Name: _____ Date: _____

Lulu the Lanternfish Lights Up

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 687 words

"LADIES AND GENTLEFISH!" That was Barnacle Bob. He stood on a rock by the shore with a shell held to his mouth. "Tonight a thousand lanternfish swim up from the deep! Please keep your fins to yourselves. And now, folks. LIGHTS UP!"

Lulu was a lanternfish, and she was as long as your finger. Along her belly ran a row of small round lights, like a string of beads. Her lights had one extra habit, too. They got brighter whenever she was happy.

Lulu was very happy right now. All day the lanternfish stayed down in the dark, and now that it was evening, up they swam, a long glittering line. "Up we go!" sang Lulu. Her belly shone like a row of tiny moons.

Near the top, Lulu heard a sniff. A big gray shape floated in the water, as round as a sofa. "Hello, who is that?" said Lulu. "Mo," said the shape, in a very small voice. "I am a manatee, and I am not scared, I am just, you know, staying here."

Mo was gentle, and very large, and afraid of the dark. "A storm blew me out past the reef," he said. "My seagrass is back by the shore, and I would go home, but I cannot see the way. I cannot even see my own flippers."

Lulu thought hard. A manatee needs seagrass, and a lanternfish has a light, and a light is useful when the water is dark. "I will show you the way," she said. Her lights glowed brighter, because helping made her happy. "BRIGHTNESS NINE!" shouted Bob from the rock. "Please do not announce it," said Lulu. "I always announce it," said Bob.

Off they went, with Lulu swimming in front and Mo coming slowly behind, while Bob scuttled sideways along the shore, calling every move. Every few minutes, Mo floated up for a gulp of air, because manatees are not fish. Each time, Lulu waited, and glowed, and hummed.

The middle of the trip was the darkest part. The moon was hiding behind a cloud, and Mo stopped. "I cannot do it," he whispered. He was shaking, and that made Lulu worry, and a worried lanternfish goes dim. Her lights flickered down, down, down. "BRIGHTNESS TWO," said Bob, in a small voice. "Oh dear. Two."

In the dark, something tickled Mo's face. It was the water, moving. His stiff whiskers could feel even the tiniest pull in the sea, and Mo went very still, the way you do when you are listening hard. Then he lifted his big gray nose. "This way," said Mo.

"You did not need my light," said Lulu. "I liked it anyway," said Mo. "It is nice to be scared next to something glowing." Lulu felt something warm bubble up inside her, and her lights came back on, one by one, from tail to nose. "BRIGHTNESS SIX!" cried Bob, and he did a little

dance sideways.

The seagrass was just where Mo's whiskers said. He ate for ten minutes in perfect silence, with a very pleased face, while Lulu watched the bubbles rise. Bob arrived at last, panting. "I have been sprinting for an hour," he said. "It was ten minutes," said Lulu. "A very long ten," said Bob.

Then the sea began to glow. Up from the deep came the rest of the school, a thousand lanternfish, then two thousand, each with its own row of lights. They had all followed one small, bright light, and it was Lulu's.

Mo stood in a sea of lights with a mouthful of seagrass. Tonight, Mo had been afraid of the dark. Now he took the biggest breath of his life. "LIGHTS UP!" he shouted, so loudly that the whole ocean heard. The school flashed, every light at once, from the top of the sea to the bottom.

Bob nearly fell off his rock. "BRIGHTNESS TEN!" he roared. "Brightness TEN!" Lulu glowed so hard that the crabs had to squint. "There is no such thing as eleven," she said. "There is tonight," said Bob. A thousand small voices laughed, and Mo laughed loudest of all.

Questions

1. What happens to Lulu's lights when she is happy?

A. They turn red
B. They go out
C. They get brighter

2. Why did Mo stay where he was?

A. He was afraid of the dark
B. He was full of food
C. He was waiting for Bob

3. What does "scuttled" mean in "Bob scuttled sideways"?

A. Slept
B. Ran quickly
C. Sang loudly

4. How did Mo find the seagrass in the dark?

A. He followed a star
B. He felt the water with his whiskers
C. He asked Bob

5. Why did Lulu's lights go dim in the middle of the trip?

A. She was worried about Mo
B. She was hungry

C. She was sleepy

6. What did Mo shout at the end?

A. Brightness ten

B. Up we go

C. Lights up

Words to know

lanternfish: a glowing fish

manatee: a sea cow

seagrass: ocean plant

scuttled: ran sideways

flickered: shook and dimmed

Answer key: Lulu the Lanternfish Lights Up

1. C. They get brighter
2. A. He was afraid of the dark
3. B. Ran quickly
4. B. He felt the water with his whiskers
5. A. She was worried about Mo
6. C. Lights up