

STUDY GUIDE

Translating A Prize-Winning Book  
To The Movie Screen



# *Island of the Blue Dolphins*

COMING TO THE  
PALACE  
THEATRE

Endorsed by the  
AMERICAN LIBRARY  
ASSOCIATION  
which also awarded the  
Newbery Medal to the novel.



© Universal Pictures Company, Inc. and Robert B. Radnitz Productions, Inc.

## PREFACE:

"The Island of the Blue Dolphins" written by newspaperman Scott O'Dell, has become one of the most honored books in the three short years since its first publication by Houghton Mifflin in 1960. It has received the Newbery Medal Award of the American Library Association, as "the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children"; the William Allen White Award; and awards from the Hans Christian Andersen Foundation, the Southern California Council on Children's Literature; and, from abroad, an award from the German Juvenile Book Council. Well on its way to becoming a modern classic, it is required reading in the elementary classes of numerous public school systems in the United States.

The film version of "The Island of the Blue Dolphins" was produced by Robert B. Radnitz and released through Universal Pictures in 1964. It has received the endorsement of the American Library Association and commendation and praise from many organizations and individuals concerned with film both as entertainment and as a stimulating intellectual experience for children and young people; such commendations have come from Justice William O. Douglas, of the U.S. Supreme Court; Senator Maurine Neuberger, (Oregon); Lyle W. Ashby, Deputy Executive Secretary of the National Education Association; Janet Isbell, of the Dept. of Audio-Visual and Broadcast Education of the National Council of Churches; Rev. C. Albert Koob, Associate Secretary of the National Catholic Education Association; and many others.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface .....	1
To the Teacher .....	2
To the Student .....	4
Getting the Film Under Way .....	5
Finding the Location .....	7
Casting the Star Role .....	9
About the Dogs .....	11
Ramo: Casting for the Boy's Part .....	12
Make-up Problems for Karana .....	15
Training Rontu .....	16
Training the Birds .....	17
Housing and Feeding Cast and Crew .....	18
Some Differences Between Novel and Screen .....	19
Karana Finds a Friend .....	20
A Note From The Producer .....	21
Glossary of Commonly Used Film Terms .....	23
Discussion Questions .....	26

## TO THE TEACHER:

"The Island of the Blue Dolphins" is a book which can be understood and appreciated on many levels from approximately age seven through adulthood. The adaptation of this work for the screen offers teachers a unique opportunity for guiding young people into a lively experience of learning to evaluate creative material. Motion pictures—movies—are a normal and pleasurable habit for most children, but no real body of text exists which can help teachers to develop in young children the critical awareness, ability to discriminate, and the tools with which to articulate their reactions to films. This study guide is intended as a bridge between *seeing* and *appreciating*.

Children can learn something about the enormous task facing an author by writing short essays and stories themselves. There is no way in which they can experiment with film-making on anything near the scale of a professional feature film. But through an understanding of some of the creative processes involved in making a movie, it is possible to begin to apply critical standards to the final product. We hope that this study guide will open the first doors to many young moviegoers who, by their increasing understanding and discernment, will demand ever-higher standards from films in the future.

*Universal Pictures, Inc.*

*Note: Unfamiliar terms are italicized throughout the text, and defined in a glossary at the end of the Study Guide. Discussion questions based on the information in the Guide can be assigned as research problems or used in ad-lib "think" sessions with the full class participating.*

## TO THE STUDENT:

We know you like reading a good book, and we know you like going to a good movie, too. They are two different experiences, but have you ever stopped to think *how* different? Sometimes, especially when a film is based on a familiar story, it is tempting to compare the movie with the book. But we should be aware of the differences!

When you read a book, it is like someone telling you a story. But when you go to a movie, you and the other people in the audience share the experience of *SEEING* the story actually happening.

There are many ways of showing a story on film. If the film-makers are successful, you will believe in the story when you watch it, and it will be a valuable memory to you for a long time. Making a film requires the cooperation of hundreds of creative people working together. It is a very new art, belonging to the 20th century. Some of the people who work on films are technicians, who are highly skilled in operating complicated cameras, sound equipment, lighting effects, editing machines and laboratory processes. Others are experts in the difficult job of creating ideas and knowing how to put those ideas on film so that they communicate to the audience—the director, actors, writers, musicians, film editors, artists. There are people in charge of costumes and makeup and *props* and *sets*. And over it all is the producer, whose job it is to hold the whole idea together and make sure it comes out just exactly right.

We can't tell you *how* to make a movie. But we hope you will get some idea of the way in which movie makers bring a book to the screen.

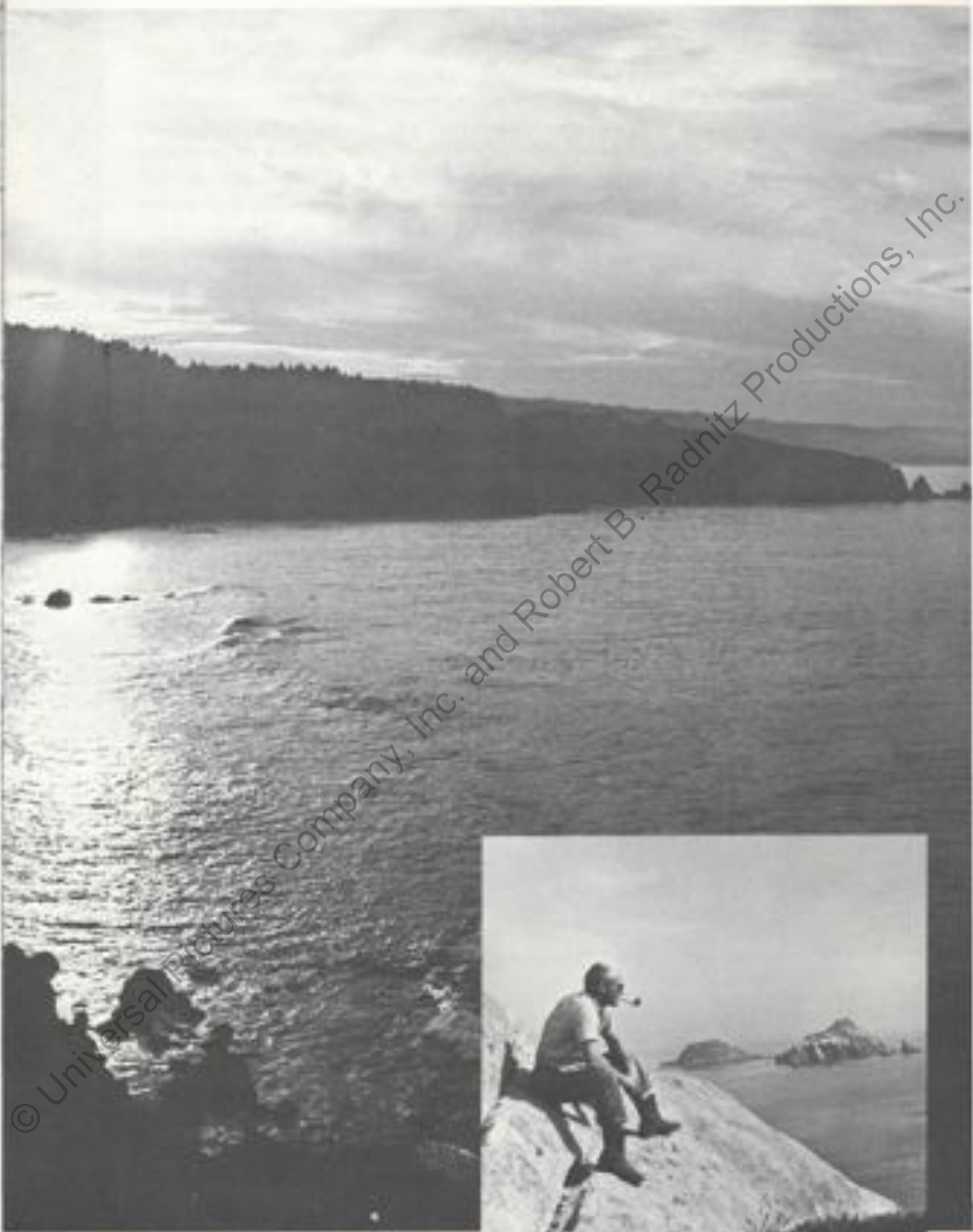


© Universal Pictures Company, Inc. and Robert B. Radnitz Productions, Inc.

Once a real girl lived all alone on a real island. To tell her story on film took hundreds of people working together. Some of the people you see here are: *the director, cameramen, lighting experts, sound engineers, producer, makeup artists, wardrobe women, script girl, technical director, and producer.* After the film is in the can, another phase of the production is just beginning. That is the *editing, and the addition of music, and the technical processing of the film to make a finished motion picture.* Shooting the picture is only the start of the creation!



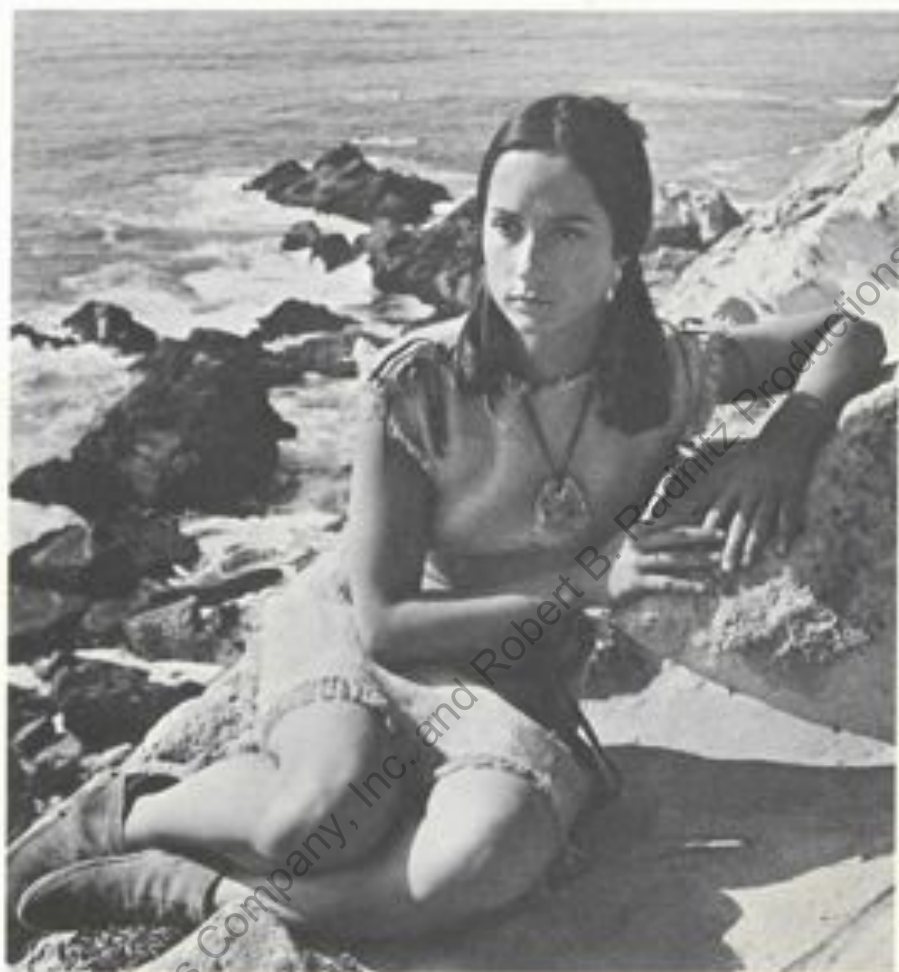
© Universal Pictures Company, Inc. and Robert B. Radnitz Productions, Inc.





The actual "Island of the Blue Dolphins" (San Nicholas Island not far from Santa Barbara off the California Coast) is different now than it was in the early 1800's when the true story on which the novel is based took place: today it is a United States Navy Base and jet planes fly overhead all day. A new location had to be found for filming the picture, and it took many months before the perfect "Island" was found. The producer of the film and his *production manager* drove along the Pacific coastline all the way north from Mexico, stopping to explore every possible location. Finally when they had almost reached Anchor Bay, they discovered their "Island"! It was an isolated section of the coast, 150 miles north of San Francisco, where Indians still live. The inhabitants were very helpful to the film-makers, pointing out rock formations, pools and inlets, hills and flat places which were perfect for the different sections of the "Island" where Karana and Rontu lived.





Finding the right actress to play the role of Karana was a special problem. She is on camera in almost every moment of the film, and usually all alone. This is very difficult job! The producer and casting director looked for a young girl with proven acting ability—but one whose face had not been seen by movie audiences many times before. She had to be the kind of girl who could change before our eyes from a dependent child into a self-reliant young girl able to take care of herself alone on the island. After Celia Kaye had been selected to play the role of the young Indian girl, it was discovered that her grandmother was a full-blooded Cherokee Indian!

Although Celia was part Indian, she had been born and brought up in the city. She had to learn how to scramble around the rocks of the island barefoot, as if she had done it all her life. Although some days were cold during the shooting of the picture and the other members of the production unit wore heavy sweaters and jackets, Celia wanted to feel as much like the real Karana as she could, and she usually went through every day in just her authentic native dress. But after the scene in which she had to swim in 40° ocean water, she was glad to be wrapped in towels and blankets when the cameras stopped grinding.





The dogs who acted in the film were accomplished pros, who were able to follow their trainer's unspoken directions no matter how many other things were going on at the same time. "Playing dead" is not easy when there are cameras and lights and microphones bearing down on you for a *closeup*, and a girl with a bow and arrow about to finish you off!



The role of Karana's little brother, Ramo, was played by Larry Domasin, who had already acted in two other movies. He had a wonderful time on the location and enjoyed playing "Indian" very much. He is a good actor who took direction quickly and understood the importance of what he was supposed to do.

Visitors to the location were occasionally startled to see a primitive Indian boy sailing modern glider planes, but that was Larry's favorite pastime when he wasn't needed on the set. Incidentally, the law says that actors under the age of 18 must keep up with their schoolwork even when they are working on a film in a distant location. When Larry wasn't rehearsing or working in front of the cameras or studying with his tutor, he was sure to be sailing his glider plane.





© Universal Pictures Company, Inc. and Robert B. Radnitz Productions, Inc

*I*n the story, Karana and Rontu are mortal enemies at the beginning, but slowly they learn to trust and to love each other. But in real life, Celia and Rontu were friends right from the start. Sometimes Rontu got carried away with his great love for his "enemy", and ruined her makeup with his kisses! Even though Celia's role as the Indian girl, Karana, required a very natural look, it is always necessary to use make-up to counteract the strong lights and the harsh quality of the film.





Rontu's professional trainer used hand signals to direct him during the *takes*, because spoken commands would be picked up by the microphones. Usually the trainer would work with the dog for about fifteen minutes before each scene, going over and over the action...



...and then the even-tempered Rontu would turn in a perfect performance.



The birds whom Karana befriends in the film were actually carefully trained pets who were accompanied at all times by their skilled handler. Celia had to learn to work with the birds for their scenes together. The trainer stayed just out of camera range during the actual filming.



Once you get all the people needed to shoot a movie together on an isolated location, somebody has to make arrangements for them to get their meals. Feeding the cast and crew is the job of the production unit manager. Above is the cast of the film on location at Anchor Bay. Hal Jon Norman, Alex Montoya, Juli Payne, Carlos Romero, Celia Kaye and Martin Garralaga. ★ In the picture below cast and crew are having lunch on location at Anchor Bay.



Many things can be told in a book which must be shown on film. One example: in the book, after the villagers have gone, Karana remembers that the women of her tribe must never make weapons because it is taboo. In the film, there is a scene before the villagers leave in which Karana's father tells her about this strong taboo. Later, when she is alone and she remembers the story, the audience shares the same memory with her. We do not need to be told what she is thinking, because we are thinking the same thing.





When the Aleut hunters return to the island, a girl is with them, and she finds Karana. They become friends, although they cannot understand each other's language. But Karana is not yet ready to trust strangers, and she does not leave the island with her new friend. This is another scene which was especially written for the film, because in the book the Aleut girl goes away without saying goodbye. But it is important for us to know that Karana has begun to trust again, and to understand her terrible loneliness. In the movie, we actually see and feel Karana's fears changing to trust. Later, she will decide to trust people again and to live in the world with them. This, too, is shown through her actions.

## A NOTE FROM THE PRODUCER:

"The Island of the Blue Dolphins" is a story about trust. A young girl is taught by her father that one must believe in people in order to live in this world; but, thru the cruelty and treachery of others—the visiting otter hunters, the wild dogs—she is cruelly disillusioned; and then slowly, painfully thru the years and all alone on the island—she learns to trust again.

The fact that she is all alone presented special problems for a movie. How do you go about making a film with just one main character—a young girl—all alone through most of the story?

We started with an outline, which looked like this:

### I. LEARNING TO TRUST

- A. Show the peaceful life of the Indian tribe on the island before the Aleutian otter hunters come.
- B. Show Karana's face while her father talks with the other men of the tribe about the need to believe in the good will of others.

### II. LOSS OF TRUST

- A. The cruelty of the hunters
- B. Failure of the rescuers to return for her
- C. Ramo's death

### III. FEELINGS OF PAIN, ANGER, REVENGE

- A. Burning the village
- B. Making weapons
- C. Stalking the killer dog

### IV. REALIZATION THAT SHE CANNOT LIVE THIS WAY

- A. The dog does not die; she helps him to live
- B. Gradual trust between the girl and the wild dog

### V. LOVE FOR NATURE AND ANIMALS AND BIRDS

- A. Rontu rejoins the dog pack; then returns to her
- B. Training the birds to call her by name
- C. The lost seal

## VI. THE STRANGERS RETURN

- A. Fear giving way to trust of the Aleutian girl, Tutok
- B. Friendship and love for Tutok
- C. Decision not to go away with Tutok and the strangers
  - 1. Karana is more lonely than before
  - 2. Rontu's death of old age; his puppy takes his place

## VII. LEARNING TO TRUST AGAIN

- A. The Spanish strangers come again
- B. Karana's fear changing to trust

As you see, this outline breaks down the story into emotions, or ideas, rather than actions. Our problem was to write a screenplay which would tell this story of emotions (with only one main character!) in a way which would be exciting and interesting and entertaining to our audiences. And, most important of all—believable.

The people in this film behave like real people, good and bad. The Indians have their own language—they don't speak in "ughs" and "hows", because real Indians don't speak that way. The Aleut hunters in the film speak the authentic Aleut language, and the Spaniards speak their own language, too. The animals in the film do not act like people or like cartoons, but like real animals.

There are sad things and violent things in this film—just as there are in life, and just as there were on the Island of the Blue Dolphins. There are happy things, too, and funny things. I believe that a really good story or book or movie tells us something true about life. It allows us to see beyond our own experiences into other worlds of other people. I hope that is what "The Island of the Blue Dolphins" will do when you see it.

*Robert B. Radnitz*

## GLOSSARY OF SOME TERMS USED IN MAKING A MOTION PICTURE

**Camerasman:** in charge of the complicated cameras and lights, and responsible for the actual photographs which are made on film.

**Camera range:** the entire area which can be seen through the camera.

**Cast:** the actors.

**Casting director:** the person who chooses the right actors for each role, usually working with the director and producer.

**Closeup:** any scene which is photographed very close to the subject; usually a person, showing just the face.

**Crew:** the people who work on the filming, other than the actors.



In the photo above you can see a moment during actual filming on location at Anchor Bay: The cameras and lights are set up in position; the producer, Robert B. Radnitz, is checking the camera angles through the camera; Celia Kays, the star who plays Karana, is waiting to be called to take her place in the scene of action (off left).



**Director:** the person in charge of the entire production during the filming; he is usually involved in the editing, too.

**Editing:** the process by which all the individual scenes which have been photographed are artistically worked into a full-fledged motion picture.

**Grinding:** a slang term which is applied to cameras when they are actually taking the photographs.

**In the can:** the film which is already shot is said to be "in the can"; literally it is packed in air-tight cans to protect it from being damaged while being moved or shipped from one place to another: for example, from the location area—in this case from Anchor Bay—down to the studio where the editing takes place.

**Lighting expert:** cameras do not photograph light the way the eye really sees it, and the lighting experts set up artificial light to give the effect needed in each scene.

**Makeup artist:** when a face is photographed many times life-size, the skin tones and every detail will be magnified. It is the job of the makeup man to make the actor's magnified face look normal and attractive under these conditions.

**On camera:** actually being photographed.

**Pro:** a slang term for "professional", usually meaning someone who has had experience working on a film.

**Producer:** the person who first decided to make this film, raised the money to do so, hired the cast and crew, and supervised the entire production.

**Production manager:** hired by the producer, he in turn hires other members of the crew and is responsible for seeing that everything goes smoothly.

**Production unit:** the name for the entire group of people who are working together on each phase of the filming.

**Production unit manager:** the person in charge of details involving the people working on the film, such as food and transportation, etc.

**Script:** the outline of the story, with plans for each scene giving details of what the cameras will photograph and all the spoken words to be recorded by the microphones.

**Script girl:** the person who records every change in the script made by the director during filming; she is in charge of making sure that each scene is coordinated with the details in other scenes.

**Set:** the place where the filming takes place.

**Shooting:** another word for "filming".

**Sound engineer:** in charge of recording the dialogue and background sounds during filming, and responsible for the final "sound track".

**Sound track:** recorded by microphones during filming and later synchronized with the picture on the same piece of film.

**Star:** a principal actor or actress.

**Take:** each scene is filmed several times until the right "take" is made in which everything goes exactly right. The director and editor later decide which "takes" to use in the final film.

**Technical director:** responsible for all details of accuracy in the story.

**Wardrobe women:** in charge of costumes.



Another production scene from "Island of the Blue Dolphins". Here producer Robert B. Radnitz is rehearsing a scene with Celia Kaye and Rontu, the dog, prior to actually shooting the scene.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. List as many reasons as you can think of why a movie takes so long to make. ("The Island of the Blue Dolphins" took two years). Why do movies cost so much to make?
2. Which do you think is easier: making a movie outdoors on location or making it inside a studio? List several reasons.
3. Suppose that you are a film director and want to show the audience that a girl is very lonely. What are five different ways that this can be shown on film?
4. If you have ever trained a dog to do tricks, how would you go about training him to be an actor?
5. If you could work as a film-maker, which job would you like to have? Why?
6. Movies are a way of communicating ideas and information and knowledge about people and places. List some things that you have learned from movies.
7. Many details about life on the Island were left to the reader's imagination in the book, but in the film they had to be seen. For example, the kind of dress she wore, the way she prepared her food, etc. Can you name some other details which had to be researched by the film-makers for the picture?

We wish to express our gratitude to:  
 The Southwest Indian Museum  
 The Santa Barbara Historical Society  
 The Sierra Club  
 Mr. Millard Sheets and the people of Anchor Bay



*Awards*  
*to Scott O'Dell's Novel*  
 Neuberger Medal  
 awarded by the American Library Association

\*\*\*  
 WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE AWARD  
 \*\*\*  
 HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN FOUNDATION  
 \*\*\*  
 SO. CALIF. COUNCIL ON CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

THE CAST

Karasa..... CELIA KAYE  
 Rano..... LARRY DOMASIN  
 Tufok..... ANN DANIEL  
 Aleut Captain..... GEORGE KENNEDY  
 Chonig..... CARLOS ROMERO  
 Kimki..... HAL JON NORMAN  
 The Priest..... MARTIN GARRALAGA  
 Spanish Captain..... ALEX MONTOYA  
 Laral..... BLUE PAYNE

and  
 "BONTU"  
 HIS

THE MANCHESTER AND KASHIA TRIBES  
 OF THE NEMA NATION.

THE CREDITS

Produced by..... ROBERT B. RADNITZ  
 Directed by..... JAMES B. CLARK  
 Screenplay by..... TED SHERDEMAN  
 and JANE KLOVE

Based on the Newbery Medal novel  
 "ISLAND OF THE BLUE DOLPHINS"  
 by..... SCOTT O'DELL  
 Photography..... LEO TOVER, A.S.C.  
 Art Directors..... ALEXANDER GOLITZEN  
 and GEORGE WEBB  
 Set Decorations..... OLIVER EMERT  
 Sound..... WALDON O. WATSON  
 and JOE LAPIS  
 Music..... PAUL SAWTELL  
 Music Supervision..... JOSEPH GERSHENSON  
 Unit Production Manager... TERENCE NELSON  
 "BONTU" trained by... FRANK WEATHERWAX  
 Matte Artist..... ALBERT WHITLOCK  
 Birds trained by..... RAY BERWICK  
 Film Editor..... TED J. KENT  
 Make-Up..... BUD WESTMORE  
 Hair Stylist..... LARRY GERMAIN  
 Costumes..... ROSEMARY ODELL  
 Assistant Director..... PHIL BOWLES