

# Shellby Learns to Fish the Right Way... While Scoot Goes Silly



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.

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To learn more, access additional resources at: [www.theobcc.org](http://www.theobcc.org).



Shellby loved the Outer Banks—the salty breeze that tickled her face, the rolling waves that whispered secrets, and the big wooden fishing pier stretching far into the sparkling ocean. One sunny summer morning, Papa handed Shellby a shiny new fishing pole.

“Today,” Papa said with a smile, “you’re going to learn how to fish safely and kindly.”



Shellby's eyes widened as she peeked into Papa's tackle box. "Why does this hook look different?" she asked.

"That's a circle hook," Papa explained. "And I filed down the barb so it's smooth. It usually hooks a fish right on the lip instead of deep inside, which makes it much easier—and safer—to take out."



Next, Papa showed Shellby how to cast into the surf. “Stand on the dry sand,” Papa said, “with your feet apart and one foot a little in front. Hold your rod with both hands and let the weight hang down near the tip. Always look behind you to be sure no one’s there. Then lift the rod gently over your shoulder and swing it forward. Let go of the line as the rod points toward the ocean.”

Shellby took a deep breath and tried it herself. The line sailed smoothly through the air and splashed into the water.

“That was easy!” Shellby said proudly.



Before long, Shellby felt a tug on the line.  
“I think I have one!” she said.

“Nice and gentle,” Papa reminded her. “Reel slowly so the fish stays calm.”

Soon, a small silver fish shimmered in the sunlight near the shore.

Shellby reached for it, but Papa gently stopped her.

“First, dip your hands in the water,” Papa said. “That helps protect the fish’s slime coat, which keeps it healthy.”



Shellby wet her hands and held the fish softly but firmly, just like Papa showed him.

“See where the hook is?” Papa asked. “We’ll take it out the same way it went in.”

Using a small pair of needle-nose pliers, Papa gently turned the hook. *Pop!* It slid right out.

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

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



Shellby carefully lowered the fish back into the water, holding it gently as she moved it forward and backward so fresh water flowed over its gills. With a flick of its tail, the fish darted away in a flash of silver.

“Perfect release,” Papa said. “You’re not just fishing—you’re helping keep the ocean healthy.”

Shellby beamed. She had caught a fish, learned to be gentle, and sent it safely home. As the Outer Banks breeze ruffled her hair, Shellby thought, *I’ll fish this way forever.*



Just then, a loud shout came from down the beach.

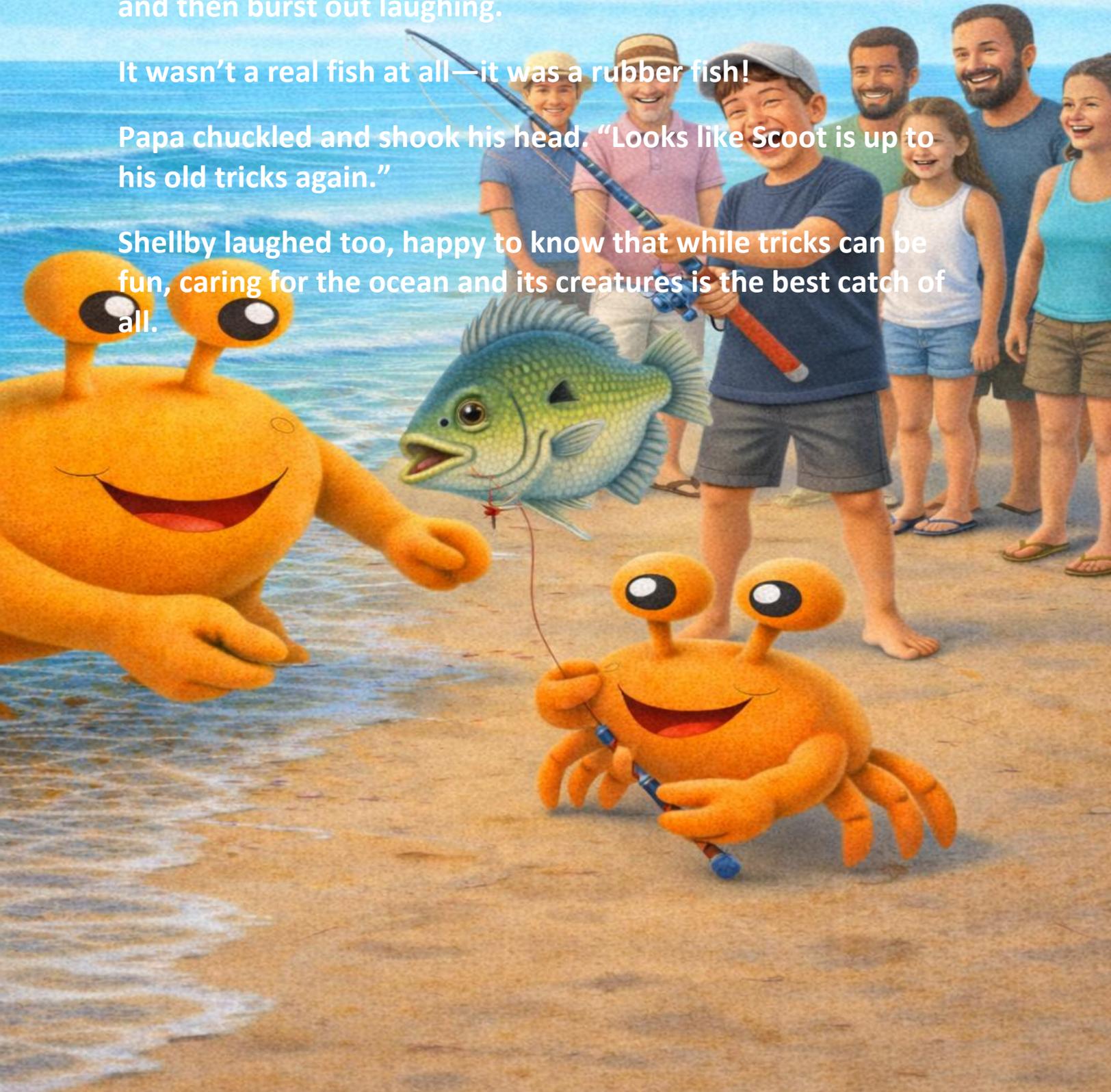
“I’ve got one—a really BIG one!” Scoot yelled.

Papa and Shellby scurried about fifty yards down the shore. A small crowd had gathered around Scoot, who was proudly holding up his catch. Scoot worked hard to unhook the fish... and then burst out laughing.

It wasn’t a real fish at all—it was a rubber fish!

Papa chuckled and shook his head. “Looks like Scoot is up to his old tricks again.”

Shellby laughed too, happy to know that while tricks can be fun, caring for the ocean and its creatures is the best catch of all.



# 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

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

## 3. Choose the Right Tool

- 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

- 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

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

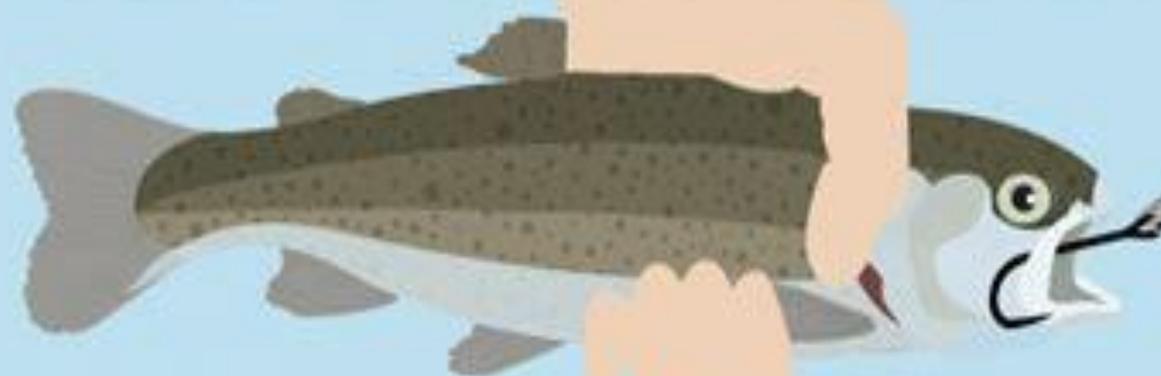
## 6. Revive the Fish if Needed

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

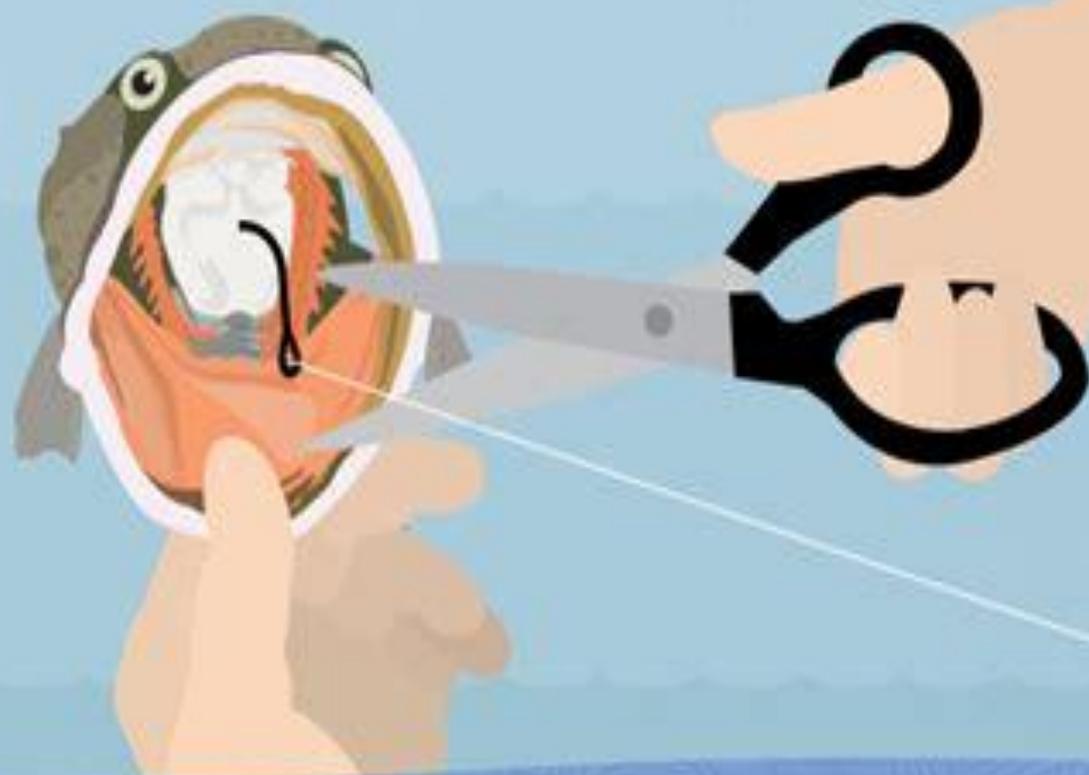
# A Quick Summary

- 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:**

- Always have your saltwater license. 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.**

# References

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. (n.d.). *Fishing in North Carolina*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncwildlife.org/Fishing>

OBX Guides. (n.d.). *Outer Banks fishing tips and regulations*. Retrieved from <https://www.obxguides.com/fishing>

