



## Sample Paper 3

Score for Ideas \_\_\_\_\_

# Seahorses

The seahorse is, of course, not a horse at all—and it isn't mythical, either. It does, however, have connections to both horses and myths. The head of this delicate and unique creature has a striking resemblance to the head of a horse. Its scientific classification, the genus *Hippocampus*, is named after a figure from Greek mythology who was half horse and half fish. And there's much more about this tiny sea creature that is both strange and remarkable.

Unlike most fish, the seahorse has no scales. Its skin is stretched tight as a drum over bony plates beneath—and can change color to blend with almost any surroundings, providing this little creature's only real defense against predators. The seahorse uses its long, curly **prehensile** tail to grasp onto ocean plants when it wants to hide from enemies or when it needs to stay in one place to eat. Grabbing onto a plant and anchoring itself frees the seahorse to use its long snout in capturing any food that happens to drift by. Though tiny, seahorses are voracious carnivores, feasting on crustaceans and plankton—all day if possible—to satisfy their huge appetites.

Seahorses are constantly famished because they burn so much energy just getting around. Their feather weight and upright body position makes swimming extraordinarily difficult. To push through the water, seahorses use powerful dorsal fins that beat almost as fast as a hummingbird's wings. During a storm, when waves are huge and ocean currents are strong, seahorses can wear themselves down to the point of total exhaustion or death.

Everything about the little seahorse is unusual. They are **monogamous**, having only one partner for life. Perhaps most startling of all, it is the male that gives birth! According to *National*



*Geographic*, seahorses are the only animal species on the planet for which this is true. The female deposits eggs into the male's **brood pouch** where they are fertilized, and after 10 to 30 days, the male gives birth to as many as 1,000 fully formed seahorse babies. This may seem like a lot (and it is), but very few of these babies reach adulthood. Most are eaten by fish and turtles—or captured by humans.

Seahorses need our help and protection. Pollution, shrinking habitat, and over-harvesting (mostly for exotic aquariums) are leading some species of seahorse towards extinction. Seahorses rarely survive in captivity, but sadly, this only increases the demand. China, Taiwan, and some parts of Europe have set up sanctuaries for the seahorse or made laws outlawing its capture. By taking steps to minimize ocean pollution and by opposing the display of this frail sea creature in aquariums (where they are doomed), we can extend their existence.

### Glossary

- **brood pouch**—a pouch where young are held and protected during early stages of development.
- **monogamous**—the habit of having only one mate at a time.
- **prehensile**—capable of grasping.

### Sources

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<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/fish/sea-horse.html>