

An illustration of five hermit crabs on a sandy beach. The crabs are purple with large, segmented legs and antennae. They are carrying various shells: one large, smooth, spiral shell; one smaller, smooth, spiral shell; one conical shell; one small, textured shell; and one large, textured, irregular shell. Blue musical notes are scattered around the crabs, some floating in the air and some on a staff line. The background is a light beige color with some faint, darker lines suggesting sand or water.

The song of freedom

Written by Joanne Fleer
Illustrated by Joseph Siri



LIVE & LEARN
Environmental Education



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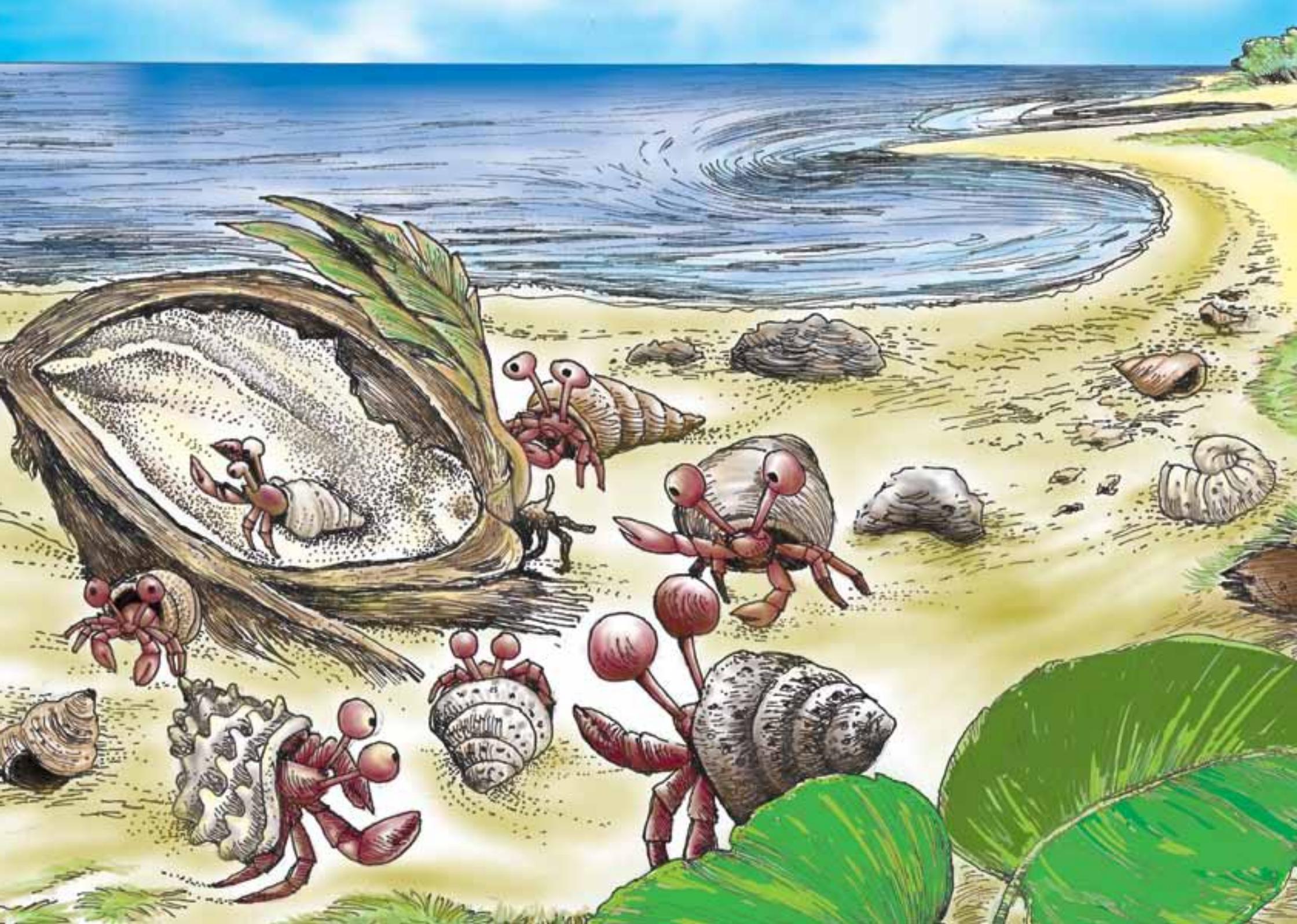
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On a small island beach in the Pacific lived a family of hermit crabs. There were two sisters called Big Sister and Little Sister and many, many brothers.

The family had everything they needed, especially shells.

When the brothers and sisters grew too big for their shells, Mama Crab helped them choose new shells from the beach.





One day a boy from the village went down to the beach.
He took a big basket and filled it with shells.

“There are plenty of shells on this beach,” he said to himself.
“Enough for all of us.”

The boy went back to the beach every day to collect more.
Soon there were no empty shells on the beach.





A few days later a new baby hermit crab was born and needed a shell. Mama Crab looked and looked but there were none left. She called the family together. After a lot of talking Papa Crab had an idea.

“Big Sister is growing up,” he said. “She will soon leave our beach to explore the world. She can give her shell to Baby Crab and hide under this rock until she finds a new home.”

It was decided. Big Sister moved out of her shell and hid under a small rock at the edge of the sand.





A few days later the boy from the village went back to the beach.

He saw Big Sister hiding under the rock. “You can come with me,” he said as he picked her up. “I have plenty of shells at home that you can live in.”

Papa and Mama Crab were happy. Their daughter would be moving to a new home where she would have plenty of shells to choose from and lots of fresh fish and fruit to eat.





At first Big Sister was happy too. But soon things started to change. The boy picked her up and played with her roughly. Then the boy got bored and forgot all about Big Sister and left to play with his friends.

Big Sister was sad and lonely. She wanted to go home. She missed Little Sister and her family.





Back at the beach the hermit crabs were in big trouble.

Without enough shells they started to fight.

One brother had grown too big for his shell and wanted his Uncle's shell. They fought over the shell until the brother's leg snapped off. Another brother lost his shell during a fight.

While he was looking for another one a bird ate him.

Little Sister hid in the corner of a rock pool. She closed her eyes, frightened as she listened to her family fighting.





When she finally opened her eyes she saw a wise old turtle in front of her. “You can make this better,” he said. “Your family must stop fighting and stand together.”

“But I am only a small crab,” she said. “No-one will listen to me.”

“You must be strong and speak from your heart. You will see that great magic can happen when a community stands together,” said the turtle. And then the turtle was gone.

Little Sister knew what she had to do. She went to speak to Papa Crab.





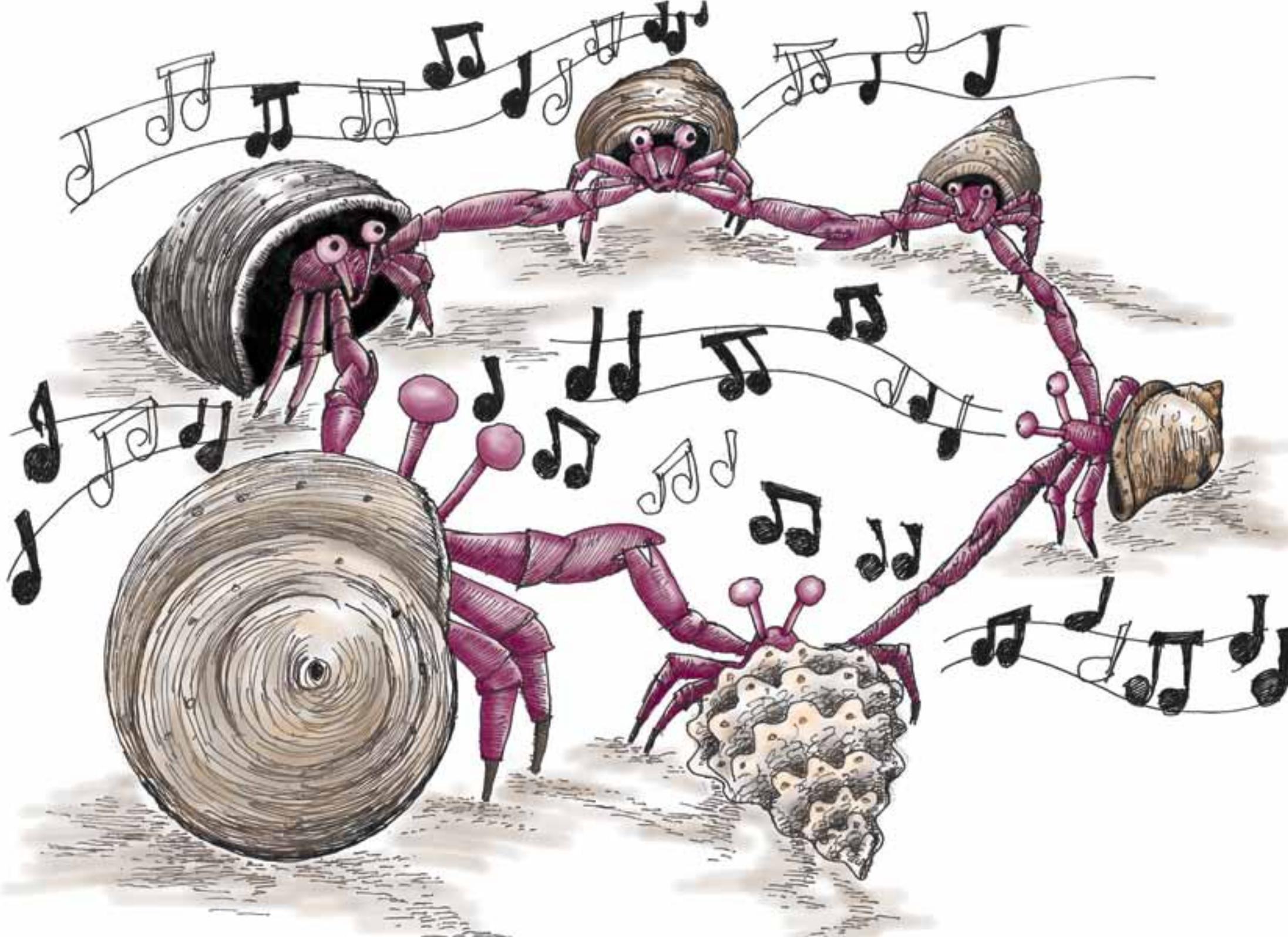
She told Papa Crab what the wise old turtle had said. “When our shells are taken away we fight and when we fight we cannot look after each other. If all our shells were taken away tomorrow, we would have nothing left,” she said.

Papa Crab knew she was right. Their family was in big trouble. He called them together. The family agreed to stop fighting and look after each other and their shells.

The family joined together and sang out in one big voice for Big Sister and the return of their shells. “*We belong together and need our shells. We have a right to our shelter. Our freedom. When all our shells are gone we will have nothing. These are our rights.*”

The powerful cry travelled through the bush to the village where the boy was playing with his friends. The boy stopped suddenly, hearing the words of the magical song. “I’ve got to make things right,” he said.





The boy put all of the shells into his basket and went down to the beach once more. He emptied the basket onto the beach. When he had finished he took Big Sister out of his pocket and placed her on the sand next to her family and Little Sister. The hermit crab family cried with joy.





The hermit crab family were happy again. They now knew that they needed to look after their shells for tomorrow, that even a small voice can make a big difference and that a community standing together has the strongest voice of all.





**Welcome
back**

Understanding human rights

Background information

Human rights are the rights we are born with. Every person in the world is entitled to these rights whether they are young or old, a boy or girl, where they live, or how much money they have. No one can take these rights away.

Human rights include our right to freedom – from torture, cruel treatment and abuse, as well as our physical needs – food and shelter. We also have the right to develop as people, to access education, to work, and participate meaningfully in our communities.

Governments all over the world, including those in the Pacific agreed on a list of rights called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This list was written to protect the rights of all people no matter who they are and where they live.

Hermit crabs and human rights

Access to resources such as food and shelter is a fundamental human right we all need to survive. Access to resources can be affected by natural causes such as earthquakes, flooding or cyclones or can be caused by people, for example overpopulation or deforestation due to logging, mining or tourism development.

The boy in this story represents people and their greed, wanting more of something they value regardless of how it may affect others.

The hermit crabs in this story represent how a community can become divided when their rights are not respected and their resources exploited.

Little Sister and Big Sister in this story represent women and children in a community. Research shows that women and children are more likely to suffer abuse, neglect and exploitation when a community's basic needs for land, food and shelter are not met.

Did you know?

Keeping hermit crabs as pets is popular in some countries. Hermit crabs in captivity have been observed to suffer stress. Some signs of stress include bullying and aggressive behaviour, inactivity, leaving their shell and dropping limbs. The hermit crabs in this story are under stress and their behaviour is based on these observations.



Discussion questions



Is the hermit crab family happy at the beginning of the story? Why?



What would the crab family think if they knew how the boy was treating Big Sister?



Who are the heroes in this story?



Why do you think Big Sister's family let the boy take her? Was this a good idea?



Why did Little Sister decide to go and speak to her father?



What did they do that was brave?



Have you ever done something brave?



What made the boys return the shells to the beach?



How did it make you feel?



This book was produced by Live & Learn Environmental Education with support from the European Union, as part of the project “Combating commercial exploitation of children and violence against women in remote regions of the Western Pacific impacted by large scale commercial logging.”

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Printed on 100% recycled paper



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The once happy hermit crab family is in trouble. Their homes have been taken and their family is separated. They are fighting and Little Sister is worried.

Who will help them? How can the family be united and happy again? Will someone speak up in time to save them? Or is there something they can do to save themselves?

