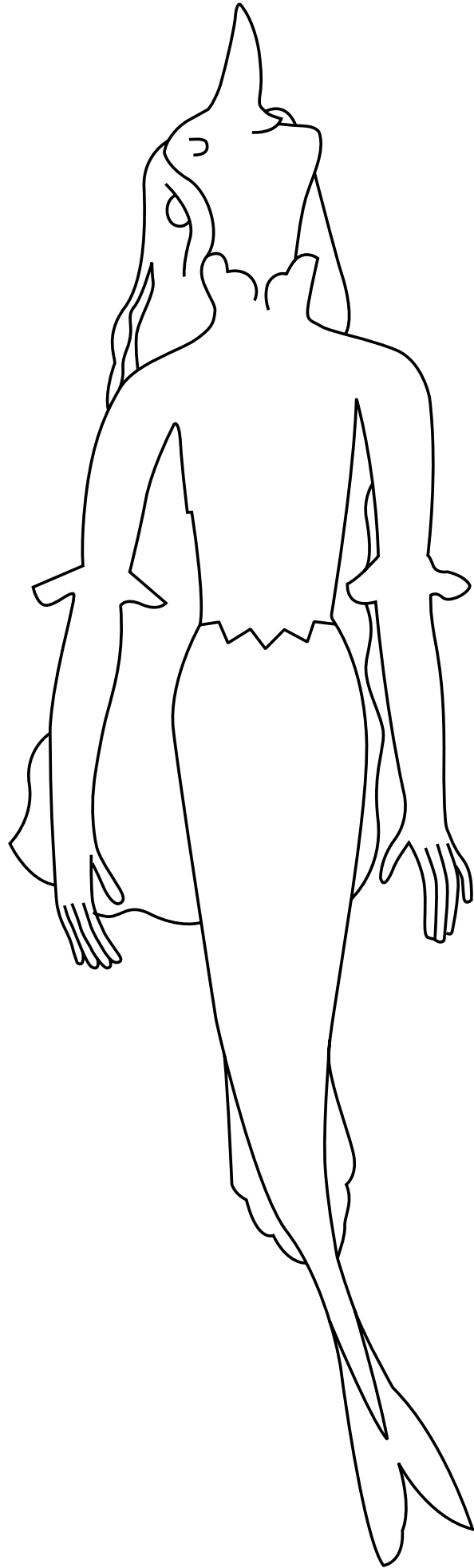
Showback and discuss. Which outfits do your children admire, and why? What does each merman's original creator think of their final 'look'?



**Extend** by collecting floaty tops, scarves and other underwater accessories and invite children to dress up. Photograph their choices and use to inspire more outfits for your cardboard merman, or lead into the creative writing activities in 5.3.



Endpaper



**Template 2: one A4-size outline figure taken from the merman on the inside cover  
(the one with his nose in the air)**

### 4.3 Which underwater creature will you be?

For this activity, you will need black fineline pens and white drawing paper.

Many of the mer-people in this story are accompanied by a sea creature, and most of them are different. These companion animals are stylised and are another way of helping us to recognise each mer-person as an individual.

As a class, search for and name the sea creatures in this book, then find real-life visual references for each one. Extend by finding more real-life sea-creatures and creating an image reference board.

Look at the picture of Malu on page 3 ask children to describe what they can see. What patterns and shapes do they notice on these seahorses?

Which sea creatures would your children choose as a companion, and why? Ask children to draw their creature using a thin black line, to create a picture inspired by David's work.

#### Extend for older children

Show children pictures of real seahorses, and talk about the difference between them and David's stylized seahorses. What has David exaggerated in his drawing? For example, David's seahorse has bigger eyes and a longer nose, and makes a neat pattern on the page... Can children exaggerate elements of their chosen creature to create a stylised design?

Talk about how it feels to be supported by water (e.g. there may be no 'right way up') and the way things like hair and seaweed move. Can your children find visual evidence that David's characters are immersed in water? When illustrating their companion creatures, ask children to include a visual cue that places their creature underwater.



Malu alone, p. 3



## 5 Writing Activities

### 5.1 Visions for a world that values everyone

Look at the final picture of Malu and Brooke and discuss what it tells us about these characters and their underwater world.

As a class, share everything you know about this realm. Who are Malu and Brooke's subjects? What does this book tell us about how they live, and how they behave towards each other?

Pair children, and ask each pair to imagine they're co-rulers of a distant country where anything is possible. Ask what this place is like, and who lives there, then ask them to draw a map of this place, marking and naming natural features and settlements.

As co-rulers, ask children to come up with rules that will make their country a happy place for everyone to live in, and write them as a charter.

Invite pairs to present their work and answer questions, then ask children to write about their country and what it's like to live there.



*Malu and Brooke, p. 24*

## 5.2 Exploring Malu's choice from different points of view

Other people helped Malu decide who to marry, but she had the courage and insight to know her own mind and heart, and make her own decision. She knew it might surprise some people and disappoint others, but she did what felt right.

This activity encourages children to think about Malu's decision from her point of view, and from the mermen's perspective.

Look at the picture showing Malu and Brooke being crowned as queens, and recap the events that led to this. Why does Malu accept Brooke's offer? How do the two mermaids feel?

What about the mermen? What does this picture tell us about their feelings? Were the mermen happy about Malu's decisions earlier in this story?

As a class, choose one of those decisions. What did this particular suitor do? How did Malu react? What reason did she give for dismissing him? What do the pictures tell us about how this suitor felt before and after Malu's decision? What about the onlookers? How did they react?

Freeze-frame this scene, asking children to use postures, gestures and facial expressions to show how they're feeling. Encourage the mermen to look after each other and make sure no-one's too upset. Use touch and tell to hear thoughts and reactions, then revisit your discussion about the dismissed suitor and add to what you know.

### Invite children to

- draw a picture of their merman with a speech bubble explaining how he feels, or
- write about Malu's decision from their merman's perspective, explaining what happened and how he felt.



Malu and Brooke, p. 24

### 5.3 Bringing the onlookers to life

Look at the mermen in this picture. Talk about their differences, and how they're expressing their individuality. Who could they be? Generate ideas.

In pairs, ask child 1 to roleplay one of these mermen while child 2 interviews him for *Ocean TV*. Share ideas for open-ended questions that will help your mermen give interesting answers. Swap roles, then showback and discuss.

Which characters did your children enjoy hearing about most, and why?

Ask children to name their merman and write and illustrate a character profile for him.

In pairs, roleplay a conversation between two mermen at the coronation.

#### Prompts could include:

- *introduce yourself*
- *talk about why you came*
- *ask about family and friends*
- *talk about what you're going to do when you get home*

To showback, ask each merman to introduce their partner to the class.

**Extend for older children**  
by working in pairs to write  
and perform a dialogue.



*Mermen, p. 6-7*

## 6 Glossary

**Choice:** the act of picking or choosing; selection.

**Diversity:** different kinds or sorts; a variety.

**Individuality:** the qualities and characteristics of a person that make them different from all others.

**Personality:** all of the qualities of a person that make that person different from others.

**Self-discovery:** the act or process of coming to know or understand oneself, as regarding one's true needs and wants, one's identity, or one's vocation.



# 10 stories to make a difference

*A Match for a Mermaid* is part of a collection of ten inspiring stories for young readers that celebrate difference and individuality.

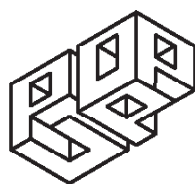
All the books in our **10 Stories to Make a Difference** collection are beautifully illustrated and perfect for children, aged 5 and up.



Each of the books is an exciting collaboration between well-known and emerging writers and illustrators, giving a platform to bold new voices.

We believe that all children should be able to find themselves, and discover others, through the stories they read. We therefore hope that these amazing stories will entertain and inspire the young readers in your lives.

Enjoy and feel free to get in touch with us at [info@pop-up.org.uk](mailto:info@pop-up.org.uk).  
We always love to hear from our readers!



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