

Educator Resource Sheet

*Based on: Quinn the not so colourful cuttlefish - part of the 'On the Reef' series of books
By Melanie Atkinson - published by PerthLight.com.au November 2025*

Disclaimer

These educator notes are not official EYLF or EYFS guidelines. They are an informal discussion resource designed to support reflection and conversation when using the *On the Reef* books with children. Educators should always refer to the current EYLF and EYFS documents for accurate and authoritative guidance and use these notes only as a supplementary tool.



About the author

Melanie Atkinson is an early years educator based in Perth, Western Australia. She earned degrees in teaching and developmental psychology in the 1990s, and has worked exclusively in the early learning sector ever since. Her work is based on the latest Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF Version 2.0) and is grounded in a deep understanding of how young children grow, learn, and make sense of their emotions.



Overview

This colourful read-along picture book is designed for children aged 2–5 years. It explores themes of **emotional awareness**, **self-acceptance**, and **identity**. Quinn's story helps children understand that everyone has **unique qualities**, and it models **safe, caring relationships** with peers and trusted adults.

The book supports early learning outcomes aligned with both the **Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF Version 2.0)** and the **UK's Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)**, with a specific focus on children's **personal and social development**. It also reflects current **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** research widely adopted in the **United States**. In particular, the story provides opportunities to practise the five core SEL competencies identified by the **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)**: **self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making**. By embedding these elements in an engaging narrative, Quinn supports young children in developing **resilience, empathy**, and a **confident sense of self** within supportive peer and adult relationships.

Theoretical Context

The themes in *Quinn the not so colourful cuttlefish* are supported by well-established theories of child development. Piaget described children aged 2–7 as being in the preoperational stage, when identity and self-concept are emerging but fragile, and thinking is shaped by appearances and comparison with others. Quinn’s uncertainty about his own colour reflects this stage of development, where children explore “who I am” through symbolic play and storytelling.

Vygotsky highlighted the role of social interaction in learning, with growth occurring in the zone of proximal development when children are supported by peers and trusted adults. In Quinn’s story, encouragement from friends and the guidance of Miss Coral reflect this principle: identity and self-worth are co-constructed in relationships, not discovered in isolation. Erikson’s work, reframed in contemporary practice, also emphasises the importance of autonomy and initiative. Young children thrive when they are free to explore self-expression in safe environments, without judgement. Quinn’s journey embodies this balance of independence and belonging.

Attachment theory, developed by Bowlby and Ainsworth, also highlights the importance of secure, trusting relationships with adults, which are modelled in the story through Miss Coral’s consistent care and guidance.

Contemporary perspectives also support this view. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model reminds us that children’s development is shaped by multiple layers of influence, from family and peers to culture and community. Bandura’s social learning theory shows how children learn empathy and kindness through observing others, which Quinn experiences in his peer group. More recent SEL frameworks, such as the CASEL model, identify self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills as key competencies. These are all embedded in Quinn’s story arc.

These theoretical perspectives are reflected in current best practice as described in the EYLF and EYFS. Both frameworks emphasise play-based, child-led learning within environments structured by sensitive and intentional educators. Quinn provides an open-ended narrative context in which children can explore identity, belonging, and emotional awareness at their own level, while modelling the importance of supportive peers and trusted adults. The book was written with these principles in mind, ensuring it aligns with the most up-to-date understanding of how young children grow and learn.

About the EYLF (Australia)

The **Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF Version 2.0)** is Australia’s national curriculum for early childhood. It focuses on key learning outcomes that guide educators in supporting children’s wellbeing, learning, and identity development.

Quinn the not so colourful cuttlefish connects especially well with:

- **Outcome 1.1** – Children feel safe, secure, and supported.
- **Outcome 1.3** – Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities and a positive sense of self-worth.
- **Outcome 3.1** – Children become strong in their social, emotional and mental wellbeing.
- **Outcome 3.3** – Children are aware of and develop strategies to support their own mental and physical health and personal safety.

These outcomes are reflected in Quinn’s emotional journey, his peer interactions, and the caring guidance from Miss Coral.

About the EYFS (UK)

The **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)** is the statutory framework that sets the standards for learning, development, and care for children from birth to age five in England. It includes seven areas of learning, with a focus on three “prime” areas in the early years.

This book supports development in two of those prime areas:

- **Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED)**
Children explore their own feelings, learn to manage emotions, build healthy relationships, and develop a positive sense of self. Quinn’s story models self-worth, peer empathy, and emotional insight.
 - **Communication and Language**
The book encourages listening and speaking through expressive storytelling, character dialogue, and guided discussion prompts. Children are also introduced to descriptive vocabulary such as colours, which supports early language development.
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Suggested Discussion Prompts

Use these questions to encourage reflection and emotional expression during or after reading:

- How do you think Quinn was feeling at the start of the story?
 - What helped Quinn feel better?
 - What makes someone a good friend?
 - What makes you special or unique?
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Extension Activities

Support deeper engagement and reinforce key learning through these classroom or home-based activities:

- **Create a “Reflection Wall”:** Invite each child to share something that makes them special. Display these reflections to support identity and belonging.
 - **Role-play with ocean characters:** Reenact parts of the story to practise kindness, helping, and asking for support.
 - **Self-portrait activity:** Use mirrors and art materials to help children draw themselves and describe what they like about who they are.
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Parent and Carer Summary: Supporting Your Child Through Big Feelings

The Quinn story opens a gentle conversation about self-worth, difference, and emotional resilience. Here are some ways you can support your child:

- **Name the feeling:** Help your child identify emotions like feeling left out, sad, or different.
“Are you feeling upset?”
- **Listen and empathise:** Let them know you are present and understanding.
“It’s okay to feel that way. I’m listening.”
- **Explore what’s underneath:** After calming together, gently uncover what’s bothering them.
“Are you feeling left out because you think you’re different?”
- **Celebrate their uniqueness:** Acknowledge physical and personal traits as special.
“You have beautiful brown eyes, your own kind of special.”
- **Reflect their strengths:** Use specific feedback to build self-confidence.
“Thank you for helping tidy up. You’re thoughtful and kind.”
- **Teach emotional safety:** Help your child identify trusted people in their life and reassure them that it’s safe to talk about feelings.
- **Model empathy and making amends:** Talk about how choices affect others.
“What could you say to a friend if they felt hurt?”
- **Encourage peer kindness:** Support children in recognising others' strengths too.
“I like how you shared the puzzle,” or “I love the colours in your picture.”

When children feel truly seen, heard and understood, they are more likely to grow in confidence, kindness, and emotional resilience.

Emotional Learning Activities for the Early Years Classroom

Activity 1: Rainbow Reflections

Theme: Self-worth & identity

- Children create self-portraits using all the colors they feel inside
- Introduce mirrors after the artwork to explore their uniqueness
- Reflection prompt: “Quinn didn’t know how colorful he was. What colors do YOU see in yourself?”

Activity 2: Emotion Oceans

Theme: Naming big feelings

- Use colored sea creature cutouts representing emotions
- Children pick and match their mood of the day
- Add a “Reef Safety Zone” corner to retreat when emotions overwhelm

Activity 3: Bubble Breathing Break

Theme: Self-regulation & calm-down strategies

- Blow bubbles and match breath with bubble motion: inhale... exhale... release
- Use visual prompts: “Send your big feeling out with each bubble”

Activity 4: Kindness Reef Chain

Theme: Peer recognition & emotional safety

- Children give paper “reef links” for kind actions (e.g., helping a friend, sharing)
- Create a kindness chain displayed in class
- Connection: “Just like Quinn learned to notice others’ feelings”

Educator Tips

- Reinforce EYLF principles: *Belonging, Being, Becoming*
- Use simple, empathetic, authentic language like: “Are you OK?” or “Would you like to sit with me?”
- Reflect with children using open-ended prompts to build emotional vocabulary. Encourage children to reflect on how their friend must feel, if they have hurt their feelings, with “What could you say to your friend, who is feeling hurt?” In approaching this way, the child will learn to apologise, or make amends in their own words.