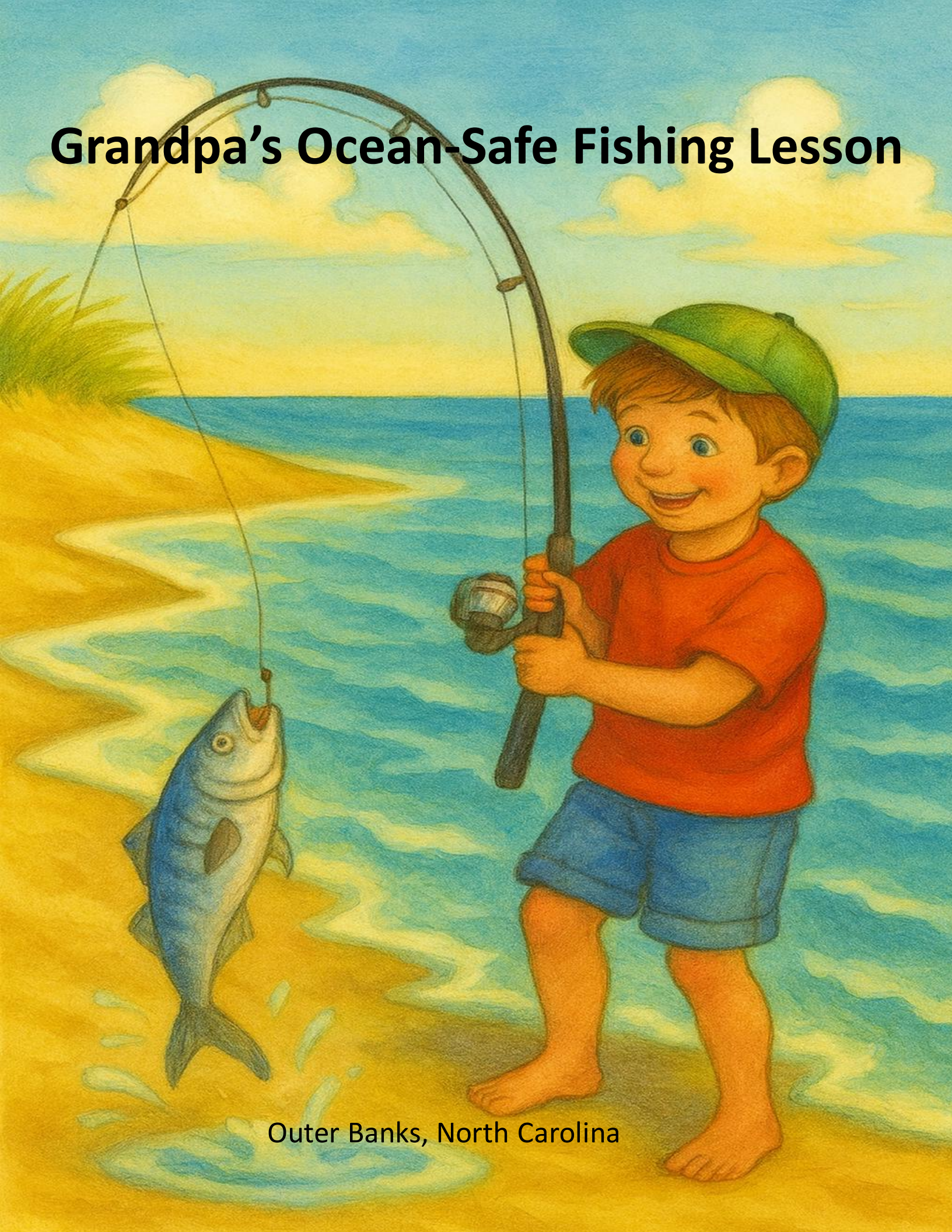


Grandpa's Ocean-Safe Fishing Lesson



Outer Banks, North Carolina

Forward

This storybook was created by the Outer Banks Coastal Conservation (OBCC), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster environmental stewardship and a deeper connection to the Outer Banks of North Carolina through outreach, education, and conservation efforts.

We believe that small stories can spark big change. That is why we have made this book available as a free resource for parents, teachers, and community members.

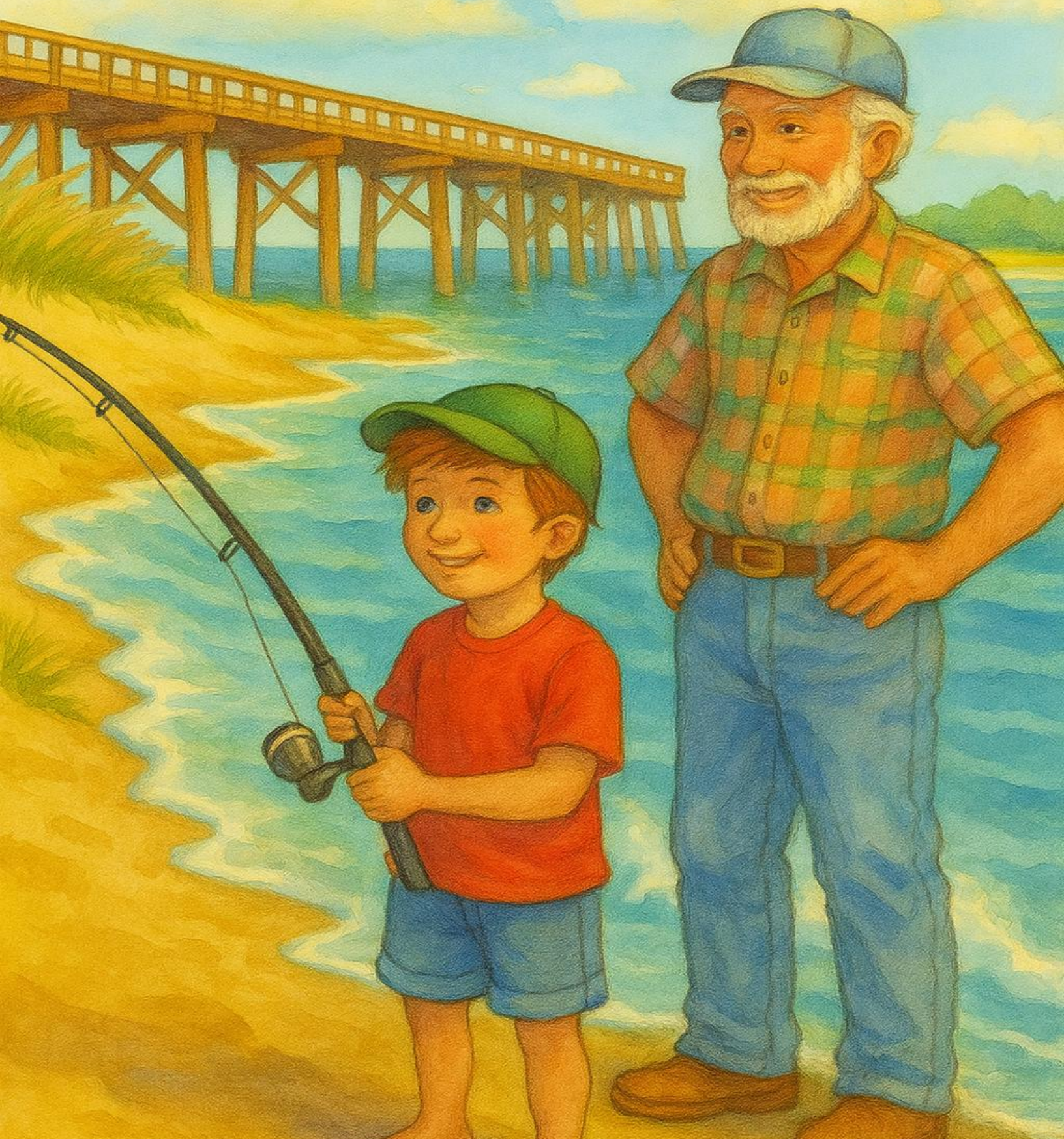
All materials in this book may be freely downloaded, shared, printed and used for educational or nonprofit purposes.

To learn more, access additional resources at: www.theobcc.org.



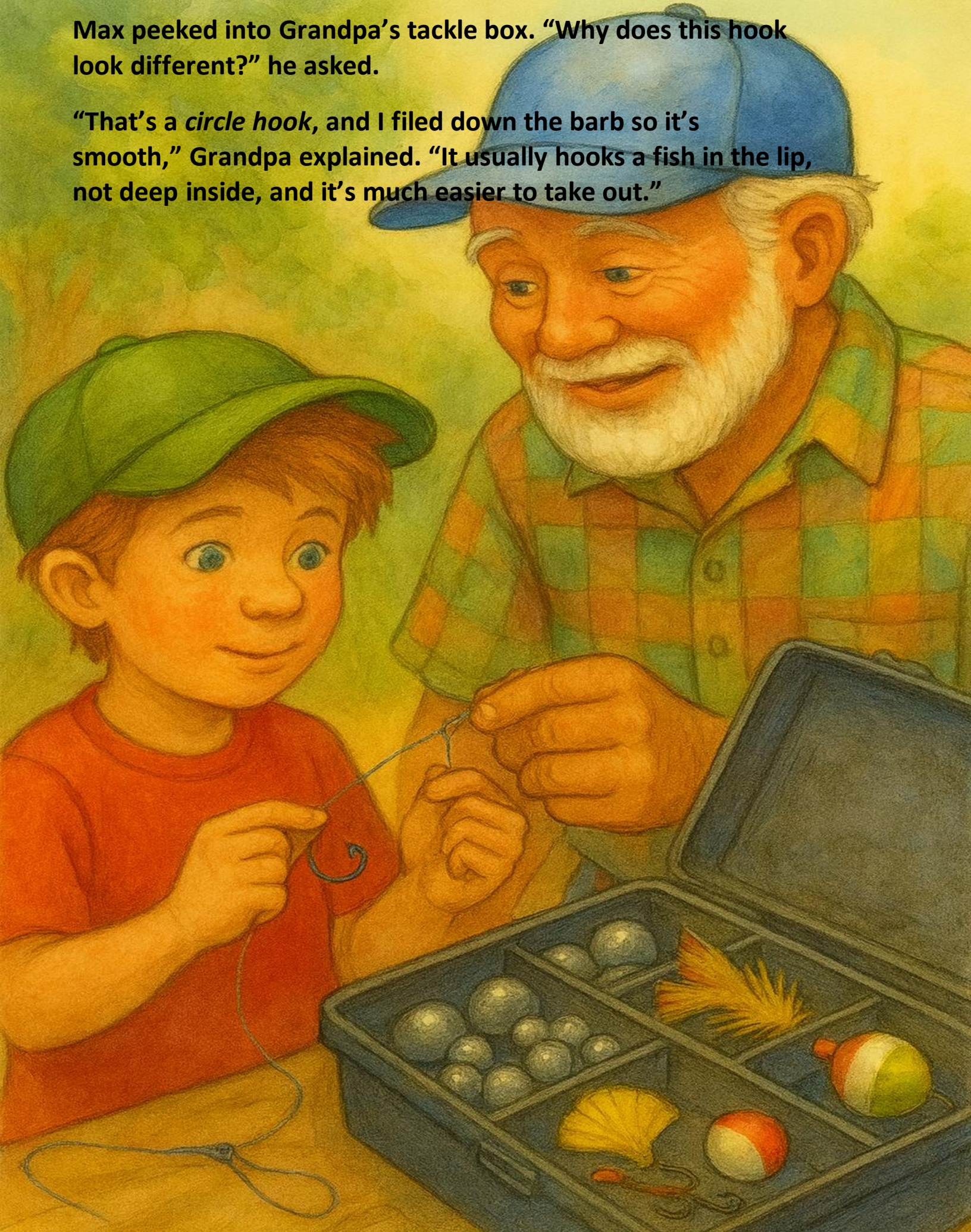
Max loved the Outer Banks—the salty breeze, the rolling waves, and the big, wooden fishing pier stretching into the ocean. One summer morning, Grandpa handed Max a shiny new fishing pole.

“Today,” Grandpa said, “you’ll learn how to catch fish safely.”



Max peeked into Grandpa's tackle box. "Why does this hook look different?" he asked.

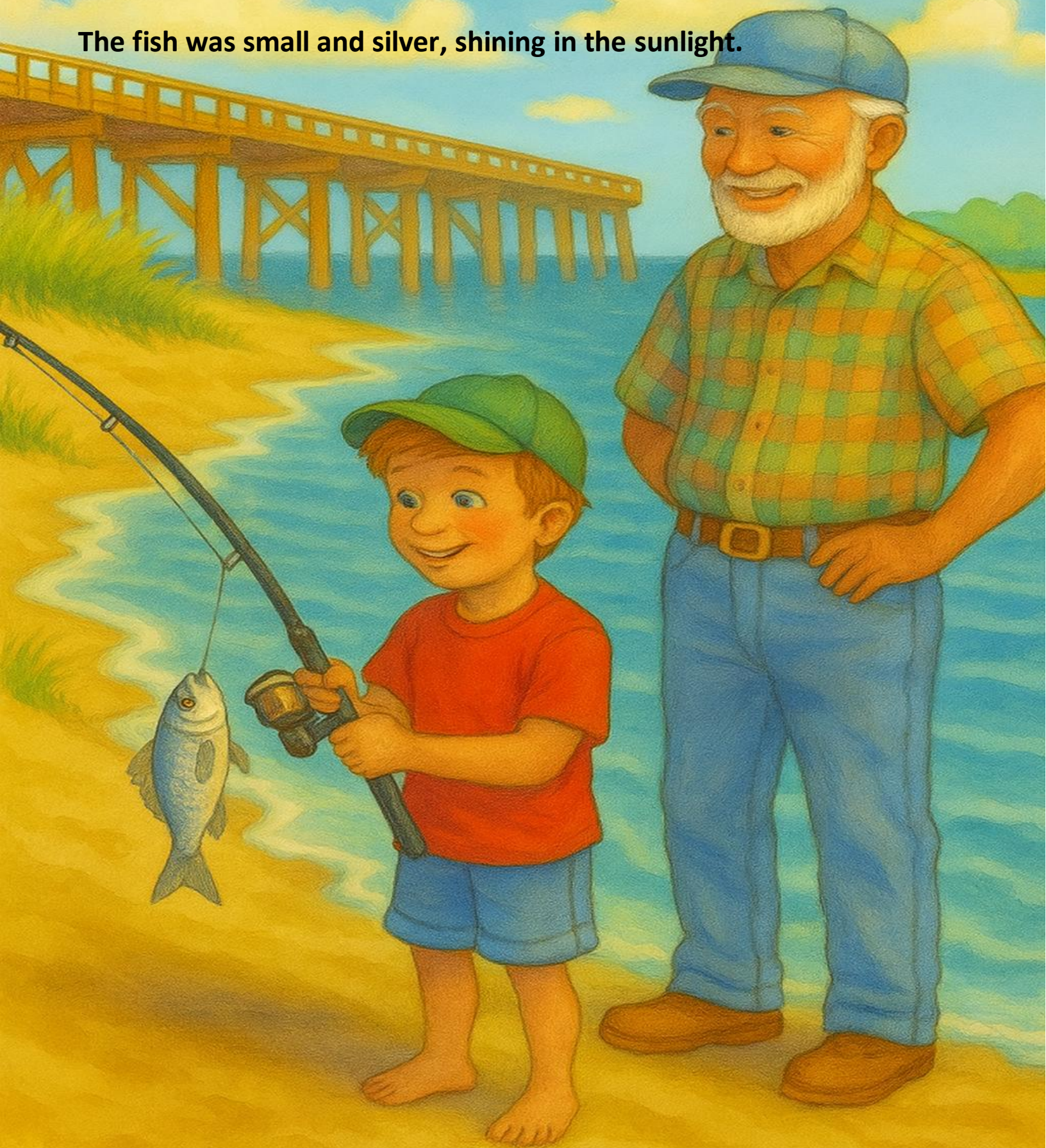
"That's a *circle hook*, and I filed down the barb so it's smooth," Grandpa explained. "It usually hooks a fish in the lip, not deep inside, and it's much easier to take out."



Before long, Max felt a tug! He reeled in slowly, keeping the fish in the water.

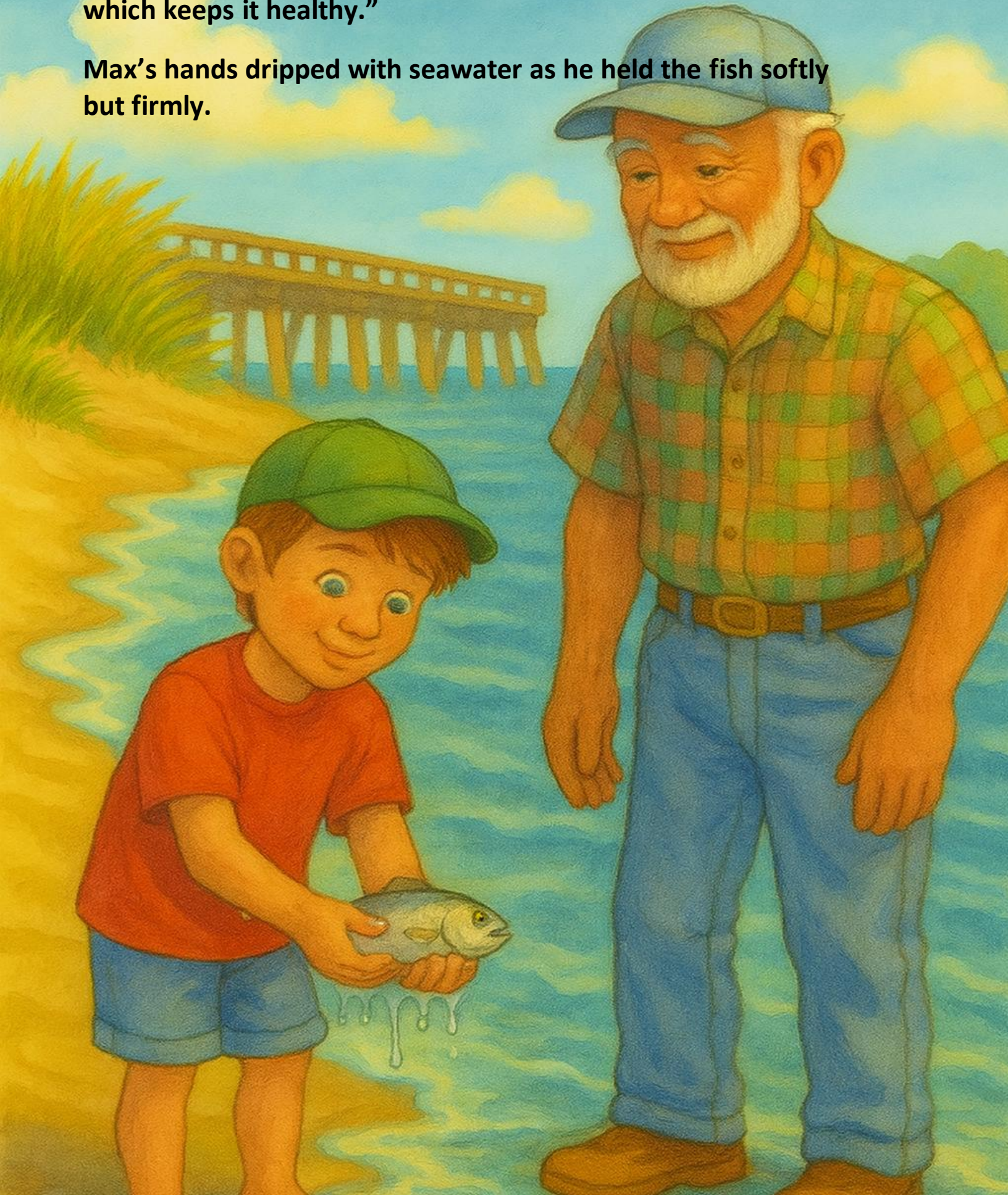
“Nice and gentle,” Grandpa said. “That way the fish stays calm.”

The fish was small and silver, shining in the sunlight.



Max reached for it, but Grandpa stopped him. “Dip your hands in the water first,” he said. “It protects the fish’s slime coat, which keeps it healthy.”

Max’s hands dripped with seawater as he held the fish softly but firmly.

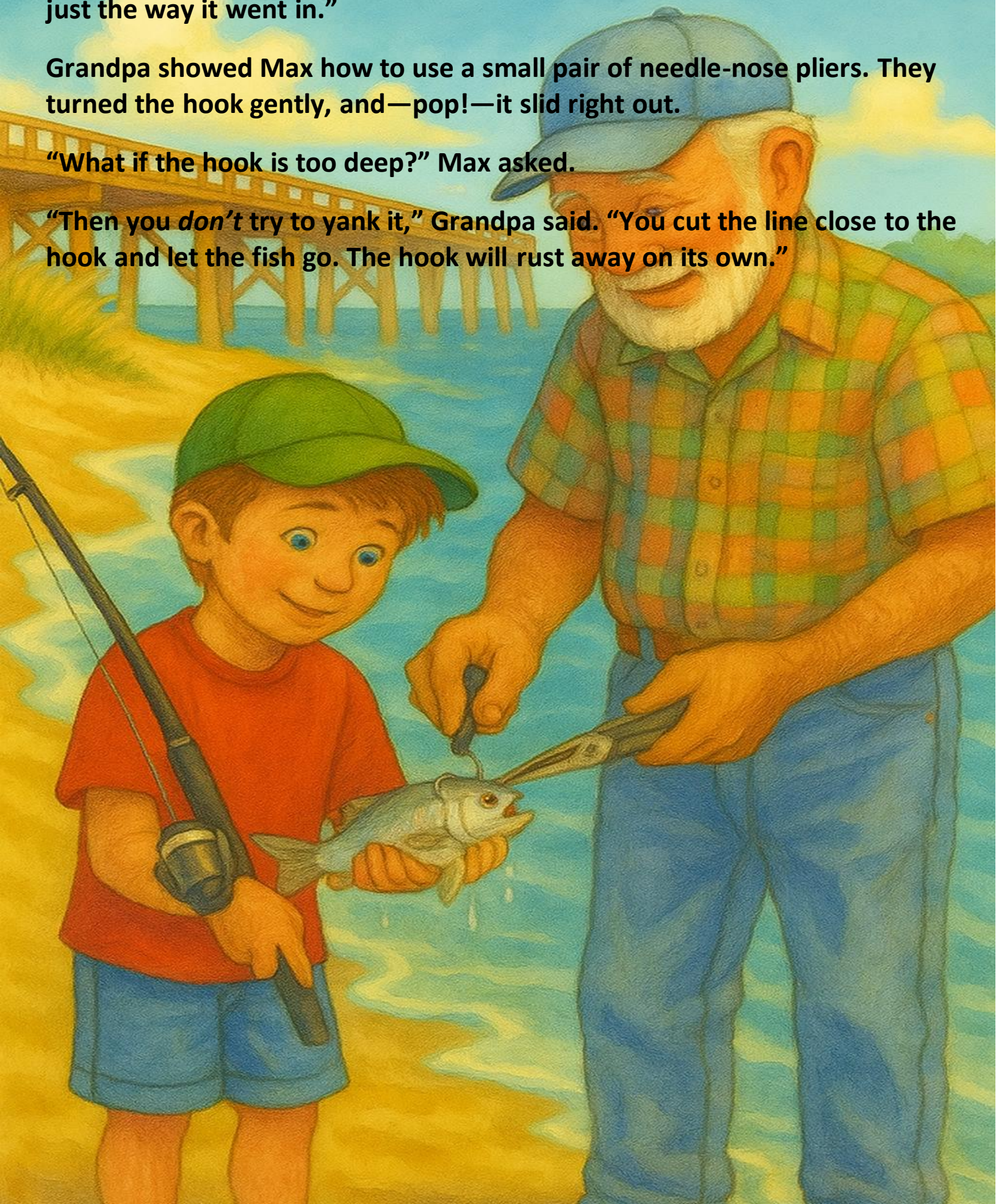


“Now, see how the hook’s in the fish?” Grandpa asked. “We’ll take it out just the way it went in.”

Grandpa showed Max how to use a small pair of needle-nose pliers. They turned the hook gently, and—pop!—it slid right out.

“What if the hook is too deep?” Max asked.

“Then you *don’t* try to yank it,” Grandpa said. “You cut the line close to the hook and let the fish go. The hook will rust away on its own.”



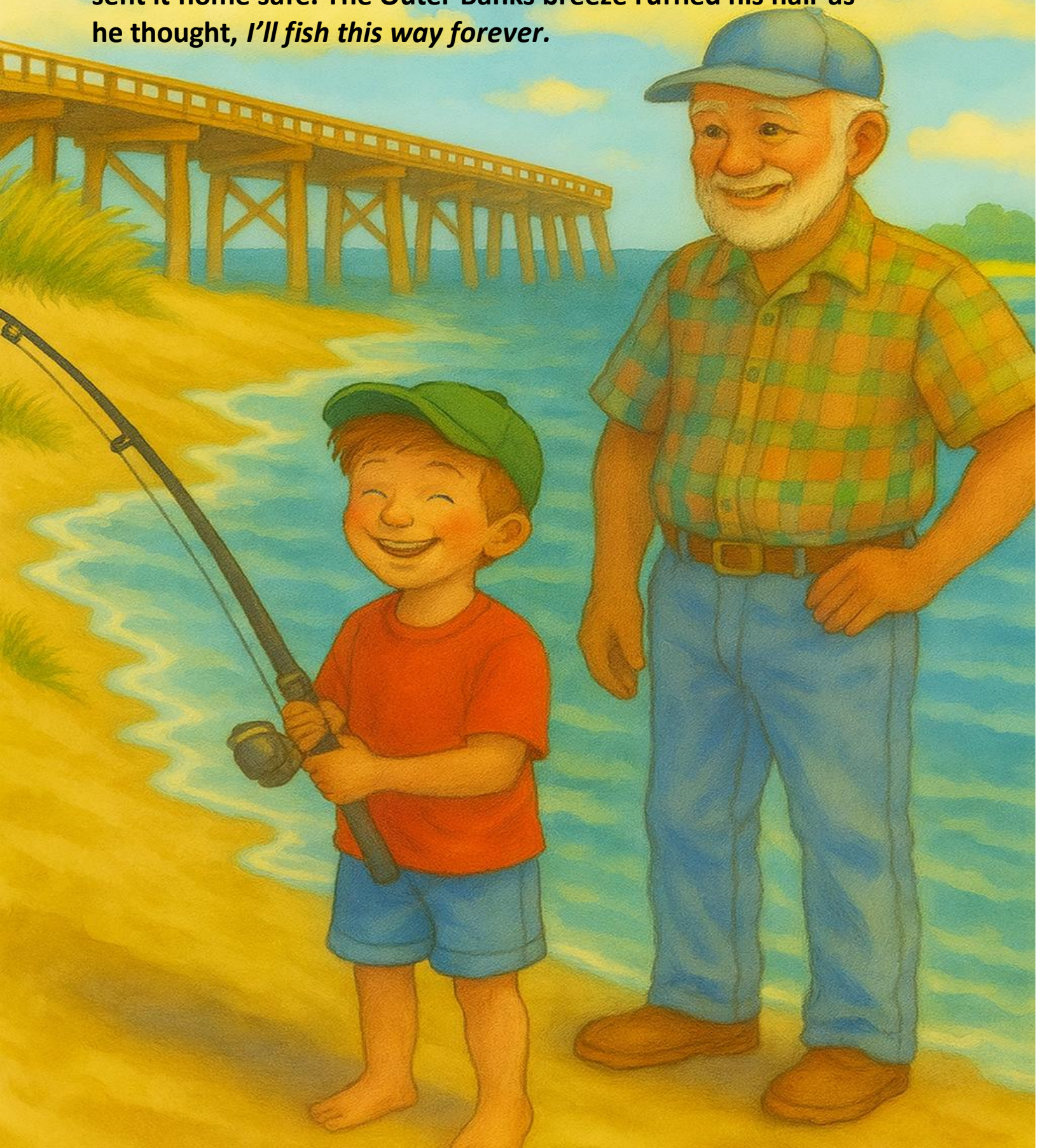
Max lowered the fish back into the water, holding it lightly until it flicked its tail. He moved it forward and backward a few times to help water flow over its gills.

With a flash of silver, the fish darted away.



“Perfect release,” Grandpa said with a smile. “You’re not just fishing—you’re helping the ocean stay healthy.”

Max beamed. He had caught a fish, learned to be gentle, and sent it home safe. The Outer Banks breeze ruffled his hair as he thought, *I’ll fish this way forever.*



Safe Hook Removal: Step-by-Step

1. Use Fish-Friendly Gear First

- Prefer **circle hooks** or **barbless hooks**—they typically catch fish in the lip, not deep in the throat, and are easier to remove.
- If using barbed hooks, pinch the barb flat to make release easier.

2. Keep the Fish in Water While Working

- a. Keeping the fish submerged reduces stress and protects its delicate slime coating.

3. Choose the Right Tool

- a. Use tools like **dehookers**, **needle-nose pliers**, or a **disgorger** to reach deep hook placements without harming the fish.

4. Remove Carefully, Or Cut the Line

- a. Try remove quickly and gently. If access is limited or the hook is deep, it's better to **cut the line close to the hook** and release the fish with it still inside—it will rust away safely.

5. Wipe Off Excess Handling

- a. Handle fish with **wet hands or gloves**—that protects their protective mucus layer and scales.

6. Revive the Fish if Needed

- a. Gently move the fish forward and backward in the water to help oxygenate its gills before release.

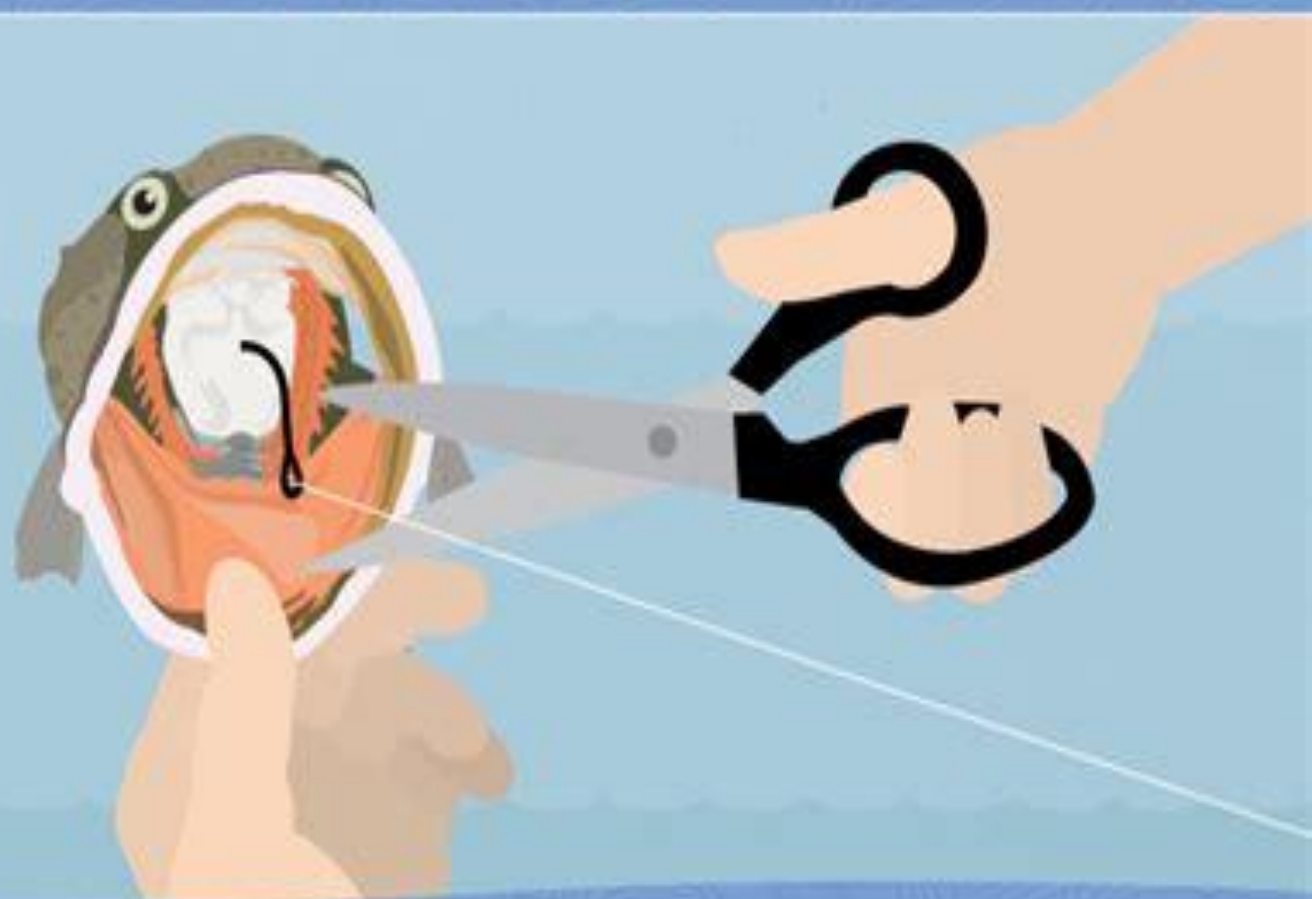
A Quick Summary

1. Use special hooks (circle or barbless) that don't hurt fish.
2. Keep the fish in water—don't take it out unless absolutely needed.
3. Use safe tools to unhook it gently—don't pull hard or hurt it.
4. If you can't unhook, just snip the line and let it go.
5. Always use wet hands so the fish stays healthy.
6. Help it breathe underwater until it swims away strong.

UNHOOK YOUR CATCH



Gently remove the hook using your pliers.



If hook is buried deep, cut the line and leave the hook in place.

Why These Steps Matter in the Outer Banks

Fishing around the Outer Banks is a beautiful experience—but it's also a region with **regulations and natural considerations**:

- Always have your **saltwater license** (or freshwater if fishing the sound). Some fish, like flounder, have minimum sizes—for example, flounder under **15 inches must be released**
- Many local species are catch-and-release only or best handled gently to ensure healthy fish populations continue.