

Read the passage “Horses of the Sea” and answer the questions that follow.

Horses of the Sea

Think about a fish you might see in the ocean. What picture comes to your mind? You probably see something that looks like a horse with a monkey’s tail. You don’t? Then you must not be thinking of the sea horse, a very different kind of fish.

There are more than 30 kinds of sea horses in the world, but all of them have a similar appearance. And sea horses don’t look much like fish at all! A sea horse’s head looks something like a horse’s head, and it is the only fish that has a neck. The main part of the sea horse’s body connects to its long tail. The sea horse’s tail is *prehensile*. This means the sea horse can use its tail like a hand. A sea horse holds on to seaweed, other plants, or another sea horse with its tail. Some lucky divers have even “held hands” with friendly sea horses. Just think of a sea horse wrapping its tail around your finger!

Sea horses do not have scales like most other fish. They have skin that stretches over bony plates in their bodies. These bony plates look like rings around the sea horse’s body. The male sea horse also has another interesting feature. It has a pouch, or pocket, on the front of its body. Why? The male sea horse carries the female’s eggs in the pouch. When the baby sea horses hatch, the male releases them into the water.

Like other fish, sea horses come in many sizes. The smallest sea horses are less than one inch long. These tiny creatures live in the Gulf of Mexico. Some sea horses are more than one foot long. These giants of the sea horse family live in the eastern Pacific Ocean.

Most sea horses are a light brown to black color. They can change their color, too. Sea horses do this when they want to hide. They hide to hunt or to stay away from their enemies. Some sea horses also change color to attract a mate.

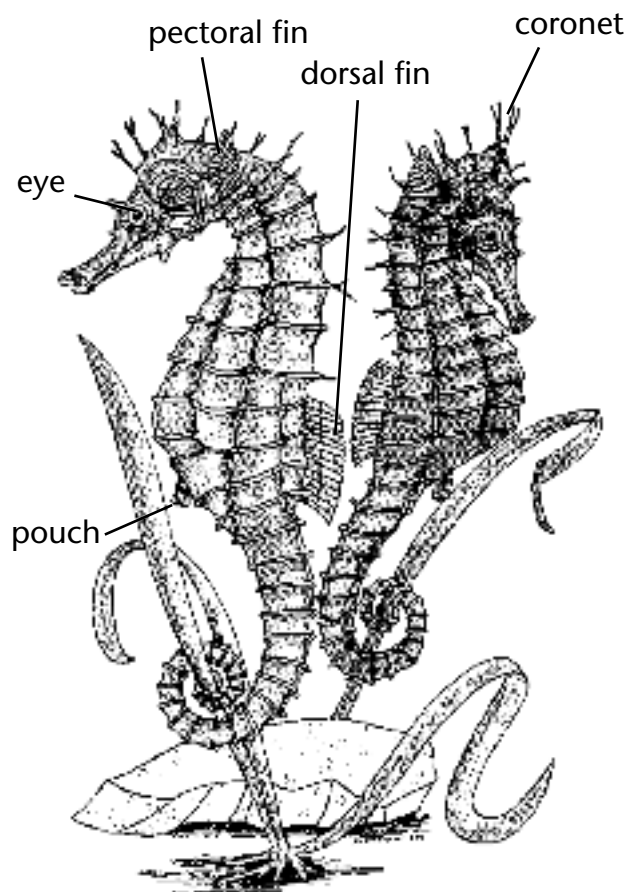
Unlike most other fish, sea horses swim upright in the water. They have one *dorsal* fin. This means the fin is on their backs. They use this fin to propel themselves through the water. They also have *pectoral* fins for steering and turning. Sea horses move very slowly. They look like they are floating in the water.

Sea horses live in the oceans of the world along the shores. They are usually not found in the deepest waters. They stay near the grasses and coral reefs of the oceans. These are the best places for the sea horses to find food.

Sea horses eat live food. This includes small fish and plankton. Plankton are very tiny animals that float in the water. A sea horse looks for food by turning each of its eyes in a different direction. It does not need to move its head. It holds on to a sea plant with its tail and searches with each of its eyes. When a sea horse sees a good meal, it snatches up the food and sucks it into its body.

Sea horses do not have many enemies in the sea. Sea horses are bony and hard to eat. They can also *camouflage* themselves. This means they hide by changing colors. If they are near a green plant, they can match its green color. This makes them hard to see. Some types of crabs like to eat a sea horse meal—if they can find one!

They look a little like horses. They use their tails like hands. The males carry the babies in their pouches. They can move each eye to search for food. They change colors to protect themselves and to hide. Are sea horses a different kind of fish? You can decide for yourself.



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Vocabulary

1. Which words from the passage have almost the same meaning?

- A pectoral, dorsal
- B pouch, pocket
- C prehensile, tail
- D scales, fins

Purpose

2. Why would someone read this passage?

- A to learn why people should own sea horses
- B to learn about some unusual features of sea horses
- C to understand why sea horses are better than other fish
- D to find information about the places where sea horses live

Text Organization

3. Use information from the passage and the diagram on page 51 to answer this question. Which of the following is true?

- A A sea horse uses its coronet to float in the water.
- B A sea horse uses its tail to steer through the water.
- C A sea horse's dorsal fin is on its back above its tail.
- D A sea horse has three pectoral fins and two dorsal fins.

Supporting Details

4. A sea horse may change colors so it can

- A attract a mate.
- B hide from divers.
- C use its prehensile tail.
- D swim upright in the water.

Literary Elements/Text Conventions

5. Why does the author call some sea horses “giants of the sea horse family”?

- A The sea horses are larger than any other fish.
- B The sea horses live in the world’s largest ocean.
- C The sea horses are some of the largest sea horses.
- D The sea horses are more dangerous than other sea horses.

Text Organization

6. Look at the diagram of the sea horses on page 51. Where are a sea horse’s pectoral fins?

- A close to its tail
- B above its coronet
- C beside its dorsal fin
- D on the side of its neck

Inference/Interpretation

7. Why do sea horses stay near the grasses and coral reefs of the ocean?

- A The grasses and coral reefs are good places to hide from enemies.
- B The sea horses can blend in with the colors of the grasses and reefs.
- C The sea horses can hold onto the grasses and reefs with their tails.
- D Grasses and reefs are the best places for the sea horses to find food.