

This is the story about creating *Iceberg*

Just like real Icebergs, the published book *Iceberg* shows only a tiny part of the huge amount of work involved in writing and illustrating this story. Author Claire and illustrator Jess take us below the surface to share this journey and process.

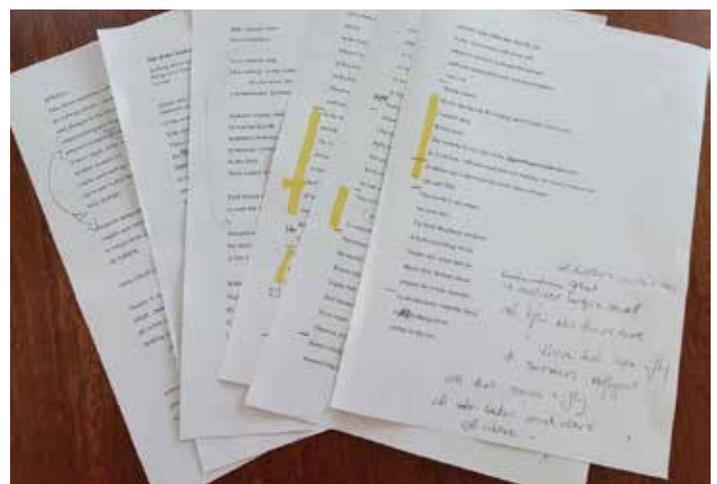
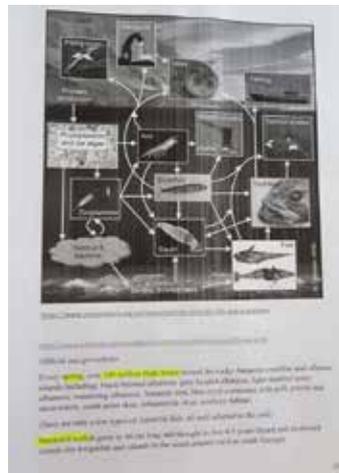
## creating the text

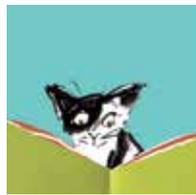
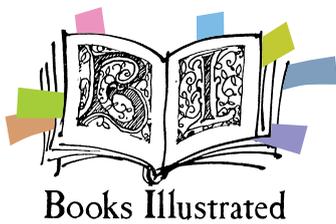
### Claire Saxby

Writing true stories is always harder than fiction ones, I first fell in love with the language of icebergs more than 15 years ago while helping my son with a project about foodwebs in the Antarctic. The foodweb was complex and fascinating but it was the words associated with icebergs that captured my attention. 'Cheeky growlers', 'old grandfather blues', 'ice flowers'. I loved that an iceberg may wear many layers and tell stories of long ago. I wrote a poem and it was published by The School Magazine.

A couple of years ago I was flicking through a folder of my poetry and found the poem again. While I still liked the poem, I wanted to explore the Antarctic a little more, while still using the iceberg as a focal point. I also discovered more ice words. Some were familiar: floe, pack and raft ice. But others? Well, they are just fabulous: frazil, dome, pancake, pinnacle, blocky, brash, grease ice! I was hooked. But if I was going to write this, I needed to understand Antarctica through all its seasons, all its occupants – permanent and seasonal visitors, all the ways ice appears and disappears.

If you think that sounds like a lot of work, you're right. It was. There were several times during the writing that I wanted to give up. It was just too much, I'd never be able to do it. Particularly as I needed to tell this story in around 500 words. But the Antarctic pulled me back every time. It is such an important, finely balanced ecosystem and so magical. There are animals that clone themselves (salps) and others that regress to less mature forms to wait out winter tucked under ice (krill). Birds travel from Russia. Whales come and go. Penguins too. Orca stay all year. I watched myriad videos of calving icebergs, penguins bursting through ice holes fast enough to outwit leopard





# stories about stories

## Iceberg

seals. I read research papers. I followed scientists and photographers on social media. I spent hours and hours on the Australian government's Antarctica website.

I don't begin writing until I understand the world I want to capture. I always start with a notebook. I fill it with information and ideas, brainstorming and quotes. For example, photographer Paul Nicklen quotes an (unknown) scientist: 'Ice is like soil in a garden. Without it, the Arctic won't grow.' Photographer and scientist are both talking about the effects of global warming. Although it's about the Arctic, the same applies to the Antarctic. Tiny temperature changes impact the entire ecosystem.

Have you ever heard of brinicles? I hadn't either. Put simply, it's an underwater brine icicle which destroys everything it touches. Wonders like this are one of the dangers of research. It's easy to journey down rabbit holes following fascinating information that doesn't fit the story. I entered information on a spreadsheet, trying to make sense of when and how everything fit. When might the Aurora Australis be seen? Which penguins nested where, and when? When did the migratory birds arrive? When did the whales arrive?

I wanted 'Iceberg' to be as true as it could be. But I also wanted it to be lyrical and magical – a poem, a love song to Antarctica. I wanted the language to be both simple and rich. An iceberg may not seem the most obvious viewpoint 'character' but it allowed me to open – ahem – with a splash. The iceberg is witness to all that happens there.

The first drafts were rubbish – they always are - but once there are words on a page, there's something to rearrange, delete, add to. Finally, after almost a dozen drafts, I was happy that the words said what I wanted them to. I handed it over and held my breath. I hoped there were

### **Iceberg**

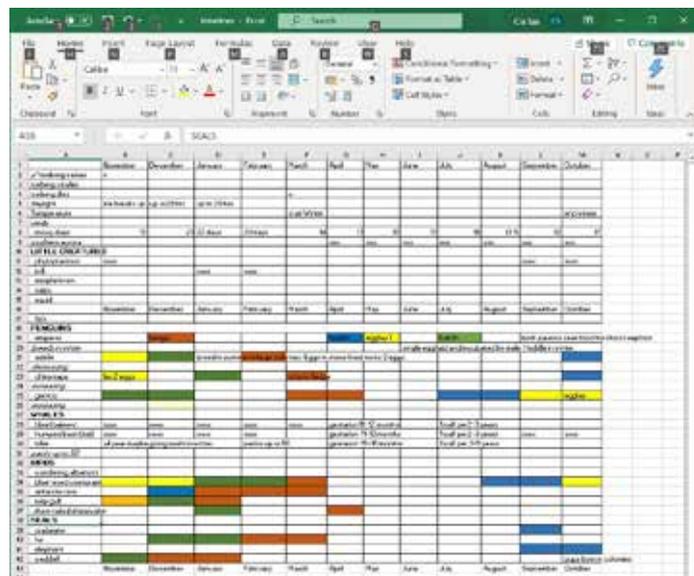
**In a blue Antarctic dawn  
an iceberg calves –  
shears from a glacier  
and is released to the sea**

**sharp and angular  
it hoards ancient weather  
layers of ice clothing  
a coat for each year volcanoes blew  
and black ash fell like snow**

**deeply it sits  
silent peaceful  
innocent whale  
deadly danger**

**storms blow  
tides swell  
nights fall and fade  
age blunts the underwater blades  
wind softens the face**

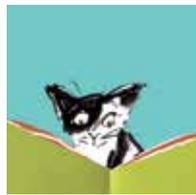
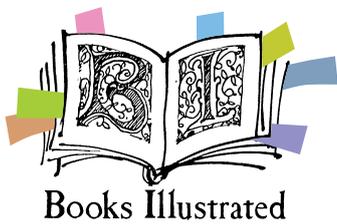
**the iceberg travels on  
past old grandfather blues  
and cheeky growlers  
to finally fall and sleep  
on a drift of fragile ice flowers**



enough spaces for Jess Racklyeft to tell her own story in the images. I offered her my imperfect spreadsheet and as much other information as I had. To use, or not to use, as she wanted/needed.

I love this part of making picture books. It's thrilling to see sketches, to watch images grow and change. I love when the lines between word and image disappear. To see the visual story take shape. I've heard the process described as 40% words, 40% image and 40% how the two are brought together (editorial, design etc). Yes, I know that maths is not right, but for me it's the perfect description about the whole being bigger than the sum of parts.

I am so thrilled to be sharing this story with the world. I love Jess's art. I hope 'Iceberg' offers something familiar, something unexpected and hopefully something that makes the reader want to know more. I hope they can get lost in the wonder of Antarctica and this marvellous world in which we live.



# stories about stories

## Iceberg

### creating the images

**Jess Racklyeft**

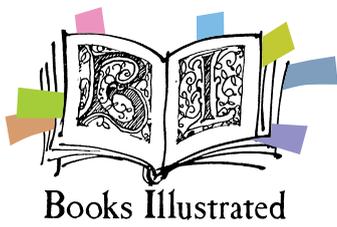
I was aware of a few challenges ahead of me when I received the beautiful manuscript. Being such a spacious environment of huge icebergs and blue ocean, I was nervous the images could look too sparse – so to bring richness and depth to the imagery, I decided collage with delicate prints and scanned textures would be the best way to reflect the tiny details in the icebergs and ocean.



I am quite used to basing books around animal or human lead characters – but this was all about an iceberg! So I had to hold myself back from filling the pages with ocean animals, and save this for the big middle spread. The lead character was given the name 'Norman' by the editor and I, so our iceberg Norman became the hero of each spread and is usually whiter and crisper than the other ice forms. Through the book 'he' moves from the left to the right side, while the ocean horizon line moves to reflect the season from filling the page in winter, to more sky in summer. At the same time, the sun moves from just tapping the horizon to being at the top of the spread.



*Due to the immense scale of the environment – huge icebergs, a wild ocean – so much blue and white– I was aware that texture would play a big part in bringing smaller details to the scenes. I decided a big experiment of scanned textures would make a wonderful backdrop for the ocean, sky and bergs. I painted, rolled, pressed and printed away and built a library of textures to use as a layer in my work and I think it really made the art come to life. (pictures attached) Of course, there was a lot of research and I built a big library of books about Antarctica, and loved watching documentaries and videos to see how things moved.*



# stories about stories Iceberg

The middle spread folds out and is a giant almost one metre in length! With many layers of ocean animals, and lots of layers of texture and light illustrated in watercolour and digitally, my poor old computer was barely up to the task. I decided it was time for an upgrade, and my new Mac whizzed through the final steps of creating that giant middle scene.



The thing I love about this book, with few vignettes and spacious double paged spreads for every scene, as each spread makes an almost huge art print – so I loved printing it all up at the end to proof. There is a magical feeling in the small details vs huge zoomed out scenes, and I'm really proud of how it turned out.