

Hermia's Shell

by Bish Denham

illustrated by Ponder Goembel



- 1 Hermia the hermit crab wanted a new shell. Her old black-and-white whelk was getting a bit tight.
- 2 “I want a shell that’s pink inside and creamy outside with chocolate-brown stripes,” she said to her friend Henry. “I’m not going to settle for just any old black-and-white whelk. I want a shell that says something about me.”
- 3 Henry grunted as he rolled down the side of the hill.
- 4 When they arrived at the beach, thousands of hermit crabs were swapping news—and shells.
- 5 Hermia passed up many shells that would have fit her just right.
- 6 “That one has a chip on the lip,” she said to Henry. “And see how this one’s been faded by the sun? I wouldn’t live in it if it were the last shell on the beach!”
- 7 One by one, all the hermit crabs left the beach, returning to their homes high in the hills. Even Henry had long since said goodbye.
- 8 When she was about to give up, Hermia found it. There, being gently washed by the lapping waves, was a beautiful apple murex. It was pink inside and creamy outside with chocolate-brown stripes.
- 9 When she tried it on, it was much too big. It flopped and wobbled so badly, she kept falling over onto her back. Then she had to wiggle her legs madly to right herself. Hermia knew she’d never make it back to the hills, so she decided to live by the beach.
- 10 It was a long, lonely year. By the time the hermit crabs returned the next summer, Hermia had finally grown into her new shell.
- 11 “See my new shell?” she said to every crab that came her way. “I had to spend the whole year all by myself because it was too big. But now I’ve grown into it, so I can go back to the hills with you.”



- 12 Hermia found Henry and traveled with him.
- 13 “I’m so excited about my new shell,” she said.
“I want to show it to everyone. Have you noticed its lovely ridges and how gracefully it spirals to a perfect, unbroken tip?”
- 14 Henry groaned as he fell into a hole and struggled to climb out.
- 15 All Hermia could talk about was her shell. The other hermit crabs started to avoid her and began to talk about her behind her shell.
- 16 Even Henry got tired of her.
- 17 “Hermia,” he said, “if you say one more thing about that shell, I’m going to find another hill to live on.”
- 18 “But it’s so unique!” she exclaimed. “I think you’re jealous.”
- 19 “I’ll just find new friends who will appreciate me,” she said to herself.
- 20 When she met new hermit crabs, they soon got bored with her too.
- 21 “They’d steal my shell if they could,” she said to herself.
- 22 In time Hermia began to feel her shell getting tight. By summer migration, Hermia was moving very slowly. Still, when she got to the beach, all she could talk about was her shell.
- 23 None of the crabs wanted to hear it.
- 24 “You’re all jealous!” Hermia replied, limping away angrily.
- 25 Hermia was in so much pain, she could barely move. She knew it was time to find a new home. But all she found was a black-and-white-striped whelk shell.
- 26 “How common,” she thought. But she knew she had to make the move.
- 27 Hermia tried to get out of her shell. She pulled and pulled, but she was stuck. And oh! It hurt so much, she could hardly stand it. Finally, there was a little sucking noise and a pop! Hermia tumbled out of her beautiful shell.
- 28 The pink inside had turned a dull gray. The creamy outside with the chocolate-brown stripes had faded to white. The very tip of the spiral was broken off.
- 29 In horror, Hermia realized she’d been dragging around and bragging about a very worn and battered shell.
- 30 Hermia slipped into the whelk.
- 31 Its smooth, mother-of-pearl interior was cool and soothing to her poor, pinched abdomen.
- 32 When she returned to the hills, no one recognized her. When they found out who she was, they were surprised.
- 33 “Henry, I’ve made a decision,” said Hermia. “Next summer I’m going to help the younger crabs find good homes.”
- 34 “I can hear it already,” Henry said. “If the shell fits, wear it!”
- 35 Hermia laughed. It felt good.



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Test Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. What is Hermia determined to find on the beach?

- a. She wants a new friend who appreciates her shell.
- b. She wants to find a very specific new shell.
- c. She wants to swap shells with all the other crabs.
- d. She wants a shell like the one Henry lives in.

2. Why does Henry get tired of listening to Hermia talk about her shell?

- a. He is jealous of her new shell.
- b. He is unable to find a beautiful shell.
- c. He does not like his new shell.
- d. He is tired of her obsession with her new shell.

3. This question has two parts. First answer Part A, and then answer Part B.

Part A: Which of the following words best describes Hermia?

- a. caring
- b. arrogant
- c. jealous
- d. generous

Part B: Which of the following details from the text best supports your answer to Part A?

- a. Hermia tumbled out of her beautiful shell.
- b. Henry groaned as he fell into a hole and struggled to climb out.
- c. Hermia passed up many shells that would have fit her just right.
- d. Hermia found Henry and traveled with him.

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Test Questions (*continued*)

4. What does *battered* mean as it is used in the following sentence from the passage?

In horror, Hermia realized she'd been dragging around and bragging about a very worn and **battered** shell.

- a. damaged
- b. colorful
- c. beautiful
- d. smooth

5. Why does Hermia decide to live on the beach for one year?

- a. Her home on the hill was too far away.
- b. She likes the sound of the waves.
- c. She likes searching for new shells.
- d. Her home on the hill was boring.