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see how we live

Whales and dolphins



 Orpheus

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Whales and dolphins

Whales, dolphins and porpoises are related. We live in the water all the time, but we are mammals—definitely not fish. Here you can read you about our lives: what we eat, how we hunt our prey, why we have a habit of leaping out of the water, and lots of other curious things about us!



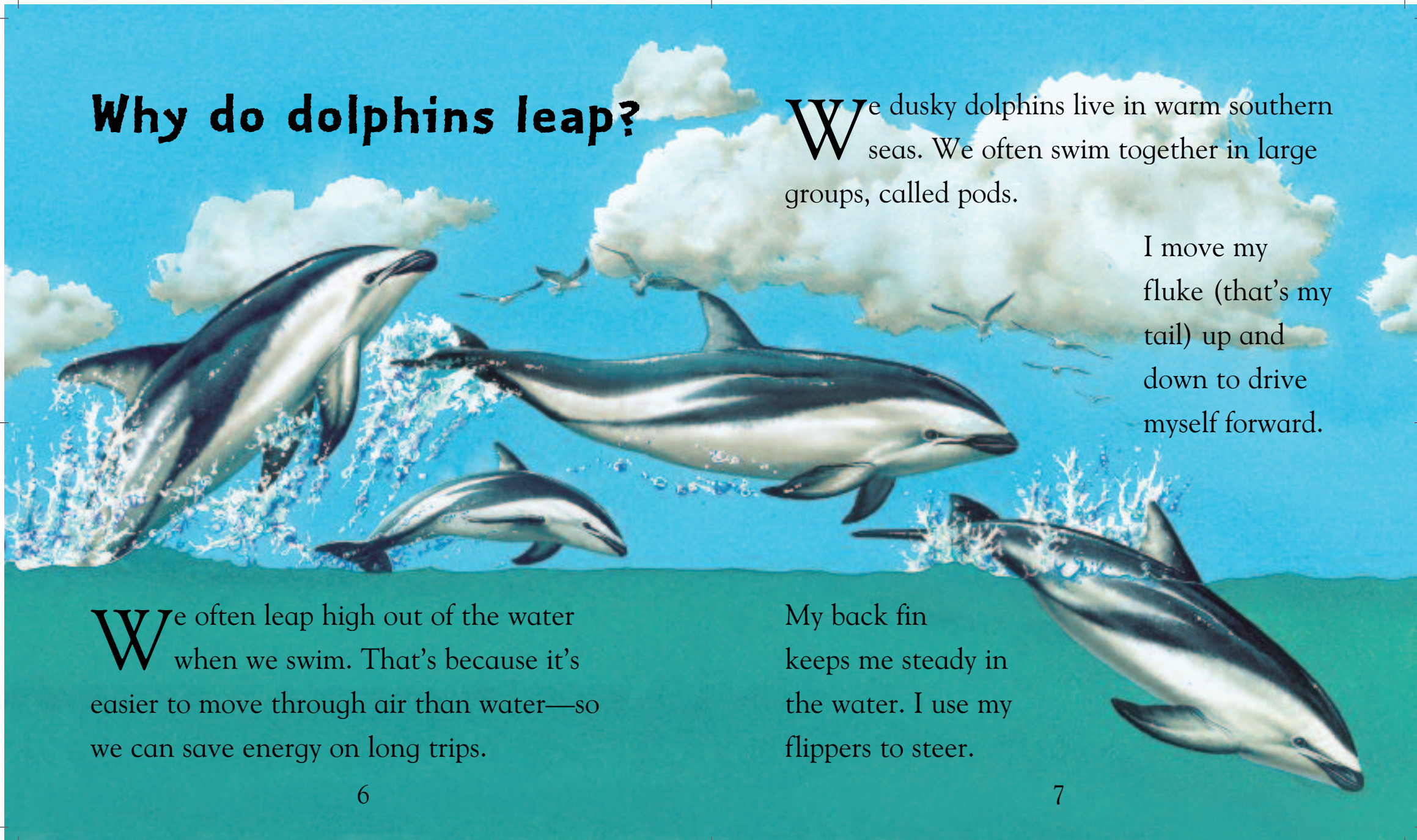
Why do dolphins leap?

We dusky dolphins live in warm southern seas. We often swim together in large groups, called pods.

I move my fluke (that's my tail) up and down to drive myself forward.

We often leap high out of the water when we swim. That's because it's easier to move through air than water—so we can save energy on long trips.

My back fin keeps me steady in the water. I use my flippers to steer.

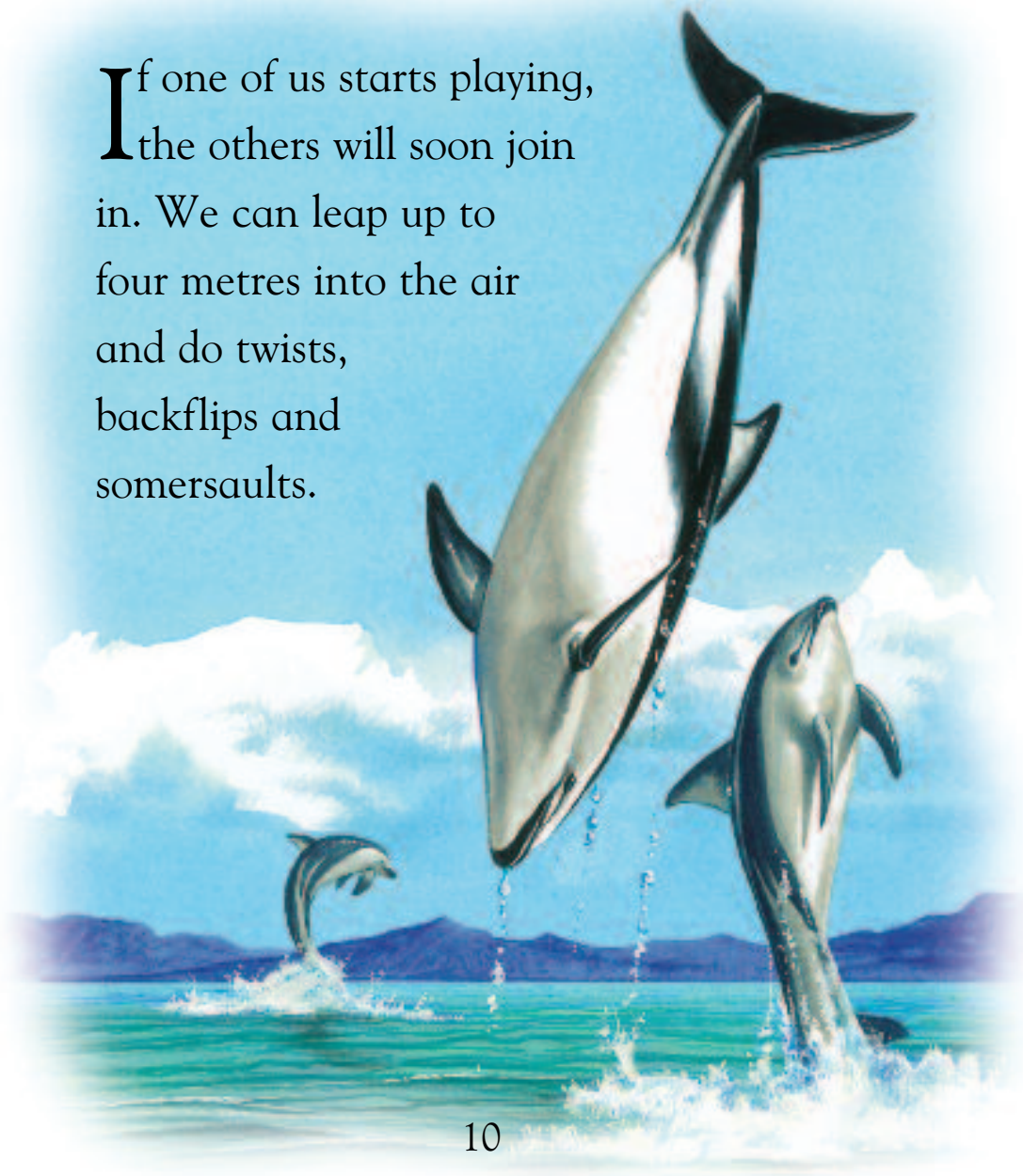


Although I live in the water, and have a smooth, hairless skin, I am a mammal—just like you. So, unlike fish, I have to come to the water's surface from time to time to breathe air. I breathe through the blowhole on the top of my head.

It's not quite the same as your nose—I can't smell anything at all!



If one of us starts playing, the others will soon join in. We can leap up to four metres into the air and do twists, backflips and somersaults.



When I slap my tail on the water, it means I have found some fish and I'm letting the rest of my pod know.



I love to ride the waves in front of a boat. I can swim much faster than you!



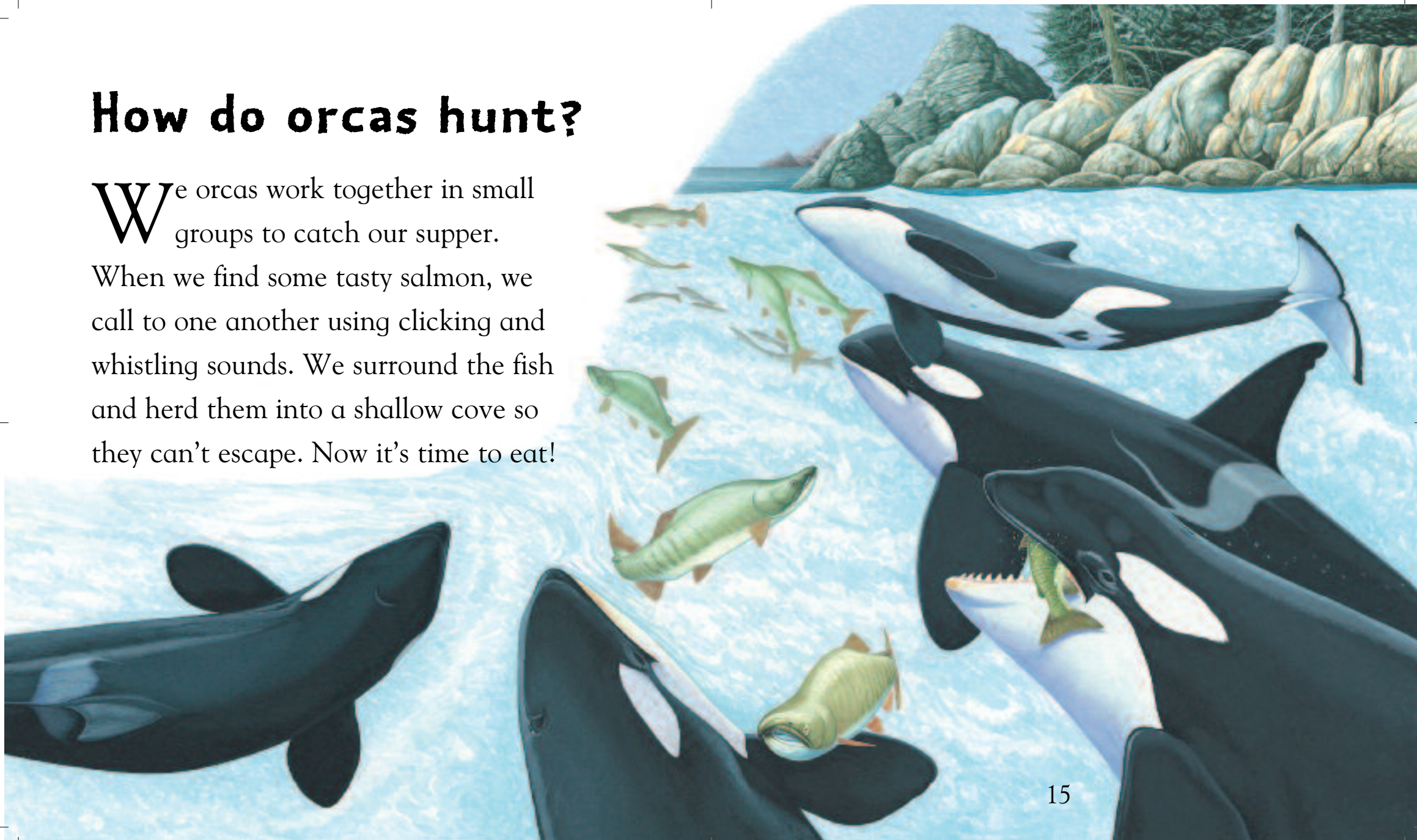
Fish are one of our main foods. When we find a shoal of fish, we leap around them and slam our bodies against the water. The loud noises we make frighten the poor little things. They crowd together into a tight ball. This makes it easier for us to gobble them up!



How do orcas hunt?

We orcas work together in small groups to catch our supper.

When we find some tasty salmon, we call to one another using clicking and whistling sounds. We surround the fish and herd them into a shallow cove so they can't escape. Now it's time to eat!





Orcas are some of the most dangerous predators in the ocean. We will attack anything: seals, sea lions, dolphins, birds, even other large whales—but not humans. You love to watch us jump out of the water.

After a tiring day, we like to relax by drifting on the surface, gently nudging one another.



What do humpback whales eat?



I am one of the largest animals in the world. I can grow to more than 15 metres long and weigh about the same as five buses. Despite my great size, I feed mostly on tiny krill. As you can imagine, I need to eat millions of them to satisfy my great appetite ...

This is a krill. It's like a small shrimp, no more than two centimetres long.



Instead of teeth, I have rows of plates lined with bristles, hanging from the roof of my mouth. These are called baleen. When I come across some krill, I gulp colossal mouthfuls, water and all.



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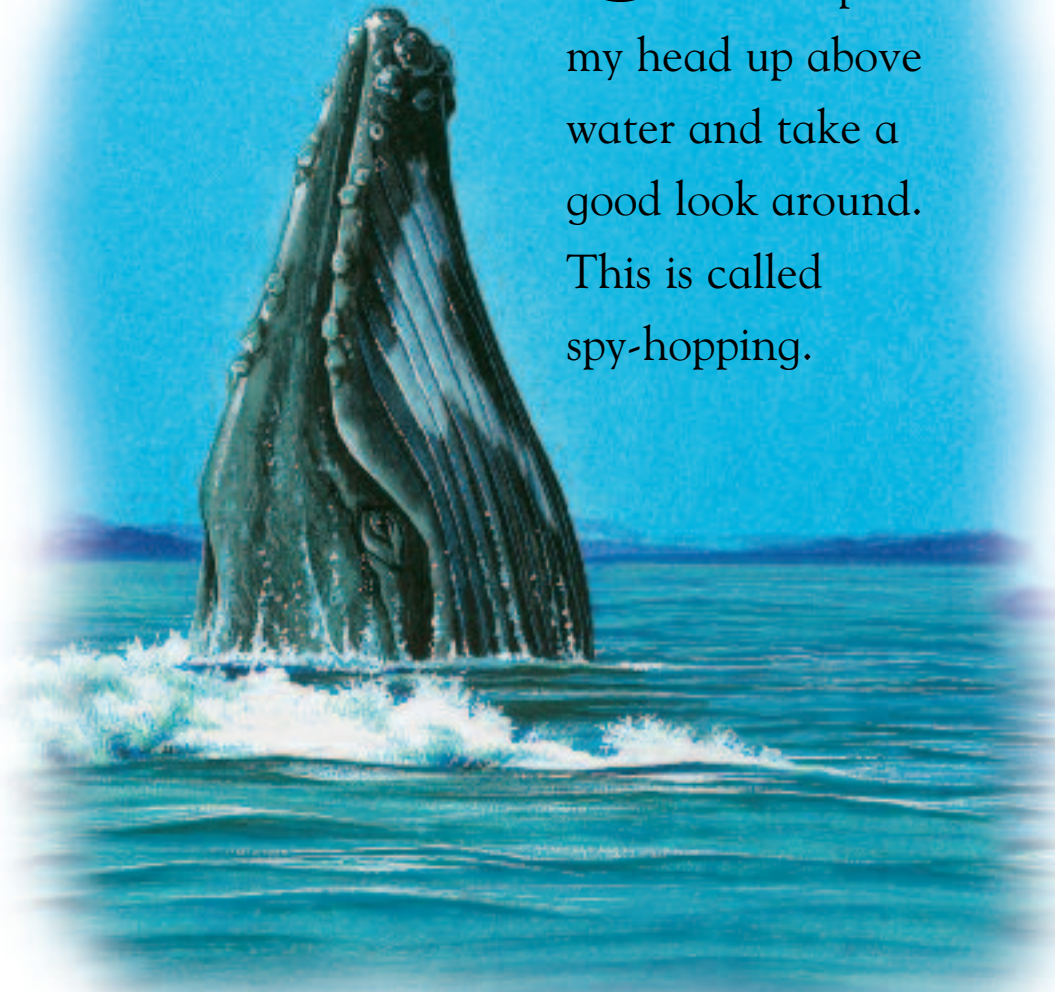
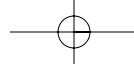
The baleen is like a giant sieve. I force the water out again, but the krill gets stuck behind the bristles and stays put inside my mouth. I scrape them off with my mighty tongue. Yum!



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I love leaping into the air and crashing back into the water on my back. This is called breaching. Besides being a lot of fun, it also helps get rid of those pesky barnacles and lice that like to attach themselves to my body.

See those grooves on my underside? They help my throat expand when I'm feeding. And what about those flippers? They are the largest of any whale.

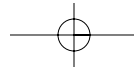


Once in a while,
I like to poke
my head up above
water and take a
good look around.
This is called
spy-hopping.

When I come to
the surface I
spout a cloud of water
vapour into the air
through the blowholes
on the top of my head.

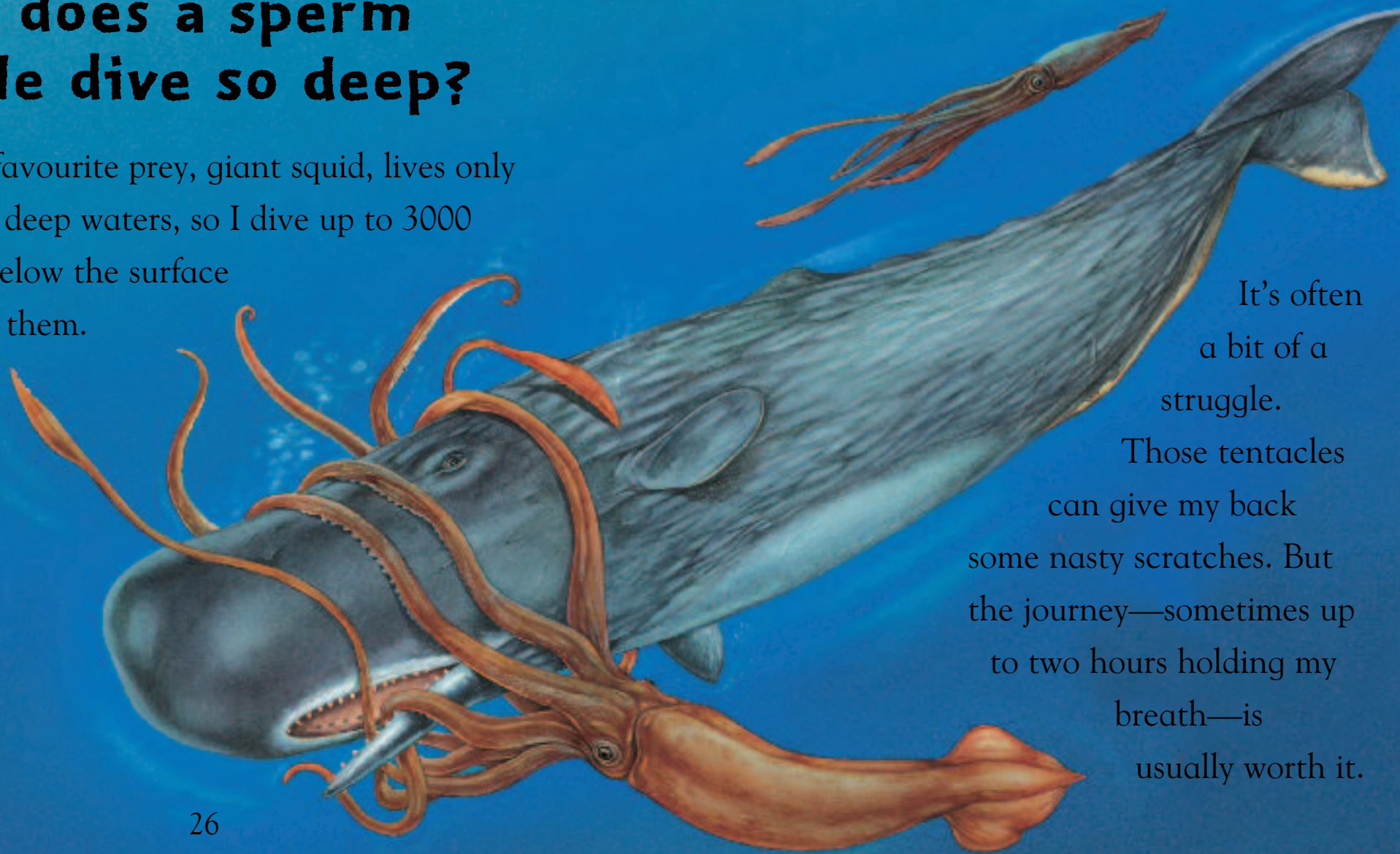


This is how I dive back into the water.
Now you can see why I'm called a "humpback".



Why does a sperm whale dive so deep?

My favourite prey, giant squid, lives only in deep waters, so I dive up to 3000 metres below the surface to catch them.



It's often a bit of a struggle.

Those tentacles can give my back some nasty scratches. But the journey—sometimes up to two hours holding my breath—is usually worth it.

What does a narwhal use its tusk for?

My tusk is really an overgrown tooth. It grows up to three metres long. It's got tiny nerves inside it which help me to tell how cold or salty the water is.

Ilive in freezing Arctic waters and my main food is cod. Shrimps, squid and octopus are good to eat too. I can dive deep for my supper, often plunging 1000 metres down.

The longer my tusk, the more likely I am to attract females. We males occasionally like to do a spot of "tusking"—rubbing our tusks together to keep them clean.

