

Author and illustrator Lauren Briggs shares how Little PAGO came to life!

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Meet Little PAGO, an energetic and playful baby sea turtle living in the Great Barrier Reef! Against a magical background of coral flowers and seaweed gardens, Little PAGO and his friends set out on an adventurous journey in search for food. However, not everything floating in the ocean is safe for a baby turtle to eat ... With an environmentally sustainable focus, Little PAGO is written and illustrated for 2-5 year olds to share with their family and teachers. An imaginative and inspiring story about friendship, perseverance and how our choices impact fragile marine animals.

Today, the author and illustrator of Little PAGO, Lauren Briggs, is on the blog to share how this wonderful picture book was brought to life. Read on ...



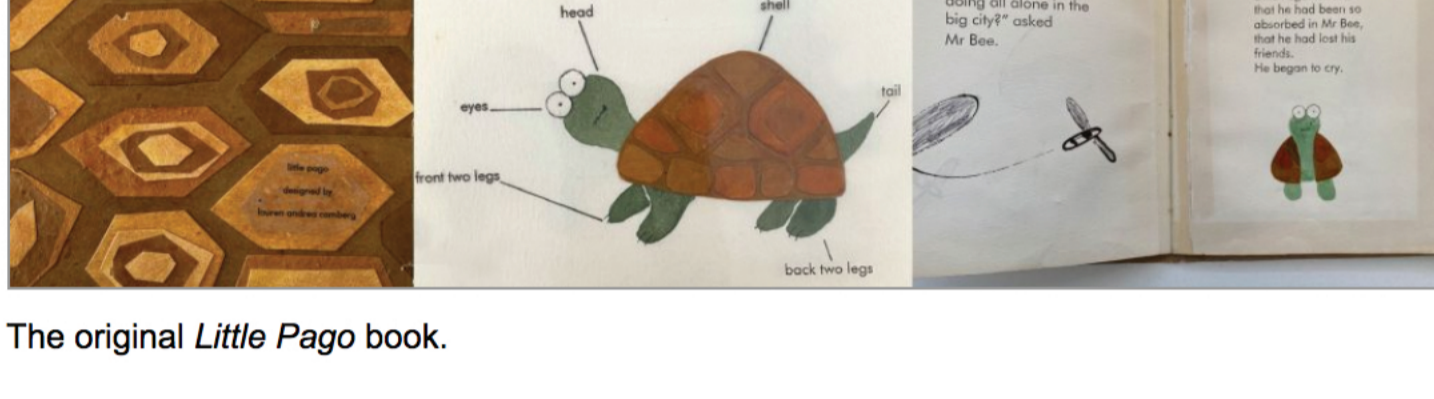
Lauren Briggs

Bringing Little PAGO to life!

Bringing Little PAGO to life has been decades in the making. He was first conceived during a university project as a lovable but endangered baby turtle. I felt he needed to be a symbol for the welfare of all marine animals in the Galapagos Islands. I created a vulnerable, little turtle whose life was increasingly at risk due to human activity.

Many years later, together with my family, I travelled to Borneo on an adventure holiday and then on to a remote turtle conservation island called Lankayan Island. It was here that my idea for a children's picture book jumped out at me, as the baby turtles were making their run for the ocean for the first time. It was such an incredible experience. We woke in the middle of the night to watch – under the light of the moon – a female green turtle laid her eggs in a nest that she had dug on the beach. We were also privileged to witness baby turtles (the eggs had been moved to a hatchery managed by conservation workers) hatch from their eggs and

scramble along the sandy beach into the ocean for the first time. Watching their beauty and vulnerability, I knew then and there that I wanted to create a children's picture book about the plight of these sea turtles. Becoming a mother had made me so much more aware of how my choices impact the environment and that of my children's future. I loved reading stories to them and so it was a natural next step to take my little hero, Little PAGO, and turn him into a meaningful story that could inspire change.



The original Little PAGO book.

On my return to Sydney, I began to research Australian sea turtles and was shocked to learn that **only 1 in 1000 sea turtles live to adulthood and six of the seven sea turtles found in Australian waters are listed as vulnerable or endangered.** One of the critical threats causing endangerment is turtles mistake floating plastic for some of their favourite foods.

I wanted Little PAGO to inspire children and their parents to value and protect Australia's endangered sea turtles by taking action against plastic pollution in our oceans.



The nesting beach on Lankayan Island and a green turtle hatchling.

I approached this by metaphorically inviting the reader into the story to come to Little PAGO's rescue. Using a young girl to save Little PAGO, and then subsequently pick up all the rubbish lying on her beach, was a way to demonstrate to young children the power of taking action. The simple action of picking up rubbish and possibly in the future thinking about their own plastic waste, will help keep our vulnerable marine life and oceans safe and free from plastic.

Bringing the story to life saw me drawing on influences as far back as my childhood. As a young girl, my sisters and I used to spend Saturdays with my grandparents while my parents were at work. My granny gave us books to colour in. I loved drawing shapes with bright, solid colour and then creating a darker outline. I emulated this style when designing Little PAGO, Solly Stingray, Carly Crab and Stevie Seahorse. By exaggerating the size of the character's eyes, I was able to bring their emotions to life. This engages the reader and creates empathy during the nail-biting race against time to save Little PAGO.



The characters in the book were a lot of fun to develop, especially as they play a key role in highlighting one of the main themes in the story: friendship.

When I created Little PAGO and his cheerful band of loyal friends, I wanted these characters to have the same sense of wonder and thrill playing in nature that I remember enjoying with my children. All those carefree and fun times exploring the natural world around us. Their charisma and personality takes the reader along with them on their adventure under the sea.



Solly Stingray, Little PAGO, Carly Crab and Stevie Seahorse

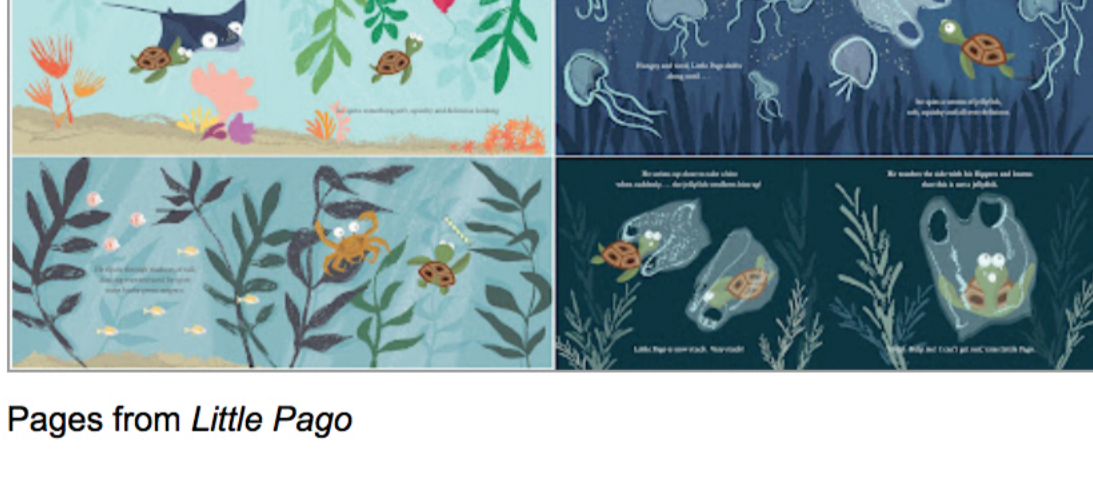
Once I had my characters designed and ready, it was time to create their home, Australia's Great Barrier Reef. After scrolling through and surveying hundreds of underwater images, I settled on using crayons, coloured pencils, paint and some digital artwork to create the magical background of coral flowers and seaweed gardens. These materials allowed me to capture the remarkable, organic textures of the coral and plant life of the underwater world.

I was especially intrigued at how the rays of light reflect and refract through the ocean water, creating shadows and dappled shapes. I was inspired by Alexander Calder's mobile sculptures to create this effect. Henri Matisse's abstract cut outs of coral and plant shapes helped inspire my design for the corals of the book.



Alexander Calder mobile photo copyright by Kim Winters. Henri Matisse coral art works

Colour is an integral part of creating a book and it helps to create cohesion between the pages. Colour is also a great visual technique to use to help children interpret and understand meaning in stories through the illustrations, especially emotions. I used the intensity of blues as a visual aid to communicate uncertainty and looming danger in the narrative, specifically at the climax of the story. The water became darker and gloomier as Little PAGO finds himself in dangerous situations.



Pages from Little PAGO

I loved creating the characters and storyline for Little PAGO and designing the final book layout and cover. Through the lens of a storybook, it is wonderful to see children not only enjoy the book but also empathise and understand the world around them.

Visit littlepago.com to find out how you can be part of the movement to help save these beautiful sea creatures. There is an abundance of information, art activities, interviews and teacher resources to help inspire change in the home, classroom and out in the community.

Look forward to seeing you there, Little PAGO is waiting!

—Little PAGO by Lauren Briggs (Boolarong Press) is out now. A donation will be made to Take 3 for the Sea on the sale of each book.

You can find Teacher's Notes and Art Activities for Little PAGO here!

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Little PAGO
by Lauren Briggs

Little PAGO is an energetic and playful baby loggerhead turtle living in the waters of the Great Barrier Reef.

Against a magical background of coral flowers and seaweed gardens, Little PAGO and his friends set out on an adventurous journey in search for food. However, not everything floating in the ocean is safe for a baby turtle to eat. A balloon, straw and plastic bag are easily mistaken for some of Little PAGO's favourite food...

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