Exploring the ocean safely

Ages 6-12 | People and the sea: ways to explore | Classroom discussion

An underwater window



Troy Mayne wearing a seawalker helmet beside Wally. Original photograph supplied by Troy Mayne; shown in full.

We can discover ocean life from the shore, from a boat, through photographs or in the water. Different ways of exploring need different skills, equipment and support.

Helmet seawalking: a special helmet receives breathing gas through a supply system while the participant is underwater. It is a form of diving, with breathing and pressure risks. A qualified operator must check suitability, explain the equipment and signals, and supervise the activity. It is not automatically safe because it involves walking.[1]

Look closely: What separates Troy's face from the water? What safety arrangements are outside the photograph? A photograph cannot show a whole safety plan.

Classroom activity only. This pack is not diving instruction or permission to enter the water. The classroom age range does not mean every child is eligible for every activity.

At the surface and below

PHOTO COMPARISON | Notice the equipment, then ask what you cannot see

Snorkelling



Two snorkellers stay together near the surface, wearing masks, snorkels and flotation vests.

Scuba diving



A scuba diver wearing a mask and regulator, holding a copy of Sorry Wally.

Snorkelling: a mask helps us see underwater. A snorkel lets us breathe air while its opening is above the water; it does not provide an underwater air supply. Beginners need instruction, properly fitted equipment and suitable conditions.[2,3]

Scuba: the diver carries a cylinder of compressed breathing gas and breathes through a regulator. Learning to scuba dive involves formal training; introductory experiences require qualified instruction and supervision. Divers must follow their training and never hold their breath while breathing compressed gas, especially when ascending.[1,4]

Talk together: What is similar in these photographs? What is different? Which equipment is visible, and which details are hidden?

Wildlife space: enjoy watching animals without touching, chasing, feeding or blocking them. A close photograph is not a distance to copy. Keep fins and equipment clear of coral.[5]

Original photographs supplied by Troy Mayne: DSC_4792(1).JPG and _DRY4266.JPG. Both shown in full.

Choose a way. Make a plan.

CLASSROOM SAFETY DISCUSSION | Read with a teacher, parent or carer

You can explore without swimming

Shore: watch from an adult-chosen safe viewpoint. At rockpools, check tides and waves, avoid slippery edges and leave animals where they live. **Boat:** a glass-bottom boat can provide a window into the sea. Follow the crew's briefing and lifejacket instructions. **Classroom:** photographs, books, aquarium visits and underwater video bring ocean life within reach.[5,6]

Before any water activity

• A responsible adult checks local advice, weather, tides, currents, safe entry and exit, and the group's abilities. Calm-looking water can still be dangerous.[2,3,6]

• Children need active, capable adult supervision. Stay with the agreed buddy and group. A buddy or flotation aid does not replace supervision.[2,3,6]

• Use equipment that fits and learn with a qualified instructor or suitable guide. Scuba and helmet diving need activity-specific eligibility checks and health screening; obtain medical advice when required.[1]

• It is always OK to say no or stop. Tell the adult or instructor if you feel frightened, tired, cold, unwell or uncomfortable. Learn the help signal before starting.[3]

• No breath-holding competitions or deliberate fast/deep breathing before going underwater. These can lead to blackout and drowning.[7,8]

• If someone is in trouble, alert a capable adult, lifeguard or crew immediately. Children should not enter the water to attempt a rescue.[6]

Our rule: if conditions, supervision or equipment are not suitable, choose a shore-based or classroom activity instead.

My ocean explorer worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Match the way of exploring

Write **snorkelling**, **scuba** or **helmet seawalking**.

A. The breathing tube opens above the water: _____

B. The diver carries a cylinder of breathing gas: _____

C. A supply system delivers gas into a special helmet: _____

2. Choose and explain

A friend wants to learn about reefs but does not want to enter the water. Suggest two ways they could explore.

3. What would you say?

A friend says, "The water looks calm. We can go without an adult." Write a safer response and give a reason.

4. Look beyond the photograph

Choose one photograph. Write one thing you can see and one safety question that the photograph cannot answer.

5. Care for people and wildlife

Complete: I can help care for the ocean by _____

Teacher notes

Ages 6-8 and 9-12 | Suggested 30-45 minute classroom lesson

Learning goals

Compare ways people observe the ocean; distinguish a snorkel from a compressed-gas breathing system; explain why supervision and preparation matter; suggest an inclusive way to explore and a wildlife-care action.

A simple lesson

• **Notice (5 minutes):** show the helmet photograph. Separate "I can see" from "I wonder". Do not infer safety from a smile or calm-looking scene.

• **Compare (10 minutes):** read pages 1-3 together. Discuss where the breathing gas comes from in each method and how someone can explore while staying dry.

• **Respond (10-15 minutes):** use the worksheet. Ages 6-8 may point, draw or dictate. Ages 9-12 can justify choices, distinguish visible evidence from assumptions and consider different access needs.

• **Share (5 minutes):** ask each learner for one question to ask a responsible adult before an outing. Allow anyone to decline an in-water activity without pressure.

Suggested answers and discussion

1: A snorkelling; B scuba; C helmet seawalking. **2:** suitable shore viewpoint, glass-bottom boat, aquarium, photographs or video. **3:** wait for a capable adult and local assessment; appearance does not reveal currents or other hazards. **4:** accept visible equipment plus a question about supervision, health checks, briefing, conditions or emergency arrangements. **5:** observe without touching, chasing or feeding; protect habitat and take litter home.

For any real outing

Use the school's current excursion process and local requirements, qualified providers, individual health/access checks, guardian consent, appropriate supervision and an emergency plan. The lesson age range is not an activity eligibility rule. This pack does not prescribe dive depths, ages, breathing procedures or rescue techniques. Never run breath-holding drills as part of this lesson.[1,3,7]

The original photographs record particular moments, not complete demonstrations of safe practice. Their locations, dates and off-camera supervision are not established here.

Sources and further reading

Numbered endnotes | Practical guidance and open-access research | Checked 2 November 2026

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1. Workplace Health and Safety Queensland. Recreational Diving, Recreational Technical Diving and Snorkelling Code of Practice 2024. 2024. Sections 2-3 and definitions. Queensland guidance; local requirements may differ.

Read the code (PDF)

2. SafeWork NSW. "Snorkelling." Accessed November 2, 2026.

Read practical snorkelling guidance

3. Queensland Department of Education. "Snorkelling." Guideline reviewed September 24, 2025. Accessed November 2, 2026.

Read the school activity guideline

4. DAN Europe. "The 10 Safety Rules." Accessed November 2, 2026.

Read DAN diving safety guidance

5. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. "Water Safety." Accessed November 2, 2026.

Read water and wildlife guidance

Also: Reef Authority, Responsible Reef Practices (accessed November 2, 2026).

6. Royal Life Saving Society UK. "Water Safety at the Beach." Accessed November 2, 2026. Check local emergency contacts and local signs before travel.

Read beach safety guidance

Also: Royal Life Saving WA, When Not to Perform an Aquatic Rescue (accessed November 2, 2026).

7. Australian Institute of Sport. "Breath Hold Training." Accessed November 2, 2026.

Read the position statement

8. Royal Life Saving Society - Australia. "Hypoxic Blackout." Updated February 2023.

Read blackout prevention guidance

9. Lippmann, John M. "Snorkelling and Breath-Hold Diving Fatalities in Australia-A Review of 317 Deaths." International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 22, no. 1 (2025): 119. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph22010119.

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Research note: the retrospective study in note 9 supports the importance of preparation, close supervision and effective buddy arrangements. It is not a trial of this classroom pack and does not establish a safe age for diving.