

THE
SEAL CHILDREN



There is a place on the edge of Wales where fields and moorlands meet, where heather and gorse slope down to high cliffs. Waves crash and bite at the cliffs, and the wind lifts the spray as seals sing to the rhythm of the sea.

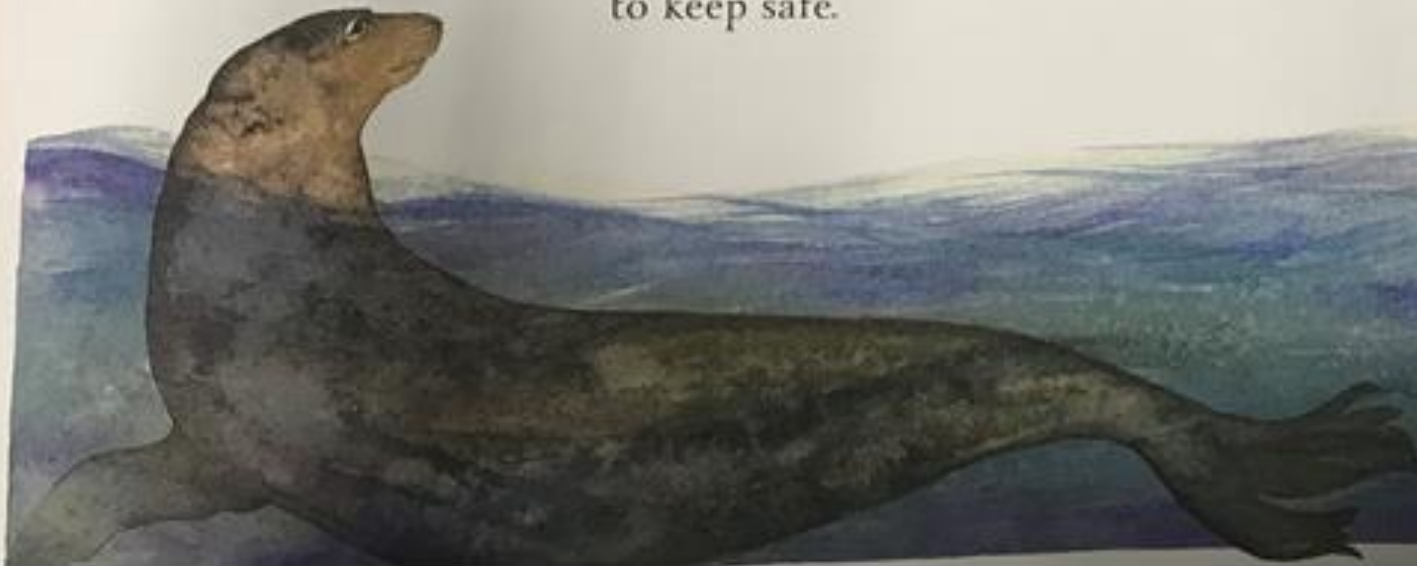
Stone walls mark where a village once stood. There are no people now. All you can hear are the cries of buzzards, the chipping of stonechats, the tumbling notes of the skylarks and the distant song of the people of the sea.





Long ago, one of the sea people - a Selkie - came to live in the village. She fell in love with the fair-faced, soft-voiced Ewan who sang as he fished. The people of the sea love music.

Surprised that such a love had come to him, Ewan welcomed the woman into his heart, all the while knowing her for the wild creature she was. As a sign of her love, she gave him her salty sealskin to keep safe.



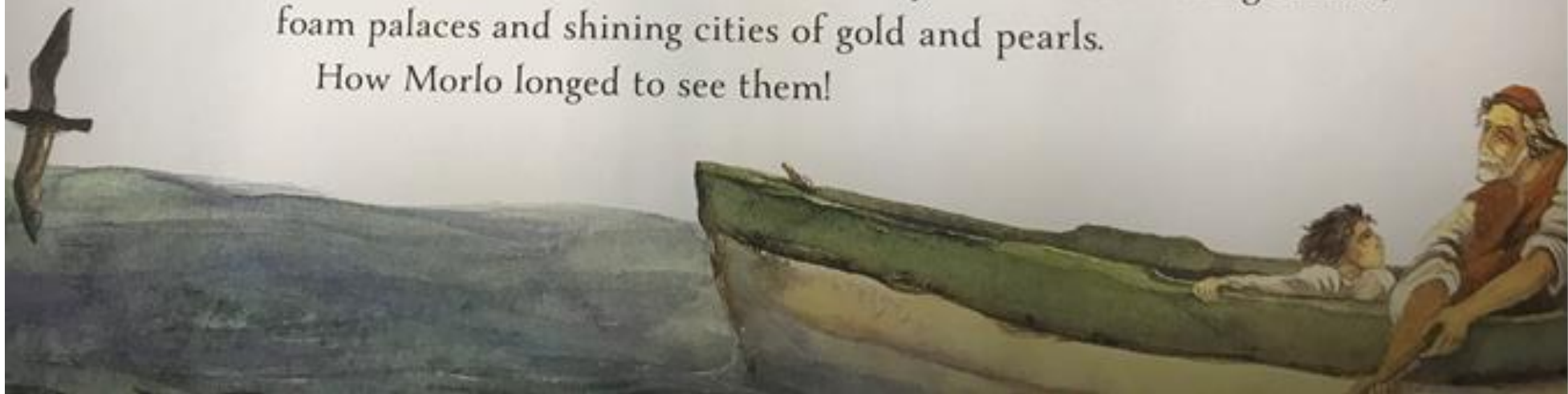


Time passed, and the sea-woman bore Ewan twins with eyes as sparkling and green as the waters of her home. The girl they called Ffion, the boy Morlo - after the sea-woman's people.

The children helped their mother and father on land and sea. Ffion fed the chickens, collected warm speckled eggs and planted seeds in the garden. Morlo fished with his father, hauling nets and crab-pots. The smell of the sea-salt was on his skin, and the heather in his sister's hair.

In the evenings their mother sang them songs of life beneath the sea. She told them of hills and valleys and weed-waving forests, foam palaces and shining cities of gold and pearls.

How Morlo longed to see them!






Years passed, and the sea-woman began to change. Her hair lost its shine, her eyes dimmed and she found walking difficult. It was time for her to go back.

Ewan found her sealskin and one night, when the summer moon was full and heavy, she walked into the sea and plunged beneath the waves. The water echoed with cries as the sea people welcomed her home.

Ewan turned and made his lonely way up to his cottage.

From that day, his nets were always full. The sea people guided shoals of sparkling fish to his boat while Ewan played tunes on his fiddle to say thank-you.





One spring morning, a stranger came to the village. In exchange for bread and fish and blackberry wine, he told of his travels. And he spoke of a land far away where people owned their own land - where they profited from the fruits of their labour, instead of watching the landlords cart away the lion's share.

He stayed for a while, and a dream began to form in the minds of the villagers. Now, all they could think about was how to pay their passage over the sea to the land far away.

So they searched their houses for farthings, pennies and silver sixpences, for family treasures to sell - until they realised that they would never have enough.

But Ffion and Morlo remembered the stories of palaces, sea people and cities of gold and pearls.

The next full moon, they climbed down the steep path to the stony beach. Everything was still and cold. Together they sang a song to call their mother up from her home.

As the last note echoed in the dark caves a sleek, dark head broke through the water. Their mother drew herself up out of the waves, beautiful and strong. And as she hugged her children close, they told her why they had come, asking, "Is it true? Are there riches in your world? Can you help us?"



"Come with me," said their mother. "Come and see."

Morlo stepped forward eagerly, but Ffion drew back, unsure. The Selkie mother took her son's face gently in her hands and blew the salt breath of the sea three times into his mouth and nose. Then she led him down beneath the waves.

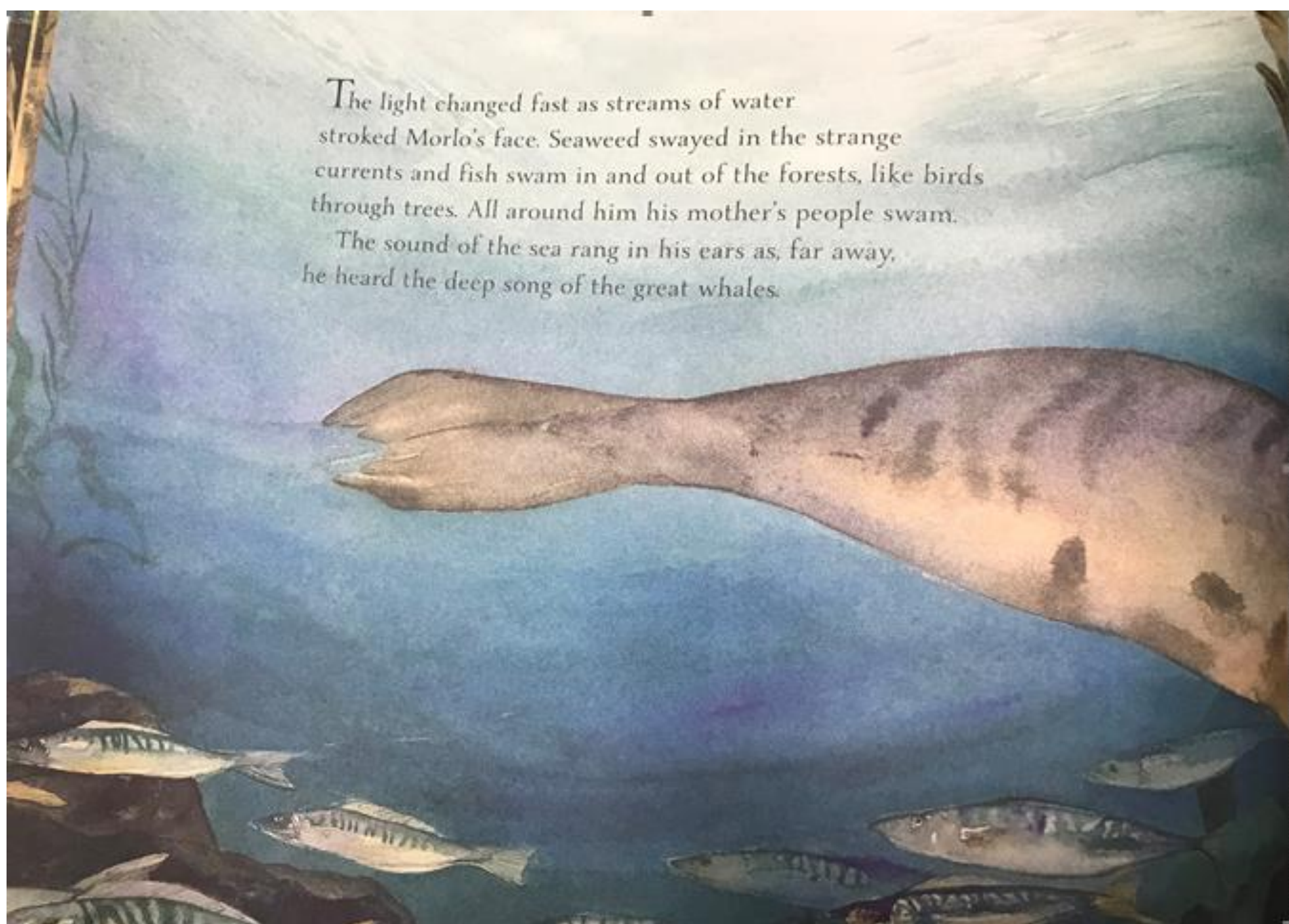
Fear gripped Morlo as they sank into the depths. Icy water cut through him and his lungs felt that they would burst from the shock as he gasped for breath.

Together they rose to the surface. He breathed again, and dived down with his mother - for they were two seals now. Down and down they went, to the hills, valleys and forests beneath the sea.



The light changed fast as streams of water
stroked Morlo's face. Seaweed swayed in the strange
currents and fish swam in and out of the forests, like birds
through trees. All around him his mother's people swam.

The sound of the sea rang in his ears as, far away,
he heard the deep song of the great whales.



On the beach Ffion waited, fearful and shivering.

As the moon rose higher, she saw two sleek heads rise through the foam, and the moonlight glinted on a box tossed out of the waves at her feet. It was covered in barnacles and wrapped in golden ribbons of kelp.

Relief flooded through her as Morlo came out of the water. His eyes were full of excitement, and Ffion knew that he would return to the sea with his mother. They embraced and wiped salty tears from each other's eyes. Then once again the Selkie breathed the life of the sea into her son, and they slipped into the shining water.

Ffion climbed the steep path home, carrying the box.



Ffion found her father sitting by the fire. She pressed the box into his hands. As they unwrapped the ribbons, she told him of their meeting with their mother, of Morlo's journey beneath the waves and of the joy in his eyes as he returned to the water.

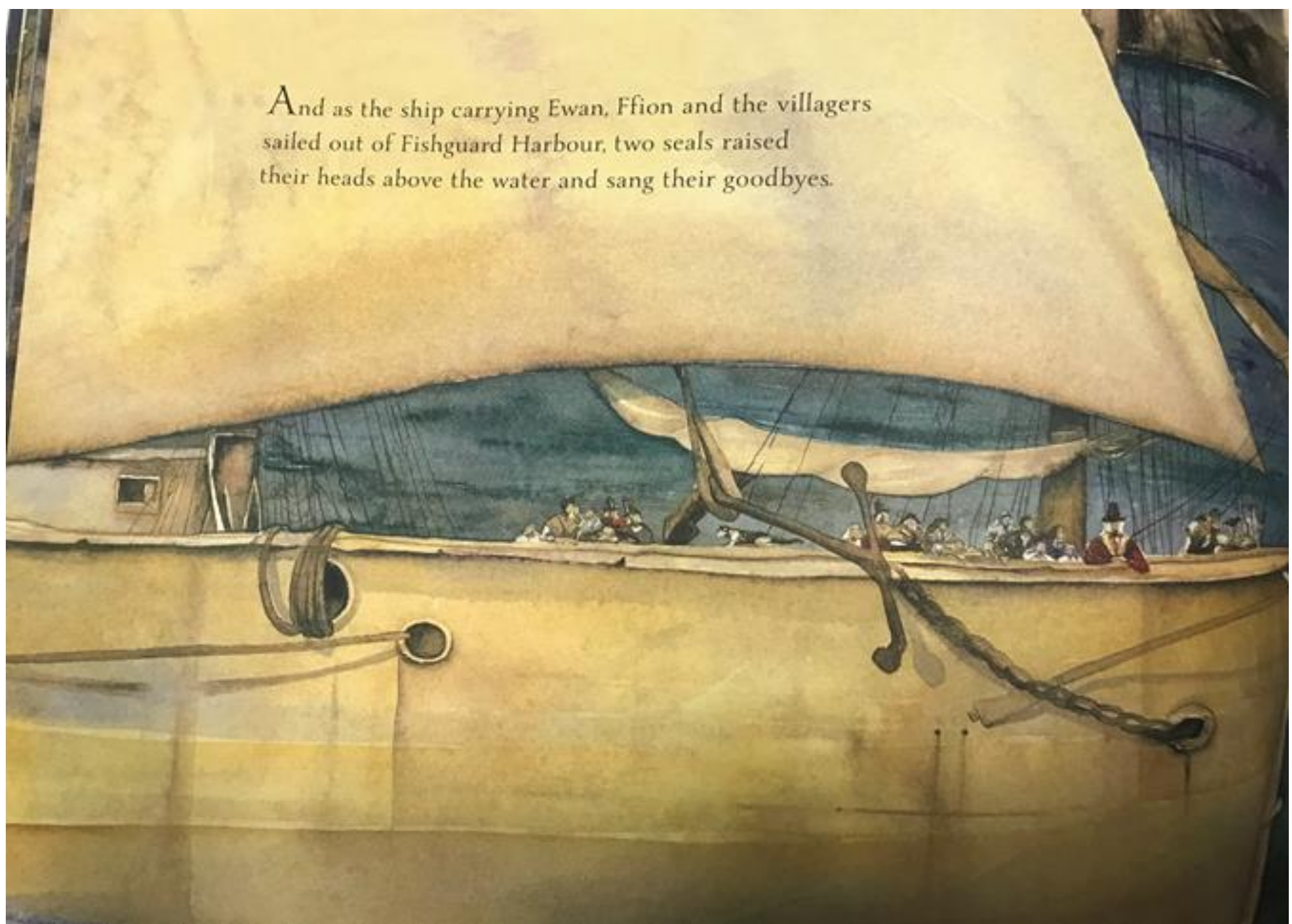
They opened the box. Inside lay a heap of lustrous pearls.

The news spread quickly from cottage to cottage. The pearls paid everyone's passage, and the villagers left their homes to sail to the New World.

As they made their way down to the harbour, the village stood empty behind them. Cats wandered in and out of the echoing stone cottages; soon they, too, would be leaving in search of new homes.



And as the ship carrying Ewan, Ffion and the villagers sailed out of Fishguard Harbour, two seals raised their heads above the water and sang their goodbyes.



Task one

For/Against

Should the villagers leave for the new land?

Reasons for:	Reasons against:

Task two

Emigration 1

Core Task

Emigration is when someone leaves their home country to go and live in another country. It happens nowadays and has been happening all through history. Sometimes people emigrate because they are forced to do so; sometimes they emigrate because they hope that their life will be better in their new country.



British people preparing to sail to America in the 1600s

People from Britain have emigrated to live in North and South America for hundreds of years, starting when Europeans first discovered the Americas. Welsh people have been part of that emigration and so have been travelling to America for hundreds of years. Nowadays there are nearly two million people living in America whose families originally came from Wales. There are only three million people living in Wales itself.



An advert in English and Welsh from 1841 for emigration to America

Emigration Questions 1

What does emigration mean?

Why might someone emigrate?

How long have people from Britain been emigrating to America?

How many people in America nowadays have families originally from Wales?

How many people live in Wales itself?

Emigration 2



William Penn

Sometimes people emigrated from Wales because they were being persecuted for their religion. They wanted to be free. A man called William Penn led a large group of Welsh people to America. They were followers of the Quaker religion and were persecuted in Wales. They made a settlement in America. William Penn wanted to call the settlement 'New Wales' but he was not allowed. It was called Pennsylvania instead. That is its name today.

Other people were sent to America against their will. Criminals were sometimes transported to America as well as to the West Indies and to Australia.

Other people emigrated in order to have a better life. There were huge areas of cheap land in America for those who could not afford land in Wales. Many of the people who moved were farmers. Later many miners left Wales to take their skills to work in America.

Stretch Task

Emigration Questions 2

Why might their religion have caused people to emigrate?

What religion did those who went with William Penn follow?

What did William Penn want to call the new settlement?

What was it called?

What other reasons were there for people to emigrate?

Emigration 3



The ruins of Maes y Myndd in Wales

When people emigrate, they leave their old country behind.

Jackie Morris based her story on an abandoned and ruined village called Place of the Mountain (Maes y Myndd in Welsh). It was lived in until the beginning of the First World War (1914). No-one is exactly sure why it was abandoned.

People believe that it was lived in by farmworkers who were paid very little for their work. They became part of the Quaker religion and they wanted to go to Pennsylvania to start a new life. However, they never raised enough money to go together and they drifted off elsewhere. On some old maps the village of Maes y Myndd is given the name Pennsylvania.

Challenge Task

Emigration Questions 3

What is the Welsh name of the abandoned village that Jackie Morris based this story on?

What is this name in English?

When was it abandoned?

Why might the people have left the village?

How certain is this explanation?