

『Water Sings Blue』 Kate Coombs × Emiko Ayane CONVERSATION



Author : Kate Coombs

Birthplace: Spokane, Washington, USA
Hobbies: Reading, gardening, photography
Role models: Poet Valerie Worth and fantasy writers Diana Wynne Jones and Terry Pratchett
Favorite flower: Daisy
Where I want to visit one day: Tokyo
Motto: Try again!



Translator : Emiko Ayane

Birthplace / hometown: Born in Shinagawa, Tokyo. Raised in Kobe, Hyogo, then Onomichi, Hiroshima. After living in Kobe for thirty years, came back to her birthplace, Tokyo.
Hobbies: Writing stories, Cooking, Dressmaking
Translation goals: Smooth translation
Role model: Yaeko Nukada
Favorite flower: Blue Butterfly Bush
Where I want to visit one day: Milano
Motto: Nothing is untranslatable.

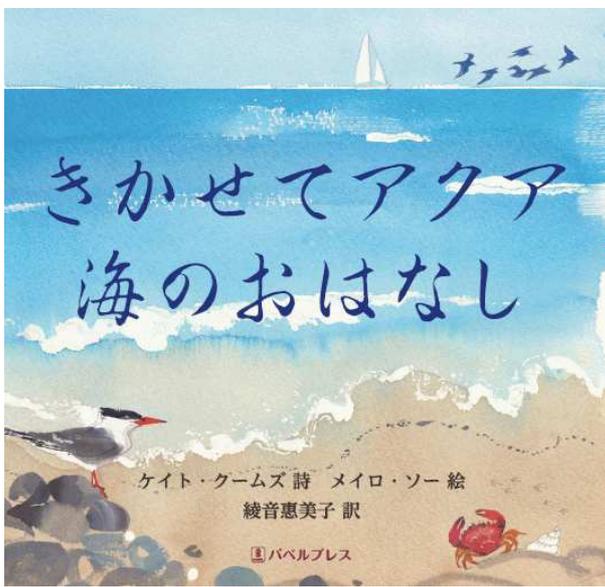
Ayane

Hello. Nice to meet you. My name is Emiko Ayane. I translated two books of yours into Japanese: the first is Runaway Princess, and the other is a picture book, Water Sings Blue, which was all written in poetry,

Today, I am very excited to get to know about the things that you enjoyed or struggled in writing these books, and if you have any interesting stories to share with us, particularly from the author's point of view, I would love to hear that as well.

Kate

Oh, thank you! I can tell you that the tricky thing about writing The Runaway Princess was keeping all of the subplots going at once—the witch, the dragon, the bandits, and of course the princes—in connection with what Meg and her friends were up to. I had a great time with those characters. I especially get a kick out of Gorba the witch with her romance novels and her endless parade of exasperating frog princes. Of course, some ideas just pop up while you're writing. For example, I was writing the part where Meg is going to use the witch's potion to make the rope hanging from the tower window invisible so no one will know she's been climbing in and out. I was writing about her putting the potion on the rope when it flashed into my mind, "What if the whole tower turned invisible?" So I just went with it, and I sat there laughing at my desk. It was such a funny way for the king to finally realize that his daughter was no longer in the tower!



[きかせてアキラ海のおはなし](#)
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Ayane

Every single page of Water Sings Blue is delightful and beautiful. Not only are the pictures magnificent and powerful, the skillful story creation and straight forward message conveyed by each poem present strength and richness to the readers' mind. I feel so blessed to be able to know this book. I am very much interested in learning how this book was born.

Kate

Thank you so much, Emiko! I grew up near the beach in Southern California, and my family used to go there during the summer, where we would have picnics and go boogie boarding (a child's version of surfing). I've always loved the ocean, so one day I decided to write a poetry collection about it. I made a long list of ocean animals and related topics such as waves, setting out to write a poem about each one. I tried to think of fun little twists on each animal, like the sea urchin poem, or how to convey their essential natures in just a few words, like the shark poem.



It took me about a year and a half, and I ended up with 80 poems, which my editor whittled down to 23. I did add one poem at the last minute—I was having lunch with a friend and when I told her about the project, she said, “Oh, good! My son loves sea turtles!” At that point, I was already working with my editor, but I did not have a sea turtle poem. I went home from lunch and wrote one. At first the direction I was taking didn't work in spite of many revisions, so I tried something else and eventually it took off. The sea turtle made it into the book!



小さな舟の歌

海へでようよ 浜^{はま}へつづく 道^{みち}をたどって
木の美^{うつく}色^{いろ}した いつも静^{しず}かな 陸^{りく}地^ちをあとに

海へでようよ 木^き々が根^ねをはる 街^{まち}をはなれて
ビタリとじ^じた茶^{ちや}色^{いろ}の窓^{まど}や 扉^{かど}をあけて

海へでようよ かけ声^{かけこゑ}高く さあでかけよう
くらい茶^{ちや}色^{いろ}の くいをならべた 舟^{ふね}つき場^ばから

波^{なみ}あおく 空^{そら}あおく きらめき かがやく
海^{うみ}はかえるよ 君^{きみ}をカモメに 青^{あお}空^{そら}たかく 舞^まい上^あがれ

Ayane

When I am reading *Water Sings Blue*, I start to feel like there really are many kinds of kingdoms in the ocean.

Kingdom of Seagulls, Kingdom of Small Fish, Kingdom of Sharks, Kingdom of Coral, and Kingdom of Whales. There is also dark, dark Darkness in the deep blue ocean.

My favorite is the world of whales, where they slide through the depths of the ocean, singing to each other.

Although this is an oversized book, it is still small enough to have open on my lap. I would feel some trepidation if I were to make such a large creature appear and floating in the book.

Ms. Coombs and Ms. So, you two artists have been successful in doing this.

I was struck not only by your boldness to accomplish it but also the spirit from within you to create a picture book to let people know about the world inside the vast ocean and the preciousness of life.

Kate

I like your idea of kingdoms. A picture book poetry collection is, as you say, small in comparison to the vastness of the sea, but it is an invitation to come to the shore and go out in a boat, which is the theme of the first poem in the book, "Song of the Boat." What's great is that most of us can dive deeper and experience more in a book than we may be able to in real life. Then maybe someday we can explore the world, or at least parts of it! I read some lists of unexplored places on the planet, and there are more than you would think. But of all of them, the ocean is the place that has been explored the least by humans.

It's said that as people get older, they often lost their sense of wonder. I hope we can avoid that, and that my poems might help a little. I still see things like a sunset or a woodpecker or the waves hitting the shore and shiver with delight. How amazing! How beautiful! What a world we live in!

Ayane

In August 2016, we were fortunate enough to hold an event called “Friends in the Ocean Fair – with Characters from Water Sings Blue,” at a fantastic children’s book store, Book House Jinbo-cho (Chiyoda-ward, Tokyo*).

One little customer said, “I will come here again tomorrow,” that made me almost teary with joy. Together with the shop people and the book’s editor, my family and I, who love making things, created a sea world with organdie and decorated revolving lanterns with the pictures of Friends in the Ocean from Ms. Meilo So’s illustrations. It felt as if I was preparing for a school fete after all of these years, and it was a lot of fun.

August is known as a month with the lowest number of shoppers, but we had many visitors to the bookshop; a father just discharged from hospital, a young and budding hairdresser, a university lecturer, people fighting against intractable diseases, all came to the fair, despite the hot weather. We were so grateful to them.

I wish they could have met you then.

*Book House Jinbo-cho recently closed and has reopened last year as Book House Café.

Kate

The event sounds wonderful, and I love hearing about the people who came. I wish I could have been there, too, to meet the readers and see your marvelous decorations. The nicest thing that happened with my book here in the U.S. is that a university theater group that puts on plays for children turned it into a play and performed it. As you can imagine, that was really fun and such a big compliment!



Event : Book house Jinbocho

Ayane

Although drawing such compelling illustrations like Ms. Meilo So is an impossible task for me, I also enjoy drawing small illustrations and designing clothes in my spare time. Do you also enjoy drawing?

Kate

I started college as an art major before going back to my first love as a lifelong bookworm, literature. I’ve done some paintings and crafts for my own enjoyment since then. I recently made a flowered wreath for our guest bedroom.

Another creative thing I like to do is garden. I grow herbs on the balcony, along with purple petunias, green peppers, and cherry tomatoes, to keep them out of the reach of the deer that come up from the wooded canyon out back and eat our flowers. The deer don’t like daisies and black-eyed susans, though, so I plant a lot of those in the yard! I also have about 30 houseplants, an indoor garden that freshens the air and makes me smile.

One more creative activity I enjoy is taking photographs of clouds. They are lovely in different ways, not just each day but each moment. My second favorite thing to take photos of is trees.

Ayane

I have heard that it is important that illustrations in picture books are able to convey the meaning of the book aptly, but do you think that is possible? I understand that *Water Sings Blue* gives the opportunity for readers to explore and enjoy two diverse worlds, one from the illustrations and one from the text. These two worlds harmonize each other and help the readers to better understand the book. How do you feel about this?

Kate

I believe very strongly a principle from the world of children's books, which is that the illustrations are ultimately a separate creative act, although they build on the words. There is an expectation that the illustrations will take the story or poems a step further through the artist's unique vision. Meilo So's illustrations are so very beautiful that they are beyond what I ever could have imagined for the book, lovely and evocative and watery. Looking at them, I can hear the seagulls cry and the deep voice of the sea. I like the way the book must be turned sideways to get a nice big look at a whale, not to mention the spread with all the different kinds of waves and the wonderful title page.

Perhaps most of all, I like the jellyfish pages! I love going to the aquarium to see the moon jellyfish. They are so ethereal and fantastical that it's hard to believe they're real.

Ayane

Meg reminds me of the book, *A Little Princess*.

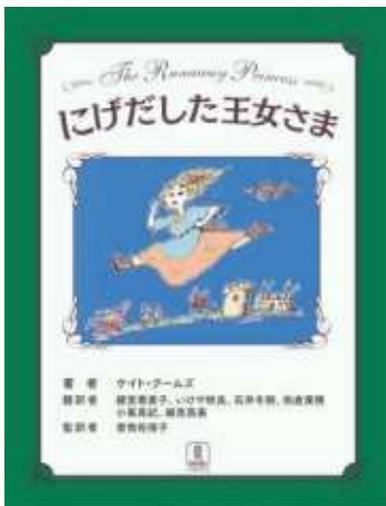
Just like Sara repeatedly told herself, "I tried not to be anything else," Meg also might have been repeating to herself, "I will create my own future."

Could you tell us how you came up with the story of *Runaway Princess*?

Kate

A Little Princess is a wonderful book, so I appreciate the comparison. Yes, Meg doesn't buckle under the weight of her father's short-sighted expectations, just as Sara refuses to let awful Miss Minchin define her or squelch her.

Believe it or not, *The Runaway Princess* started out as a screenplay. (I am from Los Angeles, land of the screenplay!) Then I decided it would be better as a book. I love fairytales, but I also like to imagine surprising situations using "what if." I began tinkering with a traditional idea from a number of European fairytales: a king gives away his daughter's hand in marriage and half the kingdom to a prince who solves a huge problem. But what if the princess doesn't want to be given away? What if, in fact, she sets out to win the contest herself with the help of her friends, unbeknownst to her father? And what if the supposed problems to be solved have their own stories, making them into real people—or baby dragons—not problems? With that premise to get me going, I had a very good time writing the book, putting in lots of little jokes along the way.



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いけや咲良 石井冬樹
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にげだしたドラゴン
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細見真美 宮上ゆか
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Ayane

By the way, your heroines, Meg from Runaway Princess and the Small Fish from Water Sings Blue are dauntless, aren't they? Even when the circumstances were about to make them cry, they always stand upright. They are kind to the others and courageous. That was my impression.

I only happened to find your books while surfing the internet. At first, I did not expect that a picture book and a YA book would offer me such wonderful worlds. It turned out to be such a lucky and valuable encounter.

Kate

I'm so glad you discovered the books! I do believe in courage, but mostly everyday courage, the courage we need to live each moment of our lives with kindness, hope, and determination despite the troubles we will invariably encounter.

Ayane

Last but not least, do you have any messages to the Japanese readers of Water Sings Blue and Runaway Princess?

Kate

Yes! The world is full of kindness, and the world is full of wonder. Between the two, we can live with joy even though sometimes things are hard. I hope readers can be kind and can appreciate the glory that is each individual who comes and goes in our lives. I hope they can see the beauty in this amazing world, too, whether it's a gigantic whale, a cloud, a crisp apple, or their very own hands with their clever fingers that can hold a pencil or a book.



Ayane

Thank you very much for sharing interesting stories with me today. I am already looking forward to reading your next book. I am sure it would be another wonderful story coming out of "Coombs World."

ケイト

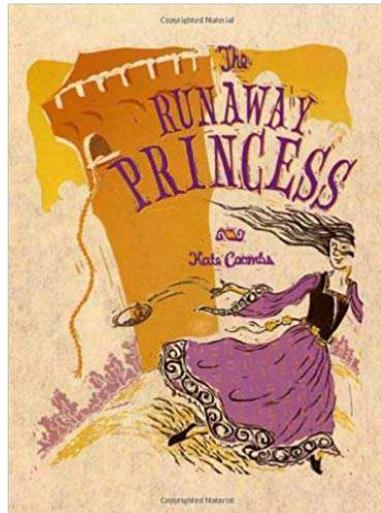
Thank you, too, Emiko. It's very nice to meet the translator—I've wondered about you, of course, and what it's like to be a translator. I'm happy to read your words and see how eloquent you are!



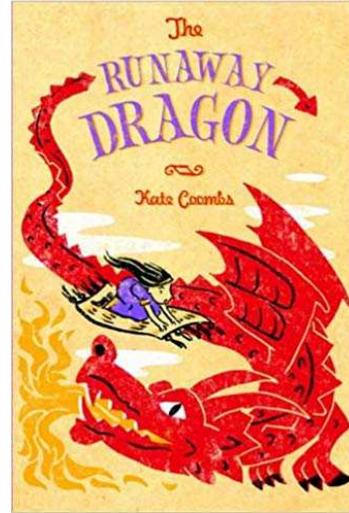
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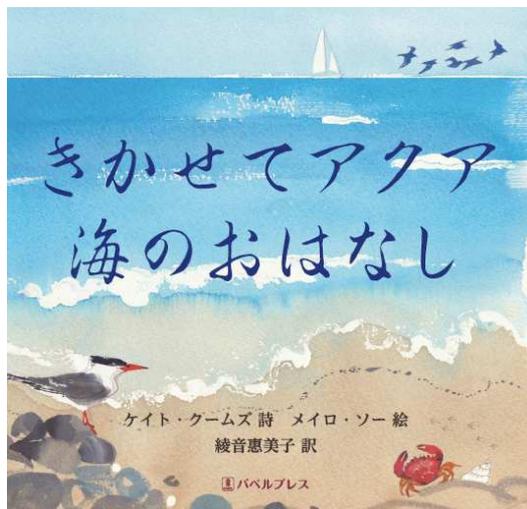
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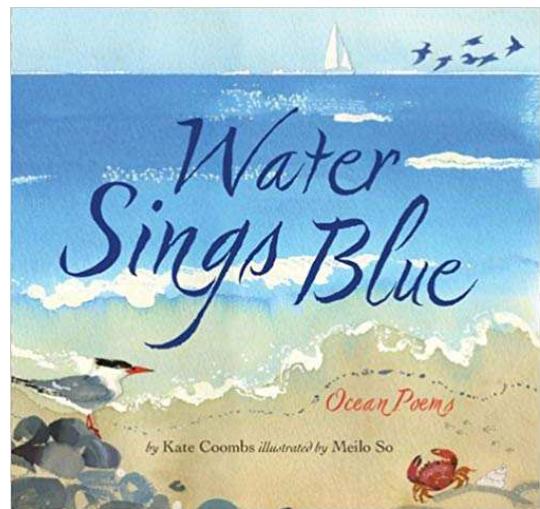
The Runaway Princess
 By Kate Coombs, Kate Coombs
 Publisher: Farrar Straus &
 Giroux Language: English
 ISBN-13: 978-0374355463



The Runaway Dragon
 By Kate Coombs, Kate Coombs
 Publisher: Farrar, Straus and
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 ISBN-10: 0374363617



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 By Kate Coombs, Kate Coombs
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