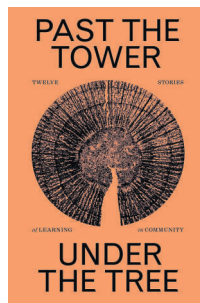


# Collection of learning and change



PAST THE TOWER, UNDER THE TREE  
**Balamohan Shingade & Erena Shingade**  
Gloria Books

By JESSIE NEILSON

In her introduction to *Past the Tower, Under the Tree*, co-editor Erena Shingade asks: “What does teaching and learning look like in beloved company?”

With an Antipodean focus, this collection of 12 written and visual pieces delves into learning outside the sometimes stifling classroom, as well as the place of important mentors. While schools claim to be the proper repository of alchemy, by “hoarding all the cauldrons”, these voices beg to differ. This alternative learning centres the reciprocal teaching-learning dynamic around connection. Elders and community are vital. Learning is lifelong, and divergent paths lead to surprising enrichment.

Some, but not all, of the contributors have Pacific roots to which they return. For all of them though, Aotearoa has a hold. In the strong opening piece, Mokonui-a-rangi Smith becomes invested in his Cook Island heritage, returning to Rarotonga and learning traditional tattooing by esteemed (English) artist and local figure, Croc Coulter. Smith retrained as his apprentice, observing Coulter's absolute concentration on each task. Smith identified the intense, yet somehow soft work focus, of mindfulness and enquiring minds. Art and culture would meld into an overall world-view of spirituality and continuity. This is a fascinating piece.

Some of the contributors align themselves with other spiritual and cultural realms. Areez Katki, of Zoroastrian background, presents a haunting prose poem, dedicated to his mother, Nilofar. He reimagines her as a young woman in Bombay, learning new languages of “motherwifeworkerwoman” when she immigrates to Aotearoa, as well as the language of shorthand, a secret script transmitted between females. This shorthand has “all the nuts and bolts . . . al-most”, but Nilofar sees “spirals/unfurling, sharp spears plunging into an inky abyss”. She passes this language on to her unborn son, stitching collective voices tighter, which grows “strong, humid, immaculate/syntaxed in blue/a creature of sublime hybridity”.

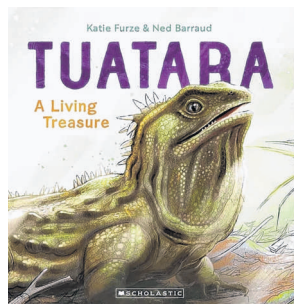
All these pieces emphasise continuity and returning to roots, sharing skills and worth. Often new contexts call for new iterations. Balamohan Shingade addresses how the classical Hindustani music of India can be applied here without political agendas. Terri Te Tau writes of her trauma of narrowly surviving the Boxing Day tsunami. Though it is angst-inducing, water also links her whakapapa. This piece has many shifts in place and narrative, and is as engrossing as it is alarming.

This collection is pocketbook in size, yet feels full, an amalgam of experiences of learning and changing pace. Here are but a few examples of individuals living lives on their terms, moulded by mentors esteemed in their eyes. From this work will hopefully come many more stories, for it is always a pleasure to read of contentment and growth, especially in stories far different from one's own.

Jessie Neilson is a University of Otago library assistant

# Something for everyone

Emma Wood reviews a selection of children's books.



TUATARA: A LIVING TREASURE  
**Katie Furze & Ned Barraud**  
Scholastic

Written in beautiful, lyrical prose, this wonderful book is about the majestic tuatara, the only remaining reptile of its kind in the world.

Contemporaries of the dinosaurs, tuatara have been around for 250 million years, but were forced to the brink of extinction with the introduction of mammalian predators to New Zealand. Thanks to the efforts of iwi and conservationists, they are now thriving on predator-free islands and in ecosanctuaries.

Readers will discover many interesting details about tuatara, as the engaging text and lively illustrations follow a female hatchling throughout her life until she lays her first clutch of eggs.

Highly recommended.  
Ages 2+



EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT SHARKS IS WRONG!  
**Dr Nick Crumpton & Gavin Scott**  
Nosy Crow

Like its excellent predecessor about dinosaurs, this myth-busting book about sharks hooks readers with its fun, interactive format while



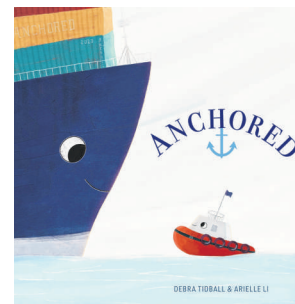
THE BEST BAD DAY EVER  
**Marianna Coppo**  
Frances Lincoln Children's Books

Wolfie is in a grumpy mood — he can tell as soon as he wakes up that it's going to be a bad day, even though everyone else seems to be having a good time.

He suffers through most of the school day feeling like nothing is going right and nobody understands him. He draws a dark storm cloud, then notices Penguin has also drawn a storm cloud. Soon, things begin to look brighter for them both.

This sweet, funny picture book has adorable illustrations — Wolfie's frowny face is especially charming — and will appeal to a wide range of ages.

Ages 2+



ANCHORED  
**Debra Tidball & Arielle Li**  
EK Books

A reassuring and empowering story for children who experience separation anxiety, *Anchored* explores the relationship between two vessels: big Ship and tiny Tug.

Ship heads out into the deep ocean, leaving Tug behind at port. The longer they are apart, the sadder Tug feels. Tug wonders if Ship misses her as much as she misses Ship.

On her return, Ship tells Tug she has been thinking of her during her adventures at sea. Assured that their love for one another persists even when they are apart, Tug feels stronger and braver the next time Ship must venture out.

Ages 1+

imparting a wealth of fascinating facts about these ocean predators.

The book discounts more than 25 misconceptions about sharks, for example that they are all cold-blooded, or that they have not evolved for millions of years.

Each provides a jumping-off point for a deeper

exploration of shark biology and behaviour. The appealing, accessible text is written by zoologist Nick Crumpton, and brought to vivid life by Gavin Scott's lush, detailed artwork.

Ages 7+

Emma Wood is a Dunedin writer and communications specialist

## Clever structure but fails to live up to the hype

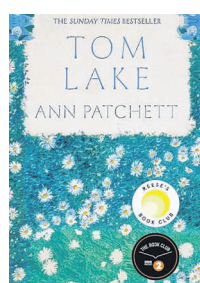
TOM LAKE  
**Ann Patchett**  
Bloomsbury

By CAROLINE HUNTER

Ann Patchett has an impressive array of awards to her name, including the Orange Prize for Fiction, not to mention being named one of *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people in the world in 2012. Her best-sellers include *The Dutch House*, *Bel Canto*, *The Magician's Assistant* and *State of Wonder*.

I was ready to be impressed by her latest novel. It is heralded on the back cover as “The publishing event of the year” — quite a claim. The problem with PR hubris of that nature is that it sets up expectations that may not be delivered.

*Tom Lake* is set across two



time periods, which switch constantly. This is frustrating at first because the reader only get a fraction of each storyline. However, it becomes easier to understand why Patchett has done this as the threads get more tightly woven and the links between the narratives develop.

Lara Nelson lives on a cherry orchard in Michigan with her husband and three grown daughters. It is set during the Covid pandemic, which is why the adult

children are living with their parents and helping to run the farm.

It transpires Lara was once a successful actress who appeared in a famous play, dated an actor who later became a major star, and made a movie that earned her rave reviews.

Her daughters appear to be obsessed with her past and, in particular, with Peter Duke, the actor she had a summer romance with in her youth.

As they constantly question her, Lara gradually relents and fills in the blanks for her offspring.

As she reveals what happened, and the lives of those with whom she shared her acting days, the fixed ideas her daughters had about Lara start to give way to a new understanding, not just about their mother, but about

their own lives as well.

A surprise discovery about their father also prompts a tectonic shift in how the three daughters see their parents and the family life they built after taking over the orchard.

The play Lara starred in as a fledgling actress — *Our Town*, by Thornton Wilder — becomes one of the central motifs of the book, but I have to confess to becoming bored with it and its characters about halfway through. And if you don't know the play, which I didn't, some of the references are meaningless.

There is a clever structure to *Tom Lake* and it is an insightful take on youthful romance and the blessings of marriage, but it seemed to drag in places.

Caroline Hunter is an ODT subeditor