A Horse is a Horse Unless it’s a Seahorse

By Kelly Hashway

Seahorses get their names because of their profiles. From the side view, a seahorse resembles a horse. Of course, a seahorse really isn’t much like a horse at all. Maybe that’s because it’s a fish. But oddly enough, this type of fish is a poor swimmer. Unlike other fish, seahorses swim vertically, or upright. While they use fins to move through the water, they aren’t able to maneuver as well as fish that swim horizontally. Seahorses use their dorsal fins on their backs. But there is a big difference between the dorsal fin on a seahorse and the dorsal fin on a shark. Seahorses flutter their dorsal fin, sometimes up to 35 times per second. They also use small fins behind their eyes called pectoral fins to steer. They don’t have a caudal fin, which is the tail fin you see on other types of fish. This is why you typically find seahorses resting with their tails wrapped around coral and sea grass. If seahorses are caught in rough water, they can actually die of exhaustion since they aren’t good swimmers.

Seahorses share many characteristics with other animals. Their eyes can move independently of each other, like a chameleon’s. Also like a chameleon, seahorses can change color. They can use this color changing ability to blend into their surroundings and escape predators. They can range in color, spanning white, red, yellow, black, brown, and gray.

Male seahorses have pouches like kangaroos, where they carry their young. Like aardvarks, seahorses have long snouts, which suck up food. They are big eaters, grazing continuously throughout the day on plankton, crustaceans, and shrimp. Seahorses are even like stegosaurs in that they have bone plates covering their bodies. These bone plates are arranged like rings. This acts like a suit of armor to protect the seahorse from predators, but it also limits the seahorse’s flexibility.

These amazing creatures can be found all around the world. And while they share features with many different animals, the seahorse is definitely a creature all its own.
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1. Where is a seahorse’s pectoral fin located?
   a. on its back   b. on its tail
   c. on its nose   d. behind its eyes

2. How does a seahorse’s ability to change color help it survive?
   ___________________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________________

3. Name three things seahorses eat.
   ___________________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________________

4. Reread the following sentence from the passage and choose the best definition for the underlined word.

   The underlined word means...
   a. bump into objects
   b. feel water currents
   c. wiggle its tail
   d. perform a quick or skillful move

   While they use fins to move through the water, they aren’t able to maneuver as well as fish that swim horizontally.

5. What type of passage is this?
   a. science fiction   b. realistic fiction
   c. non-fiction   d. fantasy
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Fill in the missing letters to create a vocabulary word from the article. Then write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1.  ____ o f i ____ o s  
   clue: side views

2.  ____ d ____ l ____  
   clue: strangely

3.  ____ o r ____ o n t ____ l y  
   clue: left-to-right

4.  ____ h a ____ c t e ____ i ____ t ____ c s  
   clue: traits; properties

5.  ____ a ____ ____ l e o ____  
   clue: species of lizard that can change color

6.  ____ r a ____ i ____ g  
   clue: eating continually throughout the day

7.  ____ l e ____ i ____ i l ____ y  
   clue: ability to move and bend

Super Teacher Worksheets - www.superteacherworksheets.com
In the article, “A Horse is a Horse Unless it’s a Seahorse”, you learned many facts about seahorses.

Write a paragraph about seahorses. Include some sentences that are opinions and
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profiles
oddly
horizontally
characteristics
chameleon
grazing
flexibility
ability to move and bend