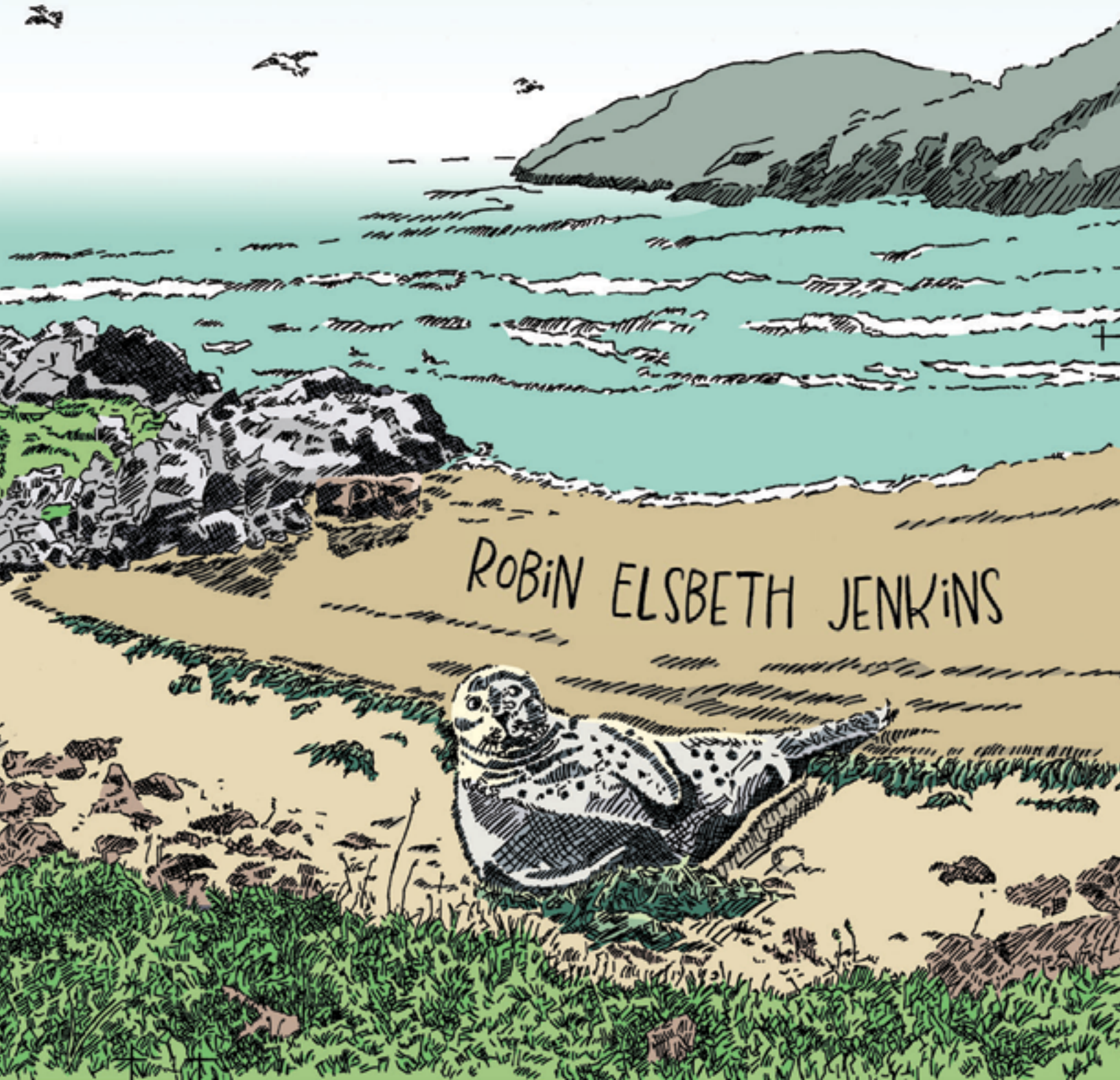


EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

THE SECRET OF THE CATAPUS

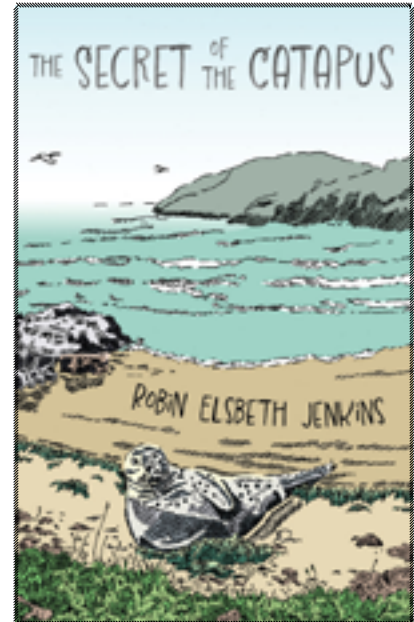


ROBIN ELSBETH JENKINS

ABOUT THE BOOK:

A Seal. A Circle of Friends. A Special Kind of Magic.

Twelve-year-old Ellie moves to her grandmother's Maine homestead, uncovering extraordinary secrets about her family, community, and nature. In this small coastal town, she finds her voice as a young climate activist, aided by a group of new friends, a mysterious seal, and her grandmother's spirit. Set on the wild Maine coast, *The Secret of the Catapus* is a coming-of-age tale blending environmental urgency with heart-felt storytelling, humor, and magical realism.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Robin Jenkins lives in Aroostook County, Maine, and grew up in mid-coast Maine, where she spent many hours exploring the coves and tidal inlets, much like her characters in *The Secret of the Catapus*. She studied English Literature and Elementary Education, eventually becoming a Special Education and Literacy teacher. She has two grown children and two grandchildren, and when she's not writing, she enjoys cooking, reading, doing cross stitch, gardening and walking on her hill, which has a glorious view of the surrounding Amish farms and the Canadian border.

PRAISE:

"Thank you for writing this book! I am so glad an author has finally published a story about environmental activism so true to the experience of a young person! "

—Thea, 15-year-old environmental activist and Citizen's Climate Lobby volunteer

"Beautifully written, with a vivid sense of place that will connect readers with nature and make the environmental crisis real and personal. Engaging characters and human warmth demonstrate that individuals can be part of creating solutions to the threats we all face. Accessible, readable adventure with a true green heart."

—Nicola Davies, author of *The Song That Sings Us*

"The Secret of the Catapus is an extraordinary story of love: for the natural world, for standing up for what is right, and for carrying forward a grandparent's legacy. Ellie is a force, and the town of Whitneyport hums with Down East traditions as it confronts our desperate need for greater ecological responsibility. You'll have to listen to these whip-smart kids, and you won't want to leave these waters."

—Gregory Brown, author of *The Lowering Days*

"Full of good-hearted humor, compelling issues, lovable characters, friendship, and hope, The Secret of the Catapus will resonate long after the last page is read."

—Kristine Bondeson, columnist, *Echoes Magazine*

"Ellie is a young climate warrior with such a good heart! Descriptions of the Maine coast and its inhabitants, rich intergenerational backstory, and a touch of magical realism have strong literary qualities that enrich the narrative."

—Kate Risse, author of *Inland*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

You can use some or all of these questions to spark a discussion with the class. As an alternative, you can use these as a writing prompt, or have students record a video with their thoughts/responses to one or more of the questions.

1. Ellie tells us in the first few pages that she calls her parents by their first names. Do you, or would you, ever want to do that? Later in the book Ellie asks her father if she can call him "Daddy." What do you think changed?
2. Freddy tells Ellie about the pirate "Black Sam" Bellamy. What Freddy didn't realize was that some of the treasure was recovered after the discovery of the shipwreck, and the search for the remaining treasure is ongoing. You can read more about it here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whydah_Gally. "Black Sam's" treasure trove has also been the subject of local legend for many years: <https://quoddytides.com/legend-of-pirate-samuel-bellamy-spurs-hunts-for-facts-treasure.html> Have you heard about any stories or local legends where you live? Ask your family or neighbors.
3. When Ellie tells Freddy about Gram, she gets sad. Freddy says, "You miss your grandma." Ellie replies that "she wouldn't want everything spoiled by climate change...she would want us to do something about it." Think about your grandparents or another friend or relative. Is there something important to them that they would want you to do, or try to do?
4. When Ellie sneaks out of school early, she ends up spending time with Joe and Betty, who share their stories about Gram when she was younger. Do you know any stories about your grandparents, or other friends or relatives, from a time when they were younger?
5. Judy takes Ellie to see the petroglyphs (ancient rock carvings). Ellie uses her imagination to think about the people who might have made them. What do you think life might have been like for people who lived in your area thousands of years ago?
6. Harbor seals are often called "sea dogs" (which is also the name of the Portland, Maine minor league baseball team), but Judy and Ellie think the seal they meet looks and acts more like a cat. After reading the book, what do you think, are seals more like dogs or cats? Or something else?

7. Ellie gets angry when Judy's father doesn't believe in climate change, or "global warming" as he calls it. Later that evening, Ellie's father asks her if she had a two-way conversation with Judy's father, or if she was "talking at him." Have you ever found yourself "talking at" someone when they didn't agree with you? Do you think you helped to change their opinion, or not?
8. Ellie's father tells her about a university study on people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding climate change called the "Six Americas" framework, which says that people fall into six distinct categories: Alarmed, Concerned, Cautious, Disengaged, Doubtful, and Dismissive. Which category do you think you fit into? What about your friends, family, and neighbors?
9. Ellie sometimes misses her old home in New Haven, CT. Have you ever moved to a different town or state (or country), or do you know someone who has? What did you (or they) miss most? Did you, or they, find some things that were better in the new location?
10. Climate change is a very important issue - but what are some other important issues you may have heard about or experienced? Can you think of some things that you or your classmates can do to raise awareness/help to make things better?

RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES:

Seal Cam

While harbor seals give birth to their pups in March and April, Maine's gray seals give birth in December and January. You can watch gray seals during pupping season live on the Seal Cam: <https://explore.org/livecams/oceans/seal-pups-cam>

Research Project

Have students choose a wild animal from *The Secret of the Catapus* that they would like to learn more about (see list below). Have them research the animal and present what they find to their classmates. Some things they should look for include (but are not limited to):

- What is their natural habitat?
- What do they eat?
- Do they migrate?
- Who are their natural predators (if they have any)?
- How might climate change impact them?
- What can we do to help protect them?

Animals found in *The Secret of the Catapus*:

Arctic tern	cormorant	kingfisher	raccoon
bald eagle	crow	laughing gull	razorbill
black guillemot	dragonfly	lobster	rock crab
black sea bass	garter snake	mackerel	sandpiper
bobolink	great black-backed gull	mussel	shrimp
chickadee	great blue heron	octopus	swallowtail butterfly
clam	green crab	osprey	weasel
cod	harbor seal	puffin	wood thrush
common tern	herring gull		

Creative Writing

Interspersed throughout the book are sections told from the seal's perspective. Have students pick an animal from the book, or from where they live, and write a paragraph or two from that animal's perspective. What would the animal think of humans? Where might humans and the animal interact?

Letters to the Future/Time Capsule

Ellie's teacher asked the class to write a letter to the people who will be living in their town in fifty years. Ellie's letter apologized to the people in the future for climate change, and also shared stories about her grandmother, including her environmental activism.

Have students write their own letter to the people who will be living in their town in fifty years. Encourage them to think about what they want to say, is it positive or negative? Do they want to include stories about someone important to them (family member, friend, community member)? If students are comfortable, the letters can be shared with the class. If you would like to create a time capsule you can find some ideas here: <https://www.weareteachers.com/time-capsule-ideas>

MORE RESOURCES

For more educational materials about climate and the environment, you can visit these sites:

- Learn more about Seal Island, Maine:
<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/seal-island>
- Find more live animal cameras from Seal Island, including puffins and guillemots
<https://explore.org/livecams/puffins/puffin-loafing-ledge-cam>
<https://explore.org/livecams/birds/guillemot-cam>
- Maine Environmental & Climate Literacy Plan:
<https://www.maine.gov/doe/innovation/climateeducation/literacyplan>
- Maine Climate Education Hub:
<https://maineclimatehub.org>
- Climate Change, National Geographic Kids:
<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/climate-change>
- NEEF Environmental Education Resources :
<https://www.neefusa.org/what-we-do/k-12-education/environmental-education-resources>
- For more on lobstering and the impact of warming waters in Maine:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4v-eNmWECw>

Q&A WITH DR. JESSICA MUHLIN, MARINE BIOLOGIST AT MAINE MARITIME ACADEMY IN CASTINE, MAINE:

Q: What is a marine biologist?

JM: A marine biologist, broadly speaking, is a scientist who focuses on the living organisms in the coastal and oceanic waters. There are sub-specialties within marine biology - some marine biologists are experts at a particular group of organisms (for example, sharks or seaweeds), whereas other marine biologists specialize in an area of biology (for example, physiology or ecology) or area of the ocean (for example, the intertidal zone or the deep sea).

Q: What do you enjoy most about being a marine biologist?

JM: Being a marine biologist requires being able to observe nature, and I enjoy being able to explore and observe the organisms that are in the intertidal zone. I also love the process of science and being able to test hypotheses, both in the laboratory and in the field.

Q: What part of marine biology do you specialize in?

JM: My specialty is intertidal seaweeds (marine macroalgae). In particular, reproductive ecology, population genetics, and food web ecology.

Q: Do you have a favorite alga? ("algae" is plural)

JM: Oh! That is a tough question. I would have to say, bladder wrack (*Fucus vesiculosus*).

Q: How are plants different from algae?

JM: Plants are nicely classified within the Tree of Life into one neat group, and actually descended from one group of algae, the green algae. The term algae is used to describe a huge variety of organisms that span many parts of the Tree of Life - and not all algae are closely related to each other in the same way plants are closely related to each other. Many algae and most plants photosynthesize, converting sunlight energy into sugars and producing oxygen—so ecologically, they can share similar functions in ecosystems (primary producer, base of the food web).

Q: What is the most memorable experience you have had as a marine biologist?

JM: So many wonderful experiences! I think some of my fondest memories are introducing people to just how beautiful and amazing the algae are.

Q: Do you have any special interests or hobbies outside of your work as a marine biologist?

JM: I do! I started a small business making frozen cookie dough. Many recipes are unique and celebrate the flavors of Maine (including seaweeds!). Over 50% of all my ingredients are sourced from Maine farmers and producers, and I donate 10% of my profits to Maine non-profits.

Q: Why are the oceans so important?

JM: Oceans are important - biologically, chemically, physically, and geologically - for healthy ecosystems across the Earth. They facilitate climate and weather.

Q: What can we do to help protect the oceans?

JM: There are many ways to protect the oceans. At an individual level, I would advocate to be mindful and reduce, reuse, and recycle.

Q: What is the best way to learn more about marine biology?

JM: One good place to start is the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (<https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/kids>)

Q&A WITH ROBIN JENKINS:

Q: Ellie had a very strong relationship to her grandmother, and you dedicated the book to “grandparents and grandchildren everywhere.” Did you write this book for your grandchildren?

RJ: Yes - for all grandchildren, but I am working on two picture books that are specifically dedicated to my own grandchildren.

Q: Is Whitneyport, ME based on a real place?

RJ: No - not a specific place, but a region in coastal Maine.

Q: Is the Catapus based on a real animal/real experience?

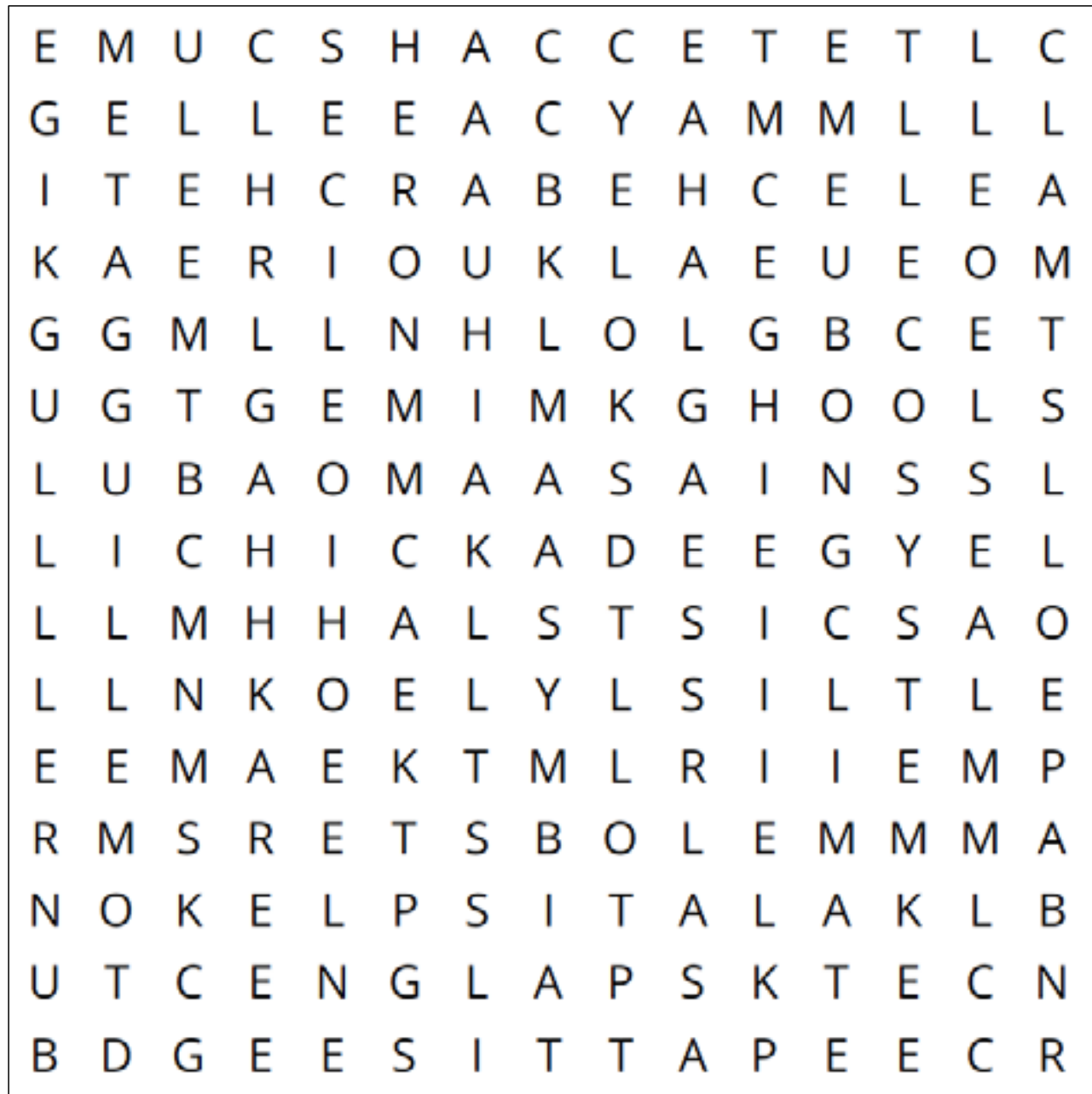
RJ: No - I have not had a pet seal. But many times, harbor seals have popped up all around my rowboat - and I have enjoyed observing them as much as they seem to enjoy observing me!

Q: What do you hope readers will take away from your book?

RJ: I hope young readers will take away the understanding that we are all interrelated with one another - and with the natural world around us.

Q: Do you have any advice for your readers who want to be like Ellie and fight against climate change?

RJ: Yes - As Ellie discovered, the most important thing you can do to raise awareness of climate change is to simply talk about it.



FIND THE HIDDEN WORDS FROM THE LIST BELOW:

Seal
Heron
Gull
Chickadee

Guillemot
Lobster
Clam
Crab

Kelp
Algae
Climate
Ecosystem

Answer Key:



To learn more about Robin Jenkins and *The Secret of the Catapus*, visit:
<https://robinelsbeth.com>

The Secret of the Catapus is available now from
 your favorite bookseller and your local library.