To the Edge of the World by Julia Green

Notes and ideas for discussions and activities for teachers and reading groups

About the book
A beautifully written tale of courage, friendship, and survival.
Imagine a tiny island far out in the Atlantic Ocean off the west coast of Scotland. On some days, you can hardly see where the sea ends and the land begins, everything merged in a blue-grey mist of sea spray and wind-blown sand. There is nothing between here and America. I say nothing, but what I mean, of course, is nothing but ocean. And about sixty-five kilometres out to sea, one last remote outcrop of islands and sea stacks, with the highest sea cliffs anywhere in the UK – St Kilda. Distant, desolate, and difficult to reach. The islands at the edge of the world . . .

On this remote Scottish island Jamie and his family are settling into a new life. A friendship with wild girl, Mara, leads to a heart-stopping voyage across the waves—at the mercy of the elements—to the sea stacks of St Kilda.

I loved this beautifully written story of adventure, friendship, courage, and community, and most of all its celebration of the exhilaration and wonder of the natural world. The Bookseller

A heart-warming read. Daring and joyful emotions all in one book. Absolutely amazing. (Alec, 10)

This is a very good book. It's about a boy called Jamie who meets a girl called Mara and they sail off to St Kilda. However on the way Mara explains why she was going. My favourite character is Mara because of her different personality. 5 out of 5 stars! (Yselle and Myrtle, 10)

A brilliant book. I'd recommend it to anyone who likes adventure and excitement. It has been a real treat to read 'To the Edge of the World' by the superior author Julia Green. The beautifully scripted book is all about facing our fears and having the courage to be different. So much precision has gone into the making of this book from the amazingly illustrated cover to the description of the dog Django. (Martha, 11)
I absolutely loved it so much I couldn't put it down. My favourite parts were when they were going to and from the island. (Ashley, 10)

(Reviews from ‘Penzance Chatterbooks Group’)

About the author

Julia Green lives in Bath, but her favourite places are wild remote islands, beaches, cliffs and hilltops. She has spent many happy times on the islands of the Outer Hebrides. She has two grown-up sons who inspire her with their wild spirit of adventure. One of them recently sailed with a friend in a small boat across the Atlantic Ocean, through the Panama Canal, and across the Pacific Ocean, and lived for six months of a tiny island. Julia is the Course Director for the MA Writing for Young People at Bath Spa University, which has launched the careers of many children’s authors. She has written more than seventeen books for children and young adults.

You can find out more about Julia on her website [www.julia-green.co.uk](http://www.julia-green.co.uk)

For teachers and reading groups

Here are some ideas for children’s discussions and activities, including research, creative writing, art, and further reading.
Thinking and talking about the book

Introducing the book
Look at the cover and the blurb, and set the scene. Talk briefly about the setting for the story—a group of islands off the west coast of Scotland—and look at a map to see where St Kilda is set, far out in the Atlantic Ocean. Read the Prologue aloud and pick up on any questions. Then read the book all the way through, either reading aloud to everyone together, or letting everyone read and experience the book for themselves. Keep the flow of the story, and at the end allow time for people to reflect on it and think about their responses to it.

Talking about the book: some book-talk questions
Get everyone to share their first responses to this book. This could be with the whole class/group—or children could discuss in small groups, and then share their initial feelings and questions with everyone. Ask lots of open questions to get people talking, and encourage discussion about feelings and responses to the story, the characters, and the writing. Explain that there are no right or wrong answers—we’ll all have our own feelings and thoughts about the book, and things we like and don’t like. Here are some questions you could use:

General questions

- How did you feel when reading this book? And how did you feel when you’d finished it?
- Which parts of the story do you remember most?
- Did you skip any parts? Which parts?
- Were there any parts that didn’t make sense to you?
- Was there anything that took you by surprise?
- Did you stop and start, or did you want to read it all through in one go?
- Are there parts you want to read over again?
- Who was your favourite character in the book? Why? And who was your least favourite?
- What was the thing you most liked finding out from the book?
- What kind of book did you think it was going to be?
- What would you say about this book if you were telling someone about what you’ve just read?
- Does the story work for you? Could you follow it? What does the book say to you?
- At the end of the story, did you feel as if you’d been in the story, too?
- Has reading the book changed or affected you? Has it made you think differently about anything? Has it made you decide to do anything differently now?

This is from the introduction to the book:
You’ll have a wonderful adventure and perhaps you’ll be inspired too – to fight for your true freedom like Mara, to face your fears like Jamie, to find out who you really want to be – and of course to plan your own adventures . . .

**To the Edge of the World: some themes for discussion**

**Facing fears**

“Could I do that? Even if I was scared?”
Jamie is watching Mara sailing across the bay. He thinks how exciting and wonderful it looks, but he is afraid of the sea—could he learn to sail, dare to sail, too?
Talk about your fears—fears which stop you trying something, or fears you have overcome so that you became free to enjoy a new experience.

“Spiky, difficult Mara. It was her way of covering up fear.”
Mara and Jamie try to sail into harbour when the tide and current are much too strong, and they are afraid they won’t make it.
There are times when we do have to face up to something which threatens us and which we are afraid of; it could be physical danger, or it could be a situation or challenge where we are afraid that we will fail. Mara snaps at Jamie so she won’t sound afraid. Do you cover your fear like this—or maybe smile and act daft, as if you don’t care?

How do you face up to your fears and get through them?
“This was it. The thing I’d most feared all my life.”

**Friendship**
“What would my new friends say if they saw me talking to this strange girl . . .?”

Jamie is quite new to the island and is starting to get to know other children of his age who will be in his class when he starts school in the autumn. Then he meets Mara, a girl who is older than him and seems to be something of a misfit, not attending school and spending much of her time sailing on her own. To the Edge of the World is about the growth of their friendship.

There are many different kinds of friendships you can have—for example, with school friends, brothers and sisters, your pets, teammates, someone older than you (e.g. a grandparent), or someone with whom you share a challenge or difficult times. Make a list of all the types of friendship you can think of. Which of these friendships do you have? What do you enjoy about them?

**Freedom**

“She needs her freedom, to be outside.”

“I might not be as bold and wild and crazy as Mara, but I could still do something amazing with my life, like her.”

What does freedom mean to you?

Think about what freedoms we have in our lives and what makes us feel pinned down. For Mara school is a kind of prison, while for Jamie it opens up opportunities for friendship and learning, which will help him in what he wants to do.

Make a list with three columns:

1. ‘Things I want to do’
2. ‘What’s stopping me from doing them’
3. ‘What I need to do achieve them’

In your third column you may find that your solutions are about finding ways of removing the barriers you have listed in the second column—or it may even be about making the most of things which seem to be barriers!
Coming home
“Everyone’s come down with torches to see you safely home.”

One of the best bits about an adventure, whether it’s big or small, is coming home. Why can this be such a great feeling? Talk about when you’ve experienced this: what you looked forward to, what it was like when you actually reached home, and how you felt when you saw familiar faces and places again.

To the Edge of the World: more things to talk about

1. Choose four characters from the story and say or write something about each of them: describe who they are, their place in the story, and what they are like. Which of them do you like best? And why?

2. Think about how people on the island make their livings. Look at Jamie’s parents and grandfather, Mara’s mother, and Rob’s and Euan’s families. How are their choices affected by where they live and what has happened to them in their lives?

3. Does this story remind you of other books you have read? Which ones? And what are your favourite adventure stories?

4. Talk about real life adventures you have had. Maybe you took a risk? Or maybe you were in danger? An adventure could be something interesting or unusual that has happened to you, like getting lost or exploring a new place, or it could be having a go at something new and exciting.

5. In To the Edge of the World the author describes some wild places: dark and jagged cliffs, white, sandy beaches, sea lochs, and peat bogs. Think about the wild places you have seen, perhaps near home or perhaps on holiday. Which is your favourite? Are there more places you would like to see?
6. What is the most beautiful thing in nature that you have seen? A flower, maybe, or a bird, an animal, a view, or a rainbow?

7. “I too could do anything.”
   “I’d make a boat of my own, one day. I’d sail it out in the bay.” Mara helps Jamie think about who he really wants to be and what he could do in his life. Talk or write about your dreams and ambitions, and what you could do to try to achieve them.

8. What do you think of the ending of this story? Can you think of any different endings it might have had?
To the Edge of the World: Ideas for activities

Shorter activities

Word search

Hidden in this word search are some words and names you’ll find in To the Edge of the World. See if you can spot them—look for them running forwards and backwards, and up and down.
When you’ve found them, talk about what or who they are and how they fit into the story.

JAMIE MARA GLASGOW DINGHY CURRENT
DJANGO WETSUIT DRIFTWOOD SEA HORSE TILLER
DOLPHIN FERRY REEF LOCHAN CEILIDH GAELIC
**Scrambled**

Can you unscramble these words to solve the clues? The answers all appear in *To the Edge of the World*.

1. **LAST KID** (2,5) __ __ __ __ __
   The name of the group of islands to which Jamie and Mara sail in her boat

2. **DIRETIP** (7) __ __ __ __ __
   A strong offshore current in the sea

3. **DUST RATS** (8) __ __ __ __ __ __
   The name of Mara’s boat

4. **BITE LOAF** (8) __ __ __ __ __ __
   To the rescue!

5. **BAR HOUR** (7) __ __ __ __ __
   A sheltered port for boats

6. **CAST** (4) __ __ __ (K)
   A column of rock standing in the sea: sometimes it is spelt with a ‘k’ at the end

*To the Edge of the World: Who’s who?*

Here are some of the characters from the story, telling you a bit about themselves. Who are they?

1. At the start of this story I am afraid of the sea, and of swimming and sailing, but with Mara’s help I realise I can do anything . . .

2. I work at the fish processing factory, and my husband works in Glasgow and comes back home most weekends on the ferry from the mainland.

3. We’re Jamie’s friends and we like playing football. Euan helps his dad with the sheep.

4. I live with my mum, who isn’t well, and I would really like to see my dad again in Portugal, where we lived.

5. I’m Jamie’s sister. I miss my friend Megan from where I used to live, but I’m getting to make friends here and enjoy sleepovers and ceilidhs.

6. I’m a dog—brown and grey with a happy face. I get to have a rather scary adventure.
7. I’m a boat builder. My own boat is the Kathleen Mary.

**Flora and fauna!**

You will find all these birds, animals, and flowers in *To the Edge of the World*, but the pictures below have been wrongly labelled. Work out the correct label for each of them, and see if you can find out some more about them. (N.B. The pictures aren’t to scale!)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birds</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cormorant: a large water bird with dark feathers and wings which it opens wide to dry</td>
<td><img src="image1.jpg" alt="A" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Curlew: a wading bird with a long down-curved bill and brown plumage</td>
<td><img src="image2.jpg" alt="B" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Puffin: a sea bird that has a brightly coloured, striped beak during the breeding season</td>
<td><img src="image3.jpg" alt="C" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Arctic tern: a medium-sized bird, sometimes called a sea swallow because of its slender shape as it swoops over the water</td>
<td><img src="image4.jpg" alt="D" /></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mammals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Otter: an animal that lives and hunts in and around the water. It is a member of the weasel family</td>
<td><img src="image5.jpg" alt="A" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Seal: an animal that belongs to the pinniped family, which means that it has ‘winged feet’, or flippers, that are specially adapted for life in the sea</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Seal" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Dolphin: an aquatic mammal with a streamlined body that has two flippers, a dorsal fin, and a tail fin</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Dolphin" /></td>
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**Sea creatures**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Limpet: an aquatic snail with a cone-shaped shell and a strong muscular foot which enables it to cling firmly to rocks</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Limpet" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Mussels: edible molluscs found in fresh water and seawater. They usually have dark blue shells</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Mussels" /></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Jellyfish: soft-bodied aquatic animals with a gelatinous, umbrella-shaped bell and trailing tentacles</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Jellyfish" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Lobster: a large crustacean that lives on the sea floor. It has a long body with a hard shell, or exoskeleton, and five pairs of legs. Three pairs of its legs have claws</td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Lobster" /></td>
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**Flowers**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Clover: a plant which usually has leaves in groups of three (trefoil) and heads of dense spikes of flowers, often white or mauve</td>
<td><img src="image7.png" alt="Clover" /></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2. Meadowsweet: a plant with delicate, graceful, creamy-white flowers

3. Corn marigold: sometimes called corn daisy, it has bright yellow flowers with a ring of petals round a centre of disc florets

**Where is Jamie’s island?**

“Imagine a tiny island far out in the Atlantic Ocean off the west coast of Scotland. It’s joined by causeway bridges top and bottom to other small islands, part of the archipelago called the Outer Hebrides... There is nothing between here and America.”

In this story the author, Julia Green, has imagined Jamie’s island to be in view of the St Kilda archipelago. (An archipelago is a group of islands.)

To help you imagine where it is, have a look at a map of the United Kingdom and see if you can find these places:

- The Outer Hebrides
- The islands of St Kilda—Dun, Soay, Boreray, Hirta
- Scotland, Northern Ireland, Eire, Wales, England
- Glasgow, Edinburgh
- Belfast, Cardiff, London
- Your own home town

How far away is Jamie’s island from where you live?

Have a look at a map of the world, too, and see how far St Kilda is from America!
**Sayings about the sea**

Here are some common things that sailors say about sailing and the sea. Think about what they mean—how do you think the different sayings came about? There are often very practical reasons!

Can you find some more?

- Having bananas on a ship, especially a private boat, is thought to bring bad luck.
- A black cat on board, as the ship’s cat, is lucky.
- ‘Red sky at night, sailor’s delight. Red sky in the morning, sailor’s warning.’
- Never paint a boat green.
- It’s unlucky to change the name of a boat.
- Women on board a ship are said to bring bad luck.
- “Plenty of sailors don’t swim. They respect the sea too much”.

What do you think Mara means when she says this about sailors?

**Loading your boat for a sailing adventure!**

“Mara showed me some of the stuff she’d brought: a blanket . . . tins of beans . . . bread and cheese . . .”

What would you take on an adventure like this? Have a go at this game! It works well with several people sitting round in a circle.

The first person says “I’m packing my boat to sail to St Kilda, and in my dry-bag and boxes I’m taking a sleeping bag.”

The next person repeats this and adds something else to take—for example “...I’m taking a sleeping bag and lots of chocolate.”

Each person repeats all the things that the person before them said, and then adds something else to the list.

See how long you can continue—if anyone forgets an item, they drop out of the game, and the winner is the person left at the end.
Longer activities

Jamie’s island

Use this outline to create a map of Jamie’s island—or you could draw your own outline. Below is a list of places you could include, together with some clues from the story about where the places are and what they look like.

On the west, mark out the beaches and the homes of Jamie, Jamie’s Grandfather, and Mara. The town and harbour are further to the south.

As well as marking and labelling each place, you could also add in drawings and details, making a storyboard map of what happens in each place!
Some places for your map of Jamie’s island:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Clues from <em>To the Edge of the World</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East coast</td>
<td>“The east coast is rocky, with loads of inlets and channels and natural harbours.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West coast</td>
<td>“The west is totally different, with long white sandy beaches and dunes exposed to the Atlantic gales and storm surges.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaches</td>
<td>“I thought about how watery this island is: more water than land . . . sea lochs . . . a patchwork of peat bogs . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>-------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bogs</td>
<td>“We went along the single track road, past the small lochan which has a tiny island with a few spindly trees on it.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Road and tracks</td>
<td>“If we kept sailing west, we’d eventually get to the fishing islands . . . If we could get through the reef, that is. And if we kept going, we could sail all the way to St Kilda.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reef and St Kilda</td>
<td>This is in the south west of the island above the shore road—on page 102 there is a description of the island as seen from this hill. “On a clear day when the light is right you can see from here all the way to St Kilda.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compass Hill</td>
<td>“A few cars whizzed along the main road, making their way to the ferry, most likely.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boat shed</td>
<td>“. . . the row of houses near the harbour . . . the bumpy track to the boat shed with its red tin roof . . .”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grandparents’ house</td>
<td>We visited Grandpa and Granny in their house overlooking the sea. (Prologue) “It’s a single-storey new-build painted white with big glass windows for the amazing view.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jamie’s house and the</td>
<td>“I ran down to the beach nearest our house.” (Prologue)</td>
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<tr>
<td>beach</td>
<td>Mara’s house</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“. . . out on the western shore with her mother.” “. . . a strange, small shack at the top of a beach on one of the remote tidal inlets on the west side of the island.”</td>
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**St Kilda’s story**

“At school we’d watched an old black and white film of the last people leaving the island for ever."

“What would I have done if I’d had to leave my home and my island? Would I have left a message . . . ?”

At school, and from his grandfather, Jamie learns about the people who used to live on St Kilda. The island was evacuated in 1930—only 36 inhabitants remained, and it had become too difficult to sustain a living there.
Find out more about St Kilda—what it’s like and the story of the people living there.
Imagine if you lived on an island like St Kilda and had to leave it: talk or write about how you might feel. If you left a message, what would you say?

Here are two websites about St Kilda:

http://www.kilda.org.uk/
https://www.nts.org.uk/Visit/St-Kilda

**Writing activity ideas**

**A day you’ll always remember!**

“It was that early morning light, before the sun is properly up and everything looks amazing: new and hopeful . . .”

What happens next?! For Jamie and Mara it’s farewell to St Kilda . . . but what could it be for you? Write your own short story about a day you’ll always remember, starting your story with the sentence above.

**Write a sailing blog**

In this story Jamie is taught about boats and sailing by Mara and his grandfather. Here is a fact-finder sheet with some of the things he learns.

Check out each of these, getting information from the story and from your own research, and then use what you’ve learnt to write a short blog, describing a sailing trip out to sea.
### Boats, sailing, and the sea

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clinker-built boats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tiller</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centreboard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taking the helm</td>
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<td>Managing the sails</td>
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<td>To gybe</td>
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<td>Checking the compass</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bailing out water</td>
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<tr>
<td>A rip current</td>
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<td>A swell</td>
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<tr>
<td>A reef</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surf</td>
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### The view from your window

“... with big glass windows for the amazing view. Grown-ups go mad for views”

Describe the view from your bedroom window. What do you think about it? What would be your dream view?

**Using sounds to make a picture**
“The mournful cries of a thousand sea birds . . .”
“The slap of water against a stone jetty . . .”
“The suck and draw of waves reaching the shore . . .”

This list of sounds gives a picture of a seaside scene.
Have a go at creating ‘sound scenes’ like this for

- A busy town
- Walking through a forest
- Rowing a boat

Describe at least three sounds for each scene—for example, for ‘rowing a boat’ you could have the splash of the oars hitting the water . . .

**Make up a happy song!**

“The wind, the stars, the sparkling sea
They fill my heart and set me free . . .”

When she feels good, Mara makes up and sings happy songs as they sail.
Have a go at making up your own happy (or sad?!) song!
Think of a tune you know well and then set your own words to it.

**Another point of view**

In *To the Edge of the World* Jamie is the narrator, telling us his story.
Think about other characters and their part in the story—then choose a character and write about what happens from their point of view.

- What might Jamie’s mum write in an email to a friend, describing the days when Jamie is missing?
- What might Mara say in a diary entry describing meeting Jamie and getting to know him?
• Or, if he could speak, what story would Django tell about the voyage and being lost at sea?!

Writing tips from Julia Green
On her website (www.julia-green.co.uk) author Julia Green gives these tips.

• Read lots.
• Write lots.
• Write for yourself; keep a journal or notebook so you can write often, and easily, without worrying about making mistakes.
• Notice things.
• Listen lots.
• Write things down that you think and feel and see and hear and touch.
• Practise lots. It can take a long time to get a story right. Don't rush it. Let it take the time it needs. Do lots of re-writing.
• Talk to other people who write.
• Believe in your story.

An art activity
The sea shore

Make a list of all the things you can think of that we might find on the sea shore—for example, shells, jellyfish, seaweed, mermaids’ purses, footprints, patterns in the sand, and flotsam and jetsam left by the tide. Create and draw a seashore design or pattern which features some of these things. This could be a design for wallpaper or wrapping paper, or for the end-papers inside a copy of To the Edge of the World.

Tell people about this book!
Create a PowerPoint presentation about To the Edge of the World. Make a plan of what you want to say and what could go on each slide. Who is your audience? Your friends? A school assembly? Maybe a parents’ evening? Aim to attract their attention and interest, so that they want to read the
book—and tell more people about it!
Include the following in your presentation:

- An attention-catching title and first slide
- Simple, clear bullet points
- Excerpts, to give an idea of the story
- Your favourite bits
- Why you think other people will want to read it

**More reading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>ISBN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>More books by Julia Green</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Seal Island</em></td>
<td>OUP</td>
<td>978-0192735669</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sylvie and Star</em></td>
<td>OUP</td>
<td>978-0192757968</td>
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<td><em>Tilly’s Moonlight Fox</em></td>
<td>OUP</td>
<td>978-0192757913</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>The Wilderness War</em></td>
<td>OUP</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Beowulf the Brave</em></td>
<td>A&amp;C Black</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>(set on St Kilda in 1727)</em></td>
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**ANSWERS**

**Word search**

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D R I F T W O O D N X Z B Q W Z
Z P Y X Q B C G F X P W J F X J
P V M W H X Q N J N Q K P Q P F
F X Z Q M D Z A W I W Q J Z K S
C F V G X F P J Y H X X P F X E
G A E L I C F D Z P P F Z G J A
Q X B A F E P B Q L R D C Q F H
Z W G S R I J F L O C H A N X O
V M F G V L Z E Q D Z V M J H R
X K J O P I W X Z X Q J E F G S
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D Q X B J H P K S A R A M Q W B
I W P F Z X L F U W G X A J E F
N F J S U P Y E O L B Z J G T Z
G G W B Q F R E L L I T B F S J
H X F S P X Z R G F X U G F U X
Y R R E F Q F G J P W Q X B I F
X W P Z W Q P C C U R R E N T W
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**Scrambled!**

1. St Kilda
2. Riptide
3. Stardust
4. Lifeboat
5. Harbour
6. Stac(k)
Who’s who?

1. Jamie
2. Jamie’s mum
3. Rob and Euan
4. Mara
5. Fiona
6. Django
7. Grandfather

Flora and Fauna

*Birds: 1C  2A  3D  4B*
*Mammals: 1C  2B  3A*
*Sea creatures: 1C  2A  3D  4B*
*Flowers: 1A  2C  3B*
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