

# A Teacher's Guide for

# Odder

## ABOUT THE BOOK

**Meet Odder, the Queen of Play:**

*Nobody has her moves.*

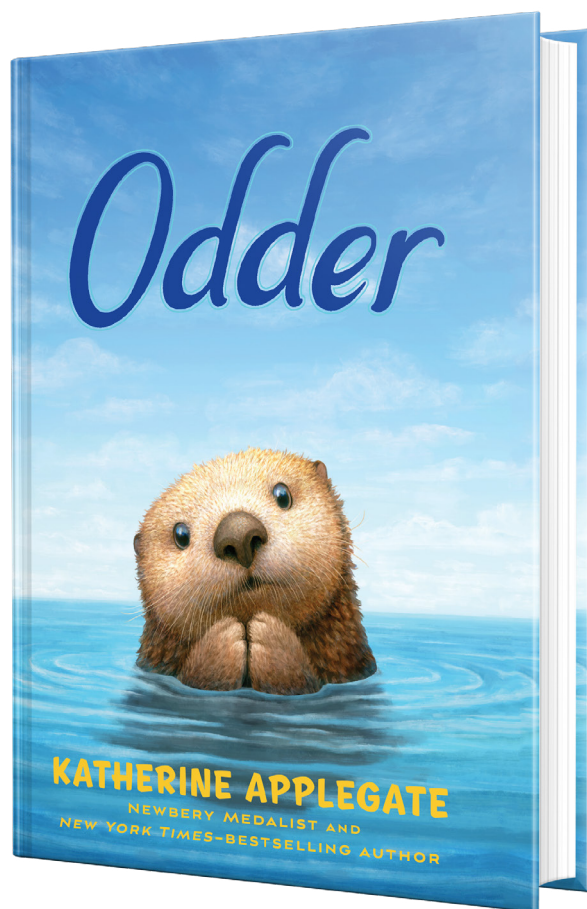
*She doesn't just swim to the bottom,  
she dive-bombs.*

*She doesn't just somersault,  
she triple-doughnuts.*

*She doesn't just ride the waves,  
she makes them.*

Odder spends her days off the coast of central California, practicing her underwater acrobatics and spinning the quirky stories for which she's known. She's a fearless daredevil, curious to a fault. But when Odder comes face-to-face with a hungry great white shark, her life takes a dramatic turn, one that will challenge everything she believes about herself—and about the humans who hope to save her.

Inspired by the true story of a Monterey Bay Aquarium program that pairs orphaned otter pups with surrogate mothers, this poignant and humorous tale told in free verse examines bravery and healing through the eyes of one of nature's most beloved and charming animals.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katherine Applegate is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Wishtree*, *Crenshaw*, *Home of the Brave*, and *Willodeen* all from Feiwel & Friends, as well as *The One and Only Ivan*, winner of the Newbery Medal, and its sequel *The One and Only Bob*. She lives in Southern California with her family. [katherineapplegate.com](http://katherineapplegate.com)



# Odder

BY KATHERINE APPLGATE



## PRE-READING QUESTIONS

- What do you know about sea otters?
- What do you know about large science aquariums? What purposes do they serve? Have you visited one?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. “It is a happy talent to know how to play,” reads the quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson in the epigraph. Why is knowing how to play a talent for sea otters? When do you see that Odder is good at playing? What does her play consist of? Is knowing how to play a talent for humans? Explain your answer.
2. Explain the importance of names in the novel, including numbers used instead of names. What do Gracie and Holly tell Odder about how names are used for the sea otters at the aquarium? Why does Odder’s mother call her Odder? Why do you think the aquarium humans call her Jazz?
3. Describe Odder’s personality in the first part, “the queen of play,” giving examples of her actions and choices. How does her attitude toward life fluctuate when she’s at the aquarium after the shark bite? What improves her spirits?
4. Who is Kairi? How is she different from Odder? Why does Odder blame herself for putting Kairi in danger? Why does Kairi end up in the aquarium? What will her future be?
5. What steps do the humans take when Odder is a baby to prepare her to return to the ocean? How do they teach her to find food? Why are they impressed with her? How do they make her feel comfortable with the ocean itself?
6. How can Kairi and Odder do a better job than humans can of preparing baby sea otters for the ocean? Why is Odder reluctant at first to help #209? What steps does Odder take to get #209 ready for living in the ocean?
7. What are some of the dangers that nature, and specifically the ocean and its animals, pose to sea otters? Discuss the dangers that sharks present. How does the shark find Odder? How does it harm her?
8. What dangers do otters face from humans, both individual people and society in general? When does Odder encounter humans other than the aquarium workers? Why do the aquarium workers worry about sea otters interacting with humans?
9. Who are Gracie and Holly? When does Odder meet them? Why are they in the aquarium? What does Odder learn from them about life in the aquarium?
10. What are some of Odder’s perceptions of the humans at the aquarium, both when she was young and three years later? What do their voices sound like to her? Why do the humans seem to have boxes on their head?
11. What do the illustrations add to the novel in terms of information and emotion? Choose a few pictures and explain how they made a difference to your reading.



12. Talk about why the book is divided into four parts. Discuss the title and overall topic of each part. Why do you think the author goes back in time for the second part instead of starting the book when Odder was a baby? Why is there a six-month gap between the third part and the coda?
13. Odder understands the world by using all her senses. Find scenes that demonstrate her perceptions through smell, sight, hearing, taste, and touch. Compare her senses to those of humans. Are they about the same, or are they more effective or less effective?
14. The sea otter characters speak to each other in dialogue. But the story also explains and demonstrates other ways that sea otters communicate with each other. What are some of those ways? How are they different from how humans communicate?
15. Reread and discuss the poems “The Fifty” and “why.” What were the Fifty? Why were there only fifty? What happened to the others? How many are there now? Relate your discussion to the information about the Fifty in the author’s note.
16. After the surgery for the shark bites, Odder realizes that the humans are thinking about how much they have “to learn from her.” What does she mean? Why is it important to the humans to learn more? In the poem, “learning,” what do the humans want to know?
17. The poem “cute” reflects on how popular sea otters are with humans. Why are they so popular? Is being considered cute helpful to them, harmful, or both? Explain your answer.
18. Find examples in the poems of similes and metaphors. What comparisons are drawn? What impact does the figurative language have on you as a reader? What emotions does the imagery create? What pictures form in your mind?

## READING ACTIVITIES

1. Invite your students to explore the website for the Monterey Bay Aquarium ([montereybayaquarium.org](http://montereybayaquarium.org)) and spend some time watching the sea otter cam. Before they watch the cam, have them discuss what they might expect to see in the daily life of a sea otter at the aquarium, based on the novel. If nothing is happening when a student watches, have them check back a few times. They should observe the sea otters as a scientist would, by taking notes and later comparing their observations with those of other students.
2. Challenge students to expand their knowledge of southern sea otters by researching facts, like how long they live, what they eat, how they reproduce, where they live or previously lived, what survival skills they need, and so on. Each student should draw a poster of a southern sea otter and surround the animal with paragraphs that share the information that they found.
3. The poem “keystones” lists some keystone species and explains briefly what the term means. As a class, do some research and make a longer list of keystone species. Then, working in pairs, have students choose a keystone species to learn more about. They should present their findings to their classmates, describing the species and what makes it important.
4. Ask students to write a poem about their reaction to Odder, her character, and her adventures, addressing questions like: What emotions did her story bring up in you? What are the strongest images you have in your head of her? The poem can be short but should include figurative language such as similes or metaphors. Have students share the poems in small groups and compare their reactions to Odder.

**Kathleen Odean was a school librarian for seventeen years and now gives workshops for educators on young adult books. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Newbery and Caldecott committees.**

