

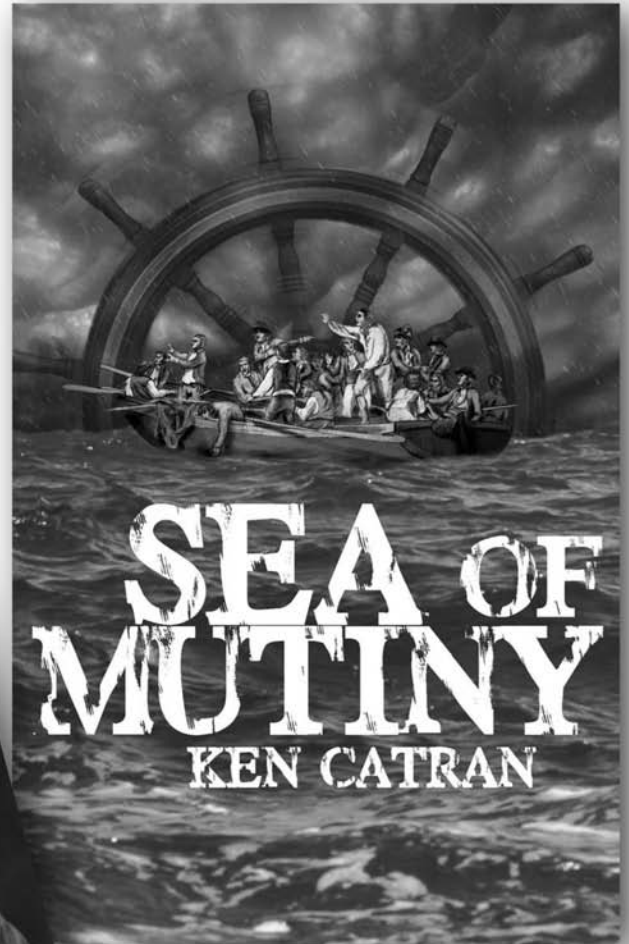
# Teachers' Resource Kit – *Sea of Mutiny* – by Ken Catran

*Sea of Mutiny* is an exciting, plot-driven historical novel about massive sea voyages in treacherous conditions upon overcrowded, overladen ships. It focuses on the character of 17-year-old John Hallet, who was sailing on the ill-fated *Bounty* in 1789, when Fletcher Christian and others staged the mutiny against Captain Bligh. Cast adrift in a small boat in wild and dangerous seas, Hallet tells the remarkable story of how Bligh led these sailors to safety. This story is interspersed with a fictionalised account of the events that led up to the mutiny on the *Bounty*.

Historically accurate and well-researched, this is a revisionist look at Bligh, who has gone down in history as sadistic and cruel. Instead, this book portrays Bligh as a victim of the British class system and his own flawed decision-making.



Born in 1944, Ken Catran is an award-winning television writer, as well as writing science fiction and historical fiction for children. He has written for some of our best-loved television series, including *Shortland Street*. He has been shortlisted for the New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards many times, and won the Senior Fiction category and Book of the Year for this coveted award in 2001.



**Including classroom activities for children, Years 8–11, in the following subjects:**

- \* **Leadership**
- \* **Film study**
- \* **History**
- \* **Writing**
- \* **Reading**
- \* **Current events**



*Sea of Mutiny* is published by Random House New Zealand Ltd,  
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## Readers' Notes

### Synopsis

The historically famous mutiny on the *Bounty* is both a story of culture clash and a remarkable survival adventure. *Sea of Mutiny* has two distinct narrative strands: the developing mutiny on board and in Tahiti; and the castaways' epic ocean voyage of three-and-a-half thousand miles. The narrator, seventeen-year-old John Hallet, sails with the *Bounty* in 1787; its mission to collect tropical bread-fruit plants to feed slaves in Jamaica. He experiences Captain Bligh's fierce temper first-hand but is also surprised at the depth of the captain's wisdom.

Cliques form on board the *Bounty*, and in Tahiti the crew rejoice in an alluring paradise of free love and feasting. Here John meets his first love, but discontent grows and there is stealing and desertion. Crew members are whipped and John must farewell his pregnant girlfriend.

After the mutiny, a group is cast adrift in an open boat. They land on the 'Friendly Islands' where they are attacked by cannibals, then are pursued by war canoes off 'Feejee'. Bligh's determined leadership keeps their hopes alive despite terrible hunger. They row up the Australian coast where John encounters aboriginal warriors, and the journey ends in Dutch Timor, where many of them die of disease. John returns to England but is seriously maimed.

John's innocence is lost during the two-year ordeal. He sees the dark side of paradise and his eyes are opened to the destructive passions of men. But the novel's thematic focus is on the complex Captain Bligh: brave, strictly authoritarian, fiery and spiritual. The mutineers remain shadowy figures in this drama, but there are essential minor characters: John's mentor, Nelson; Fletcher Christian; and the needling Purcell.

### Writing style

Catran has structured parallel stories several years apart; alternate chapters shift between the unfolding mutiny and the survivors' harrowing sea voyage. The effect of this time shift is a gradual revelation of the character of the historically misrepresented Bligh. The reader sees how he copes in a position of power followed by one of extreme vulnerability. As Bligh is fleshed out, so the motivations of the mutineers also become clear.

The depth of research is evident, especially in the rich use of cultural, nautical and historical detail and of colloquial language. There is some colourful sailors' language (e.g. 'kissing the gunner's daughter', page 39) but Catran has opted mostly for modern syntax to maintain readability for teenagers.

The dual structure, short chapters, and an event-packed plot mean the pace is swift, even in the gruelling, long, ocean voyage. The writing style is stark and vivid. It focuses on action and the figure of Bligh. Almost every scene shows how the crew react to him or how he handles a new crisis.

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### Leadership/authority figures

- \* What are a leader's responsibilities and potential weaknesses?
- \* Detail the qualities of an effective leader e.g. strength versus sensitivity.
- \* Bligh's name is synonymous with tyranny. Is this fair?
- \* Was he justified in his onboard punishments/actions? Did he cause the mutiny?

### Film study

- \* Compare the many movie versions now available on DVD – are they historically correct? Compare the scowling Bligh in the 1935 version and the repressed character in *The Bounty*, 1984. Does Catran's Bligh owe anything to these portrayals?
- \* How are myths made in film and biography?

### History

- \* Colonisation: What was 'breadfruit imperialism'?
  - \* Why do people sometimes assume 'other cultures are inferior because they are different'? (see page 106.)
  - \* How were the Pacific social groups corrupted? Was it inevitable?
  - \* How is Bligh's wisdom (page 104) like the modern view of cultural diversity?
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## Notes/study/themes

- \* Native cultures: Settlers bought alcohol, technology, and disease — what did native cultures give the settlers?
- \* How would Catran research information about aborigines in 1789?
- \* History of exploration: Research the famous explorers on page 53 and Captain Cook on page 134.
- \* What was it like on board a ship like the *Bounty*? Detail the ships' food , hierarchy, discomforts, dangers and diseases.
- \* English history: what was the importance of class structure e.g. the aristocrat explorers versus press-ganged seamen?

## Current Events

- \* The Pitcairn connection — what was the influence of the mutineers on the island's violent history? What is the link with the recent trial of their descendants?
- \* Compare with other survival stories e.g. Ernest Shackleton's amazing open boat adventure. What were the essential ingredients for survival in both cases?
- \* Is rebellion against the authorities ever a good idea? Think of recent examples.

