

What a whale might know

Today I have a story to share with you. We'll be doing lots of thinking in question time, and we'll be hearing from other children, too.

Are you comfortable? Let's get started with a story.

This story is about a boy called Kio and his grandfather.

Kio's grandfather is telling Kio a story about something that happened to him a long time ago.



"I was out in a motorboat off the north coast," says Grandpa, "and I ran into something. I didn't know what it was - maybe a half sunken boat. I didn't see anything. But suddenly there was a great THUD and an enormous BUMP and I was thrown forward onto the floor of the boat. I fell on my arm - and I heard a bone snap! My arm was broken. And then the boat tilted to the side and I fell into the water."

"But Grandpa," says Kio, "with a broken arm, you couldn't swim! You could have drowned!"

"Yes," says Grandpa, "but that wasn't the worst of it. Suddenly the motorboat started going around and around in circles around me. With each circle, the boat got closer and closer, and I couldn't get out of the way. I thought that at any minute the boat would hit me.

"And then, all of a sudden, I heard a ROAR - like the sound of an enormous truck, and then something broke out of the sea, with a great splash. What do you think it was?"

"A whale?" Kio says.

"You're right!" says Grandpa. "That's just what it was. Do you know anything about whales?"

"I know that a Blue Whale is the largest animal in the world," says Kio.

"That's right", Grandpa nods, "Blue Whales are the largest animal that have ever existed, even larger than the biggest dinosaur ever found. The heart of a blue whale is about the size of a car, and its tongue is so big, it can weigh as much as an elephant."

"Whoa," says Kio, "and they can sing too. They sing to their friends to ask them to come and play."

"That's right," says Grandpa. "And they sing for other reasons too - they sing to tell the other the whales that they've found food, or to tell them there is something dangerous in the sea."

Kio looked puzzled.

"If blue whales are so big, what could be dangerous to them?"

"Well," says Grandpa, "lots of whales get injured by boats; they get bones broken, or damaged fins, or even killed."

"When I fell off my boat," says Grandpa, getting back to his story, "and a Blue Whale came to the surface of the water, he looked straight at me, and I looked back at him, and then he swam right for the boat ... and with one smack of his tail, he smashed it to bits."

"So he saved your life!" says Kio.

"That he did!" Grandpa says.

"But - he didn't *know* that the boat was going to hit you, Grandpa. He didn't know you needed help. Probably he was just frightened of the boat, or angry at it. He didn't *mean* to save your life.'

"He looked ... right... at... me," Grandpa says again.

"But he wasn't *trying* to save you," says Kio. "It must have just been an accident. He came to the surface and you just happened to be there!"

Grandpa was shaking his head.

"When he came to the surface, he saw everything."

"But he couldn't know..." Kio started to say.

But Grandpa didn't let him finish.

"How can any of us know what a whale can or can't know?"

Then he says, "That's the end of the story. Time for bed, Kio."



Kio said that the whale didn't mean to save Grandpa's life - that it was just an accident. Do you think he's right?

And does Grandpa think the whale did mean to save his life? Can you tell what Grandpa thought?

Do you think the whale might have known that Grandpa needed help? ...And can you explain what makes you think that?

Let's think about that last question: 'Do you think the whale might have known that Grandpa needed help?'

Let's think it through step by step. And we'll listen to what other children have said to see if that helps us think about it.

Let's start with this question: Could the whale have seen Grandpa in the sea?



Leo: Yes, Grandpa said 'He looked straight at me', so he probably did see Grandpa.

And might the whale have known that there was something wrong – that the boat might hurt Grandpa?



Maya: Yes, whales know that boats are really dangerous. Grandpa said that one of reasons that whales sing is to warn other whales that there is a boat coming.

Milla: Maybe... because the whale would know that a *whale* would need help if a boat was coming towards him.

Leo: But that doesn't mean the whale would know that a *human* needed help.

Nina: Maybe the whale was just trying to help himself and help other whales, so they didn't get hurt by the boat.

Sounds like some of you think that the whale *might* have known that Grandpa needed help, and some are saying the whale *might not* have known.

When you answered the question ('Do you think the whale might have *known* that Grandpa needed help?) were you guessing, or did you know?

Let's hear a bit more about whales, and see if that helps you feel more sure about your answer ... or maybe learning more about whales will make you change your mind.

Whales' brains are like ours in many ways, and scientists tell us that whales are very smart and good at thinking. They look after each other - mother whales look after their babies until the babies are about five years old, and some whales, called Orcas, look after each other when they are sick. Scientists watched a group of Orcas where one had lost both his flippers - a bit like us losing both our arms. No one knows how it happened. But because he had lost his flippers, he couldn't hunt - so he couldn't catch fish. That's what these Orcas eat - fish - all kinds of fish.

Everyone expected that he would starve if he couldn't catch fish? But he didn't starve. Do you know why? Because the other whales in the group gave him a share of the fish they caught.

Now... does knowing more about whales - how they think, and that they do care for each other - make you change your mind about whether the whale might have been trying to save Grandpa? Or perhaps knowing more, makes you even more sure about your opinion.



If we want to figure out what animals, or even other people, did or didn't mean to do, does it help to know what they did or didn't know? Can you explain why you say that?

Remember Grandpa said 'How can any of us know what a whale can or can't know?' And if we don't know what a whale might know, can we be sure whether he meant to help Grandpa or not?

We heard some really interesting ideas today!

Thank you for being part of this. You might like to keep thinking about whether the whale meant to help Grandpa, and have a talk to your family and friends about what they think, too.

Image credit: [Vecteezy.com](https://www.vecteezy.com)

Thank you to our wonderful actors Leo, Maya, Milla, and Nina who helped us to hear different points of view. While sometimes these points of view might have reflected their own opinions, at other times they were asked to express an opposing view in order to help us think more deeply about the topic.