Calmly breathing in the fresh South African air, Anthony headed closer toward the vast beach. Could there be anything quite as peaceful as an amble with your best buddy by the coast? As Jazzy scampered freely ahead, Anthony threw out her ball for her to catch. The sea was like a rippling blue blanket, dashing against the sand. Squabbling seagulls flew overhead and gannets dive-bombed the stretched layer of the sea far out from shore. Admiring the flock of albatrosses skimming the surface of the water, Anthony thought about how taking Jazzy out for an afternoon walk was his favourite part of the day.

As he stretched out his arm to throw the tennis ball as far as he could, he notice Jazzy wasn’t looking at him. In fact, she wasn’t the least bit interested in catching her beloved ball. Instead, Jazzy was frozen as a statue, facing the opposite direction. “Jazzy?” Anthony exclaimed in a high pitch, dog-friendly voice as he put the ball back into his coat pocket, “Jazzy, my girl. What are you looking at?”

Warily walking over to Jazzy, Anthony caught sight of what had caught her attention. It was lying motionless on the beach. He recognised it. He’d never seen one on land before. They’re known for having the longest wingspan of any bird. Using their formidable wind spans, they ride the ocean winds and sometimes glide for hours without rest: an albatross.

Anthony knew instantly what had happened to this lifeless albatross. He’d learnt about it last year in Geography with Mrs Wynne. Looking around, he saw the perpetrator scattered all over the beach. Many birds accidentally eat plastic and other marine debris floating in the ocean, mistaking it for food. However the problem is intensified in albatrosses because of the way they catch fish, squid and other seafood: by skimming the surface of the water with their beak. Along the way, they accidentally pick up a lot of floating plastic, which they then feed to their chicks. Adults can regurgitate plastic they’ve swallowed, but chicks are unable to, so it fills up their stomachs. It’s probable that it injures or kills the birds by cutting their stomachs or taking up space, making them feel “full” when they are starving.

Why hadn’t he ever noticed all the disgusting plastic before? Why is it sprinkled across his lovely beach? Why are people doing this? Bottle tops, plastic bags, food wrappers… they should all be put in the bin, not left on the beach.

Learning about this global problem in class was shocking enough but seeing a victim with his own eyes triggered many more emotions. Anthony clenched his fists and stared intently at the innocent albatross. “This has to stop,” he stated, “I promise you, I’ll do what I can to help.”

Calmly breathing in the fresh South African air, Anthony strode along the empty beach. Smelling the salt from the ocean, he could hear the waves crashing onto the shore. As always, Jazzy dashed ahead, looking back for Anthony to throw her ball. The golden layer of sand swept across the well-kept beach.

Smiling to himself, Anthony felt proud the beach looked so clean. His beach clean-up had been a success. With the help of Mrs Wynne, practically the whole year group and their families gave up their Saturday morning to help pick up plastic bags, bottle caps and plastic waste from all along the coast. It had never looked so good. In addition, his campaign to educate others about the importance of using reusable bags had been going well.

In the distance Anthony spotted a rookery of beautiful albatrosses soaring over South African sea. Thinking back to that fateful day when he found the albatross, he remembered his pledge. Gazing up to the birds, he declared, “I promise I’ll continue to help. This is just the start.”

