

## Seashell Secrets

**delicate**—easy to break or hurt

**mobile**—able to move

1 When you walk along the beach, you almost always find seashells. There are thousands of shells in the sea and on land. The waves from the ocean throw the shells up onto the shore. Some shells look pretty and are very delicate. Other seashells are beautiful and are strong.

### Shells Are Important

2 Shells protect the animals living inside them. *Mollusks* (mol uhsk), soft-bodied animals like clams and snails, form shells. The animal's body makes a liquid. The liquid leaks from the animal's body. When the liquid becomes hard, it forms a shell. As the animal gets bigger, it creates more shell-making liquid. The shell grows as the animal grows.

3 The shells scattered on the beach were once the homes of mollusks. The shells seen on snails are like tiny mobile homes! Snails usually crawl across the grass after a rain. They provide safety and shelter. Both sea and land mollusks pull their bodies into their rugged shells when danger approaches.

4 The strong shells also keep mollusks moist when there is no water. Twice a day there is a low tide in the ocean. When the tide is low there is less water on the beach. Without water, the animal in the shell may die. However, the shell holds water that allows the mollusk to stay moist until high tide comes along to wash it back into the sea. That is also why snails are seen crawling around after the rain. They are soaking up the water they need to live.

## Types of Shells

5 Some mollusks have one-piece shells. A snail is an example of an animal living in a single shell. Other mollusks, like clams, mussels, and oysters, have two-part shells. Each half of the shell is exactly the same, and they fit together perfectly. The two parts are connected together at one point. The mollusk uses strong muscles to snap the pieces of its shell together. Sometimes the animals close the shell for protection, and sometimes the animals move by opening and closing the shell.

6 Shells come in many colors. Some shells have stripes and spots, and others have fancy designs. The designs allow the animal to look like the area around it. If no one can see them, they are protected.

7 Shells can be many different sizes and shapes. Some are no bigger than a grain of rice, and others are as big as a television set. These differences provide interesting homes for mollusks.