

The Journey of a Plastic Bottle



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.



One sunny morning in the Outer Banks, a boy named Kai finished drinking from his plastic water bottle while walking along the beach. The recycling bin was a little far away, so he left the bottle near the dune and ran off to play.



As the wind picked up, the bottle rolled down the sand. A gust carried it closer to the waves until—*splash!*—it was in the ocean.



The bottle floated past ghost crabs scuttling at the shoreline and drifted toward the open sea.

First, a sea turtle spotted it, thinking it looked like a jellyfish. Luckily, the turtle swam away before biting it.



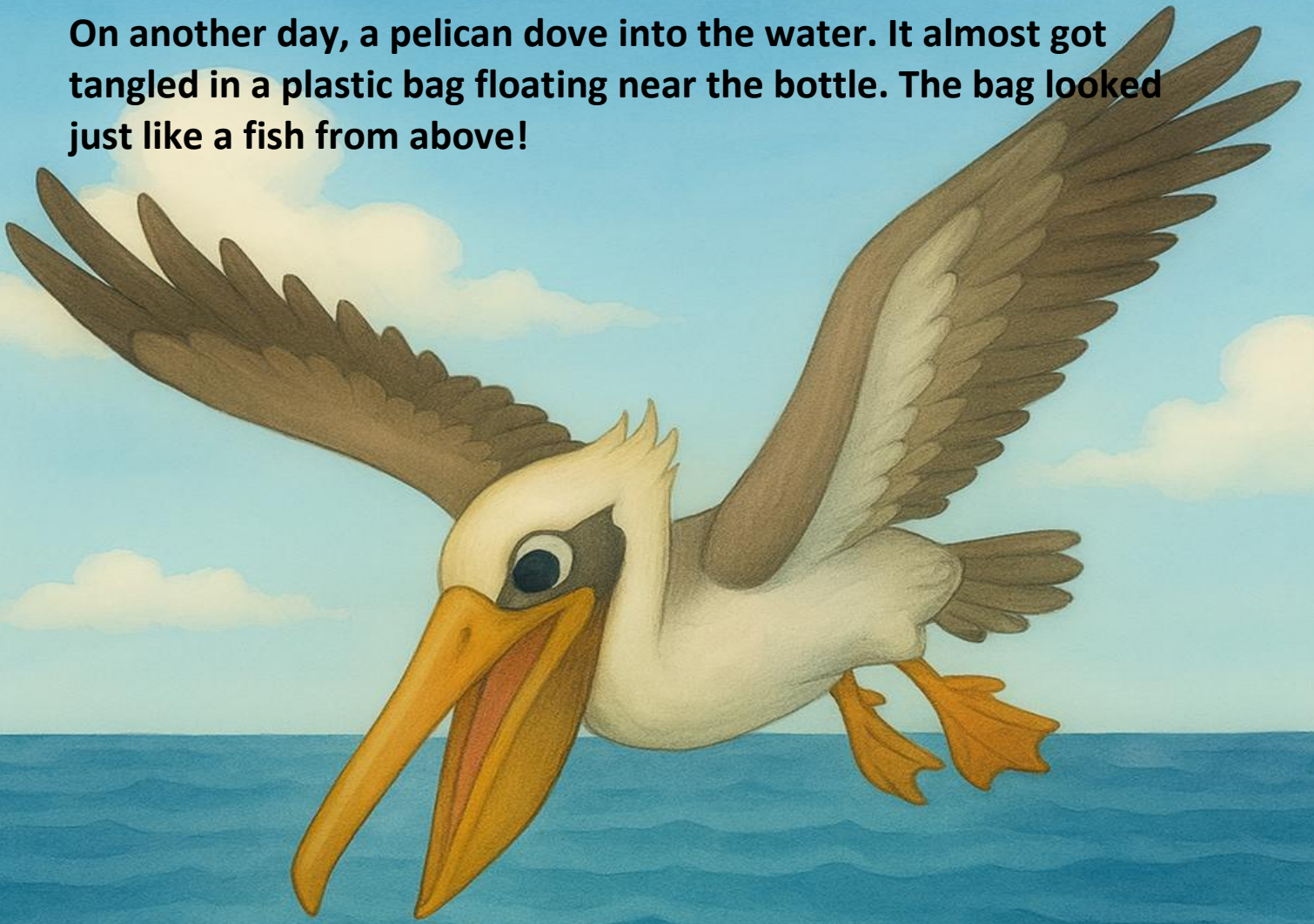
Next, tiny fish gathered around. Pieces of the bottle began to break apart into *microplastics*, which looked like food. The fish accidentally swallowed them.

Farther out, the waves carried the bottle north. A storm pushed it into a swirling ocean current, called a *gyre*, where trash from all over the world collected.

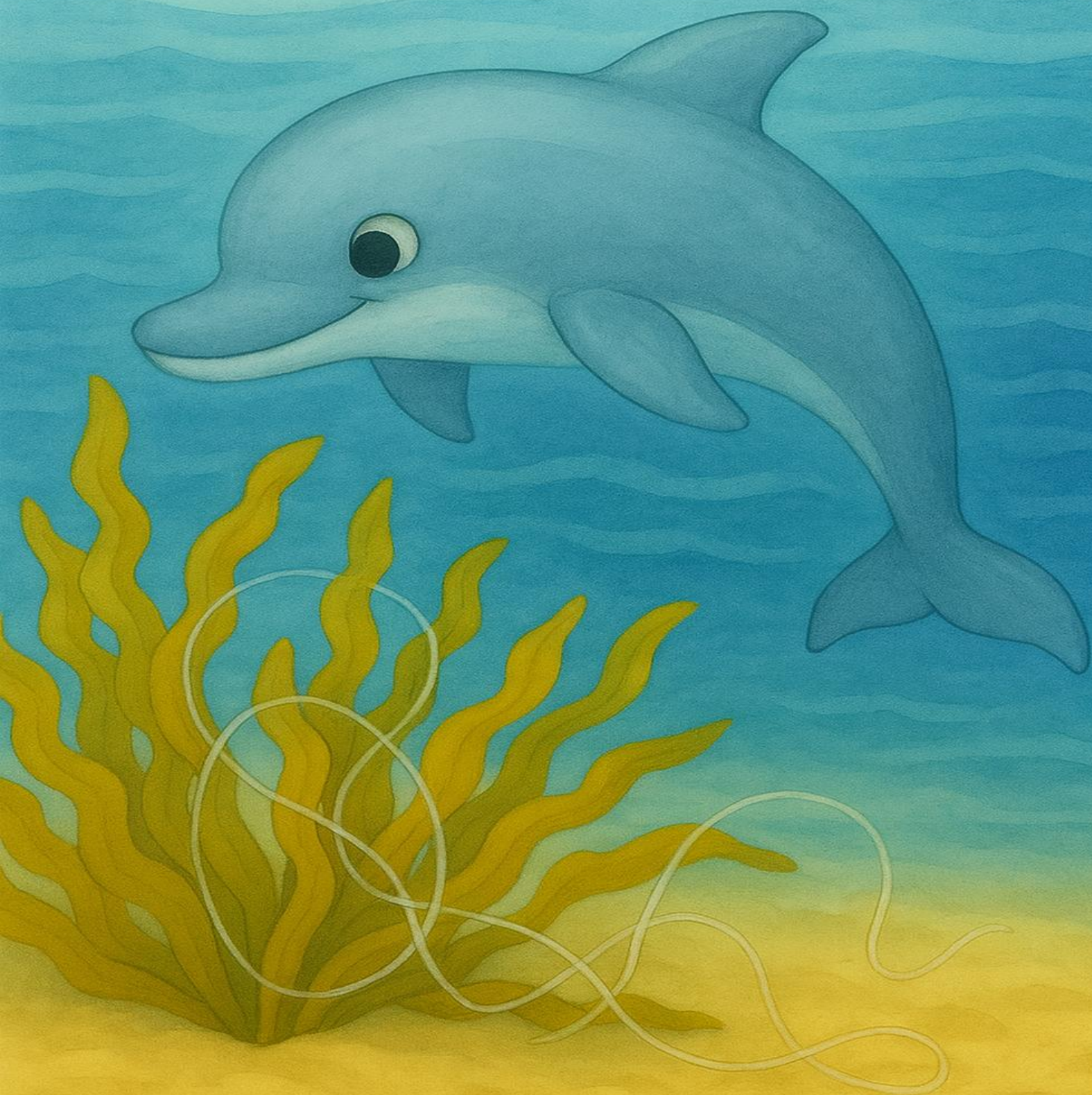
The little bottle that started on the beach was now part of a giant floating “trash soup.”



On another day, a pelican dove into the water. It almost got tangled in a plastic bag floating near the bottle. The bag looked just like a fish from above!



Nearby, a dolphin played with drifting seaweed—but hidden in the weeds were strands of fishing line. If the dolphin hadn't been careful, it could have gotten wrapped up and hurt.

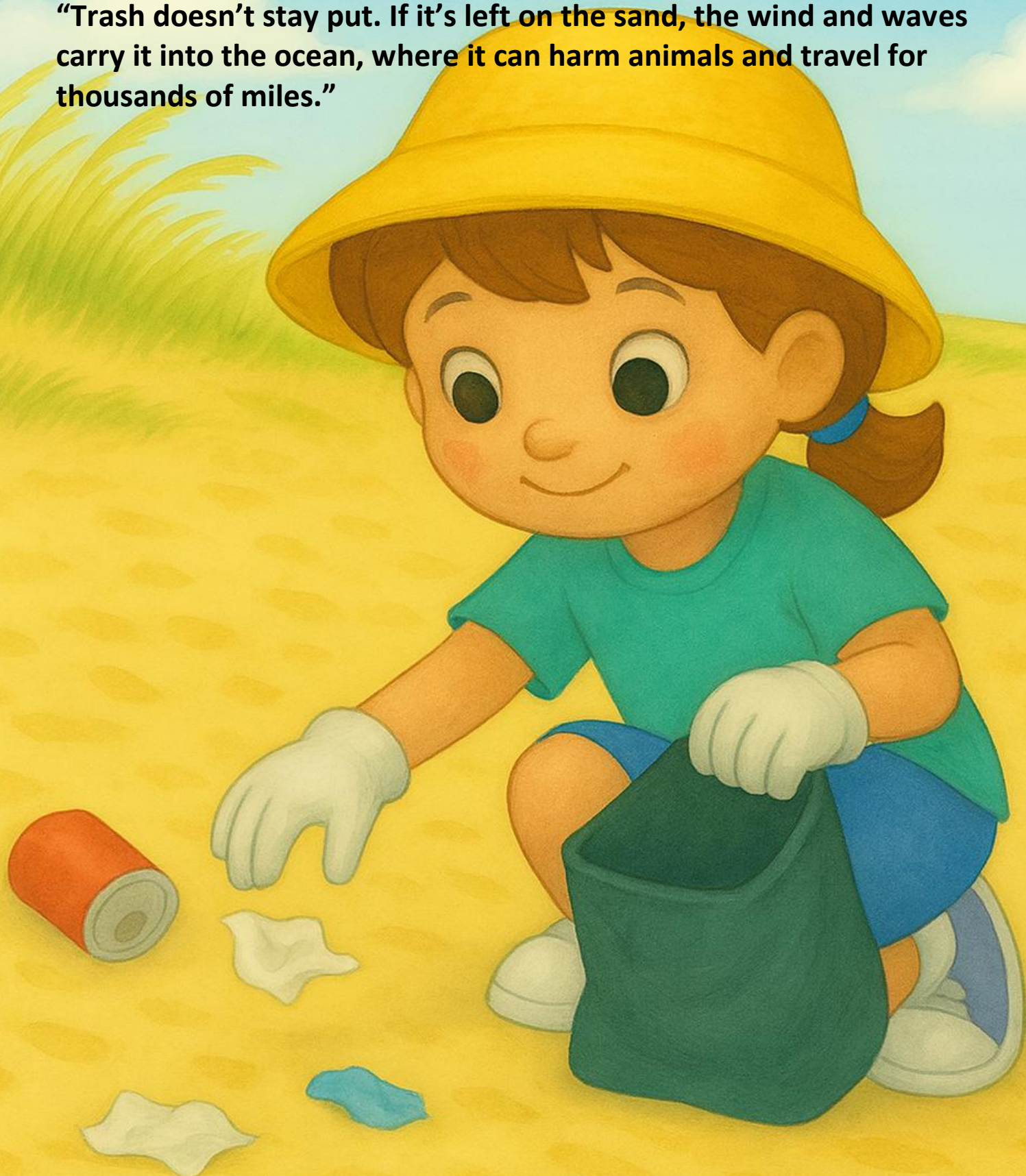


Everywhere the bottle went, it caused trouble for animals who thought it was food or got stuck in the trash that traveled with it.



Meanwhile, back on the beach, Kai's little sister, Lila, noticed wrappers and cans in the sand. She joined a beach cleanup group and learned something important:

"Trash doesn't stay put. If it's left on the sand, the wind and waves carry it into the ocean, where it can harm animals and travel for thousands of miles."



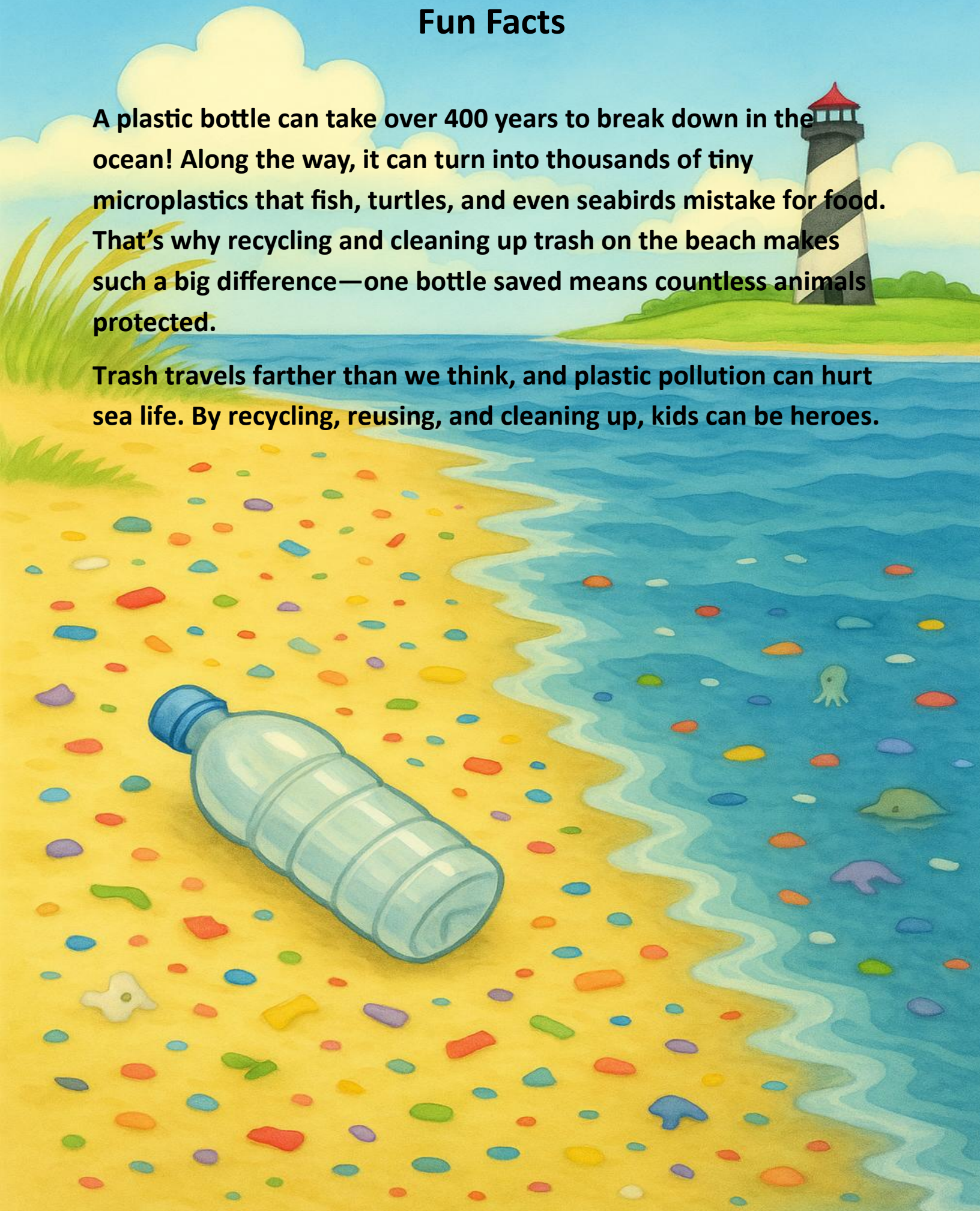
That day, she taught Kai how to recycle and to always carry his trash until he found a bin. Together, they promised to keep the Outer Banks beaches clean—for turtles, dolphins, pelicans, and people too.



Fun Facts

A plastic bottle can take over 400 years to break down in the ocean! Along the way, it can turn into thousands of tiny microplastics that fish, turtles, and even seabirds mistake for food. That's why recycling and cleaning up trash on the beach makes such a big difference—one bottle saved means countless animals protected.

Trash travels farther than we think, and plastic pollution can hurt sea life. By recycling, reusing, and cleaning up, kids can be heroes.



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