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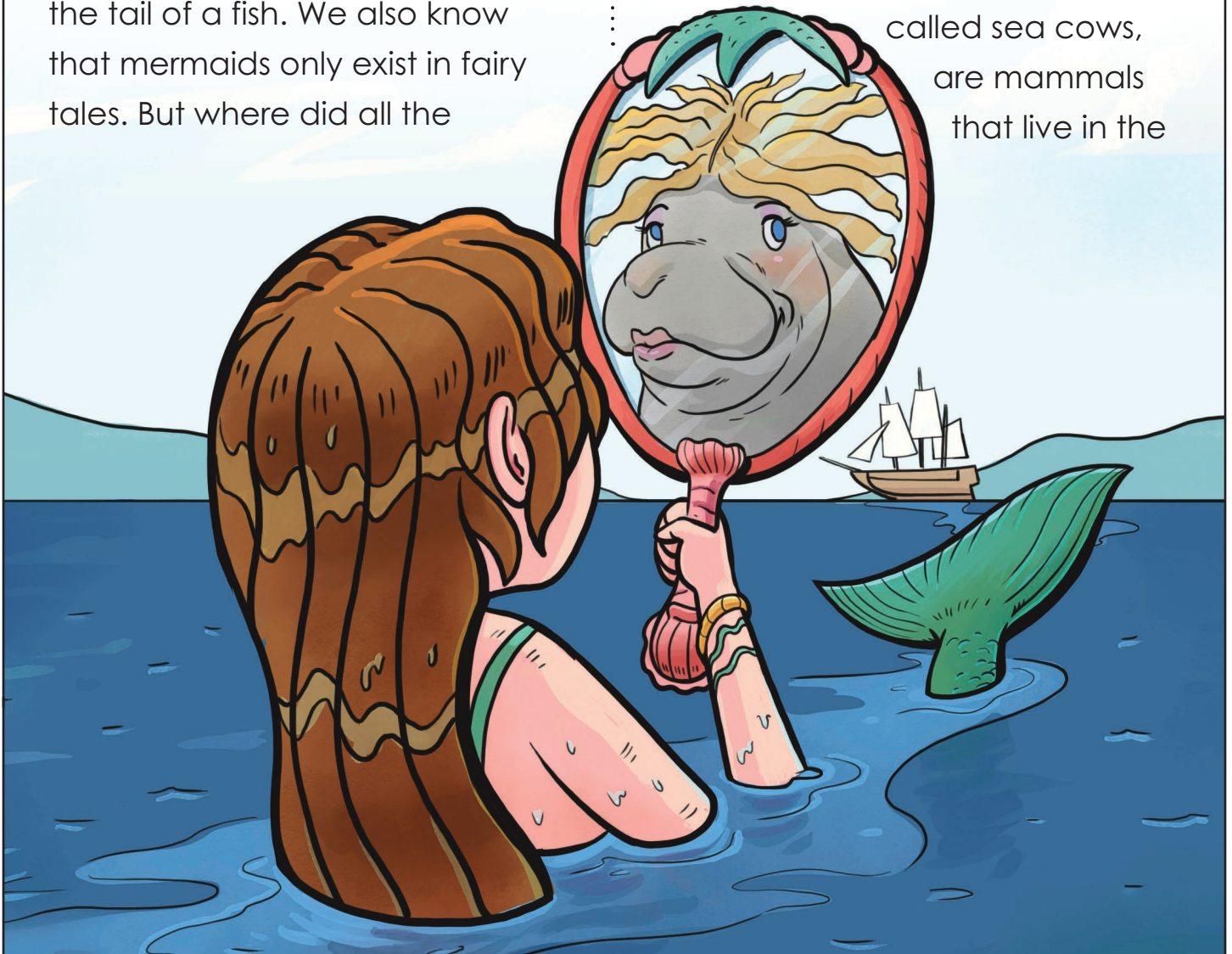
# Legend of the Mermaid

By Kelly Hashway

**W**e've all heard of mermaids. They are the beautiful half-human, half-fish creatures that live in the sea. They have the head and torso of a human and the tail of a fish. We also know that mermaids only exist in fairy tales. But where did all the

stories about these creatures come from? If you have ever seen a manatee, then you might have an idea.

Manatees, which are also called sea cows, are mammals that live in the



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ocean. Since they are mammals, they have to swim up to the surface to breathe air. Many people believe that the legend of the mermaid began with sailors who witnessed the manatees popping their heads out of the water to breathe. Because manatees are upright when they do this, it can look like they are standing. If a sailor saw a manatee doing this from far away across the ocean, it is possible that the sailor would mistake the manatee for a creature that is half-human, half-fish.

Mermaids are described as having long flowing hair. This is probably because manatees like to swim up to the surface of the water in areas where there is seaweed. Manatees eat all kinds of vegetation, including

seaweed. The seaweed surrounding the manatee's head when they eat could give the impression of long hair.

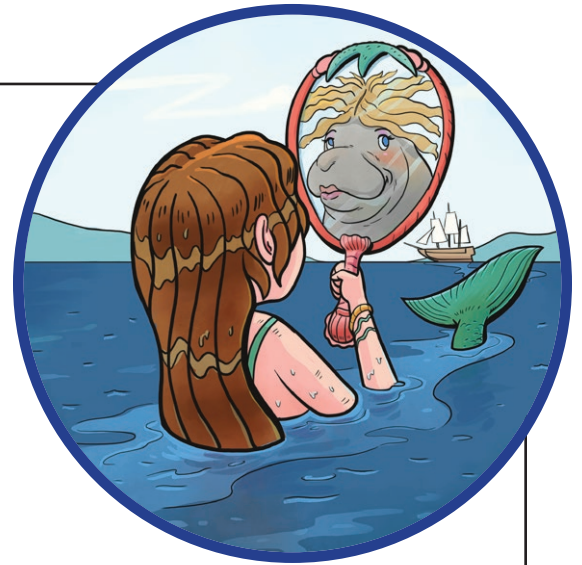
Manatees also have powerful tails that are very similar to the fishlike tail of a mermaid. Sailors probably watched manatees come up for air and then swim back below the surface, using their paddle-shaped tails. This would explain why sailors thought mermaids had fishlike tails.

Another similarity between the manatee and the mermaid is how they hold their young. Manatees cradle their babies in their flippers just like people hold their children in their arms. So it is easy to see human traits in manatees and how they just might have led to the legend of the mermaid.

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1. What is a manatee?
  - a. a large, gray fish that lives in the ocean
  - b. a large, gray fish that lives in lakes
  - c. a large, gray mammal that lives in the ocean
  - d. another word for mermaid

## 2. Three Reasons Ancient Sailors May Have Mistaken Manatees for Mermaids

I. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

II. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

III. \_\_\_\_\_

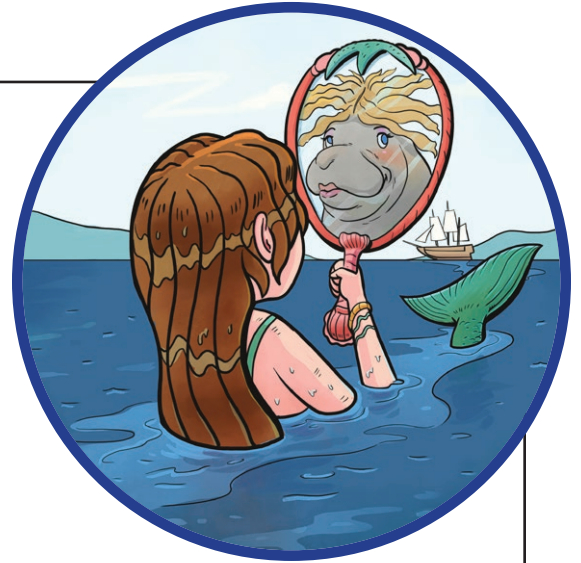
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Which sentence is an opinion?
  - a. Mermaids exist only in fairy tales.
  - b. Manatees eat all kinds of vegetation, including seaweed.
  - c. Manatees need to swim to the surface of the water for air.
  - d. Mermaids are beautiful creatures.
4. What is the author's purpose for writing this passage?
  - a. to compare and contrast mermaids and manatees
  - b. to persuade you to believe in mermaids
  - c. to describe how mermaids live
  - d. to entertain you with a story about a mermaid who lived long ago

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Legend of the Mermaid

The words below are scrambled vocabulary words from the passage. Unscramble each word and write it on the line.



1.

t a a m  
n e e

**clue:** a large, gray sea animal that breathes air

2.

d e g  
n l e

**clue:** unproven story told through time

3.

s t o  
o r

**clue:** part of the human body that does not include arms, legs, or head

4.

g e i o v  
t t e a n

**clue:** plant life

5.

l e a  
d c r

**clue:** hold gently

6.

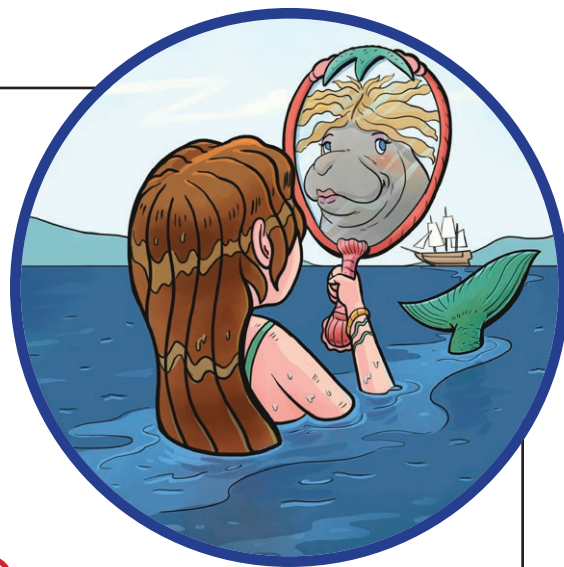
s p p l  
r e f i

**clue:** flat limbs on sea animals used for swimming

## ANSWER KEY

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2. Three Reasons Ancient Sailors May Have Mistaken Manatees for Mermaids

- I. They pop their heads out of the water to breathe. From a distance, sailors may have thought the heads looked humanlike.
- II. Manatee heads were often surrounded by seaweed. This may have looked like long, flowing hair.
- III. Manatees have powerful fishlike tails like mermaids.

3. Which sentence is an opinion?

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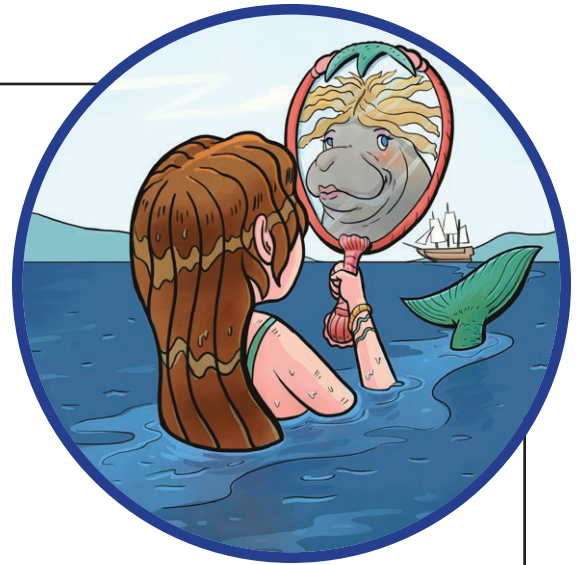
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torso

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g e i o v  
t t e a n

vegetation

**clue:** plant life

5.

l e a  
d c r

cradle

**clue:** hold gently

6.

s p p l  
r e f i

flippers

**clue:** flat limbs on sea animals used for swimming