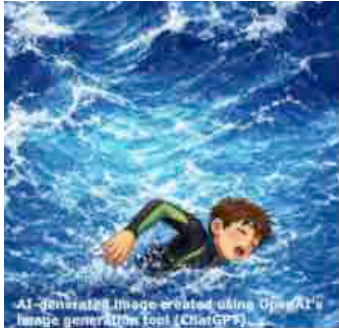


Hero boy swims for four hours to save his family

9th February 2026



A 13-year-old Australian boy has been hailed a hero after an epic swim that saved his family. The boy, Austin Appelbee, and his family were on a beach holiday in Western Australia. They were kayaking and paddleboarding in shallow water when

strong winds pushed them farther offshore. They ended up over four kilometres away from land, and the daylight was fading. Austin decided to kayak to shore to get help. However, the waves had damaged his kayak, which had taken in water and flipped over. He said he then lost an oar and knew he was in trouble. He decided he had no alternative but to swim back to land. He swam through shark-frequented waters to raise the alarm.

Austin made it to the beach and phoned for help. This sparked a huge rescue operation, which resulted in coastguards finding the teenager's mother and two younger sisters. The boy said: "I hit the bottom of the beach and I just collapsed, and then, after that, I had to sprint two kilometres to get to the phone." Rescuers called his efforts "superhuman". One rescuer said Austin's actions could not "be praised highly enough". He added that the teenager's "determination and courage ultimately saved the lives of his mother and siblings". Austin's mother Joanne, 47, told reporters: "The wind picked up. We lost oars, and we drifted out further. It was an absolute nightmare."

Sources: nzherald.co.nz / nbcnews.com / bbc.com

Writing

Meeting one's hero might be a disappointing experience. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

13-year-old / hero / epic swims / beaches / kayaking / waves / in trouble / sharks / phoning for help / rescue / coastguards / superhuman / determination / nightmares

True / False

- 1) The article says the 13-year-old boy was failed as a hero. T / F
- 2) The boy and his family were kayaking in deep water. T / F
- 3) The boy's kayak overturned. T / F
- 4) There could have been sharks in the water the boy swam in. T / F
- 5) When the boy reached the beach, he screamed for help. T / F
- 6) After the boy got to the beach, he collapsed. T / F
- 7) A rescuer said the boy should be highly prized. T / F
- 8) The boy's mother likened the experience to a very bad dream. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------|
| 1. hailed | a. difficulty |
| 2. epic | b. overturned |
| 3. flipped over | c. bravery |
| 4. trouble | d. passed out |
| 5. alternative | e. heroic |
| 6. sparked | f. commended |
| 7. collapsed | g. option |
| 8. praised | h. ordeal |
| 9. courage | i. saluted |
| 10. nightmare | j. set off |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) Have you ever phoned for help?
- c) What do you think of coastguards?
- d) Have you ever done anything that could be described as 'superhuman'?
- e) How much determination do you have?
- f) How much courage do you have?
- g) What was the last 'absolute nightmare' you experienced?
- h) What questions would you like to ask the boy and his mother?

Phrase Match

1. hailed
 2. an epic
 3. kayaking and paddleboarding
 4. Austin decided to kayak to
 5. raise the
 6. This sparked
 7. Rescuers called his efforts
 8. Austin's actions could not be
 9. the teenager's determination
 10. It was an absolute
- a. alarm
 - b. a huge rescue operation
 - c. "superhuman"
 - d. a hero
 - e. and courage
 - f. shore to get help
 - g. swim
 - h. nightmare
 - i. in shallow water
 - j. praised highly enough

Discussion – Student B

- a) What heroic deeds have you done?
- b) In what ways are all of us heroes?
- c) What do you think of the boy's actions?
- d) What were you like as a 13-year-old?
- e) What beach activities do you like?
- f) What would you have done in a similar situation?
- g) What do you think was going through the boy's head?
- h) What would you think if you knew you were in shark-frequented water?

Spelling

1. adehil a hero
2. paddleboarding in ahllow water
3. strong winds pushed them farther effhoors
4. defilpp over
5. He decided he had no aeeilnrtty
6. He swam through shark-deeeefnqrty waters
7. This sparked a huge ceersu operation
8. aacdgorstu finding the teenager's mother
9. I just acdellops
10. the teenager's determination and acegour
11. his mother and bgiiinss
12. It was an abelostu nightmare

Answers – Synonym Match

1. i	2. e	3. b	4. a	5. g
6. j	7. d	8. f	9. c	10. h

Comprehension Questions

Listen to / read the news article. Answer these questions.
(Answers are on p. 27 of the 27-page PDF.)

1.	What adjective did the writer use to describe Austin's swim?
2.	What was happening to the daylight?
3.	What had Austin's kayak taken in?
4.	What was Austin's only choice?
5.	What did Austin raise when he got to the beach?
6.	What sparked the rescue operation to find Austin's family?
7.	What did Austin hit just before he collapsed?
8.	How far did Austin have to run to get his mother's phone?
9.	Who said Austin could not be praised highly enough?
10.	What did Austin's mother describe the whole ordeal as being?

Speaking – Nightmares

Rank these with your partner. Put the worst nightmares at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- Being lost at sea
- A chocolate allergy
- Losing your smartphone
- Year-long hiccups
- Very noisy neighbours
- Losing your friends
- Going to prison
- Chronic insomnia

Answers – True False

1	F	2	F	3	T	4	T	5	F	6	T	7	F	8	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.