

The Boy and the Cormorant



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Every morning, a boy named Leo pulled on his bright yellow raincoat and red rubber boots. He grabbed his canvas satchel with his small notebook inside. Then he ran down to the harbor to watch the seabirds. The sea was gray and sparkly, and the air smelled like salt and fish. Leo loved the harbor more than anywhere else in the world.



One bird stood out on the old wooden post. It was a cormorant, glossy black with a bronze sheen in the sun. Its long hooked beak looked like a fishing hook, and its bright emerald eyes watched the water carefully. Leo thought it was the most wonderful bird he had ever seen. He sat very still so he would not scare it away.



The cormorant stretched its neck, tilted its body, and splash! It dove into the sea. Leo leaned forward and held his breath. Under the water, the bird swam fast, its webbed feet pushing like little paddles. In a flash, it caught a silver fish and popped back up. Leo wrote in his notebook: Dives deep. Catches fish. How does it do that?



At home, Leo's little sister, Maya, bounced into the kitchen in her pink overalls. "What are you writing?" she asked, her two puffy black pigtails swinging. Leo showed her his notebook. "I'm studying cormorants," he said. "They dive underwater to catch fish, and I want to know how." Maya's big brown eyes went wide. "Can I help?" she asked with a gap-toothed smile.



The next day, they went back to the harbor together. Leo pointed at the cormorant on the post. "Watch its feet," he whispered. The bird dove again, and its webbed feet kicked quickly. "Its feet are like flippers!" Maya said. Leo nodded and drew a picture of the webbed foot in his notebook. "That helps it swim fast," he said. "But there's more to learn."



They watched the cormorant swim low in the water. Its body was long and sleek, like a little torpedo. "Why does it sit so low?" Maya asked. Leo thought hard. "Its feathers get wet," he said. "Wet feathers make it heavy, so it can dive down easily." He wrote in his notebook: Heavy feathers help it sink. Different from ducks! Maya clapped her hands. "It's like a submarine!"



Leo noticed something else. The cormorant's eyes were bright emerald green. "Its eyes must see really well underwater," he said. "The water is dark and murky, but it still catches fish." Maya pretended to peer through the water. "I can't see anything!" she giggled. Leo laughed too. "That's why it has special eyes," he said. "Its body is built for hunting under the sea."



Back home, Leo spread his drawings on the kitchen table. He had pictures of the webbed feet, the sleek body, the hooked beak, and the bright eyes. "I want to show everyone how the cormorant dives," he said. Maya climbed onto a chair. "Make a model!" she said. "A model that swims!" Leo's hazel eyes lit up. "That's a great idea, Maya!"



Leo found an old plastic bottle for the body and black paper for the feathers. He cut a long beak from cardboard and painted it dark. Maya helped glue on the webbed feet, made from old flip-flops. "This is fun!" she said, her gap-toothed smile shining. Leo added a thin silver band around one leg, just like the real cormorant wore. "Now it looks just like our bird," he said.



Next, Leo built a clear plastic tank to show the diving. He filled it with water and added a toy fish on a string. "Watch this," he told Maya. He placed the model cormorant on the water. It floated low, just like the real bird. Then Leo gently pushed it down, and the model sank. "See? The wet feathers make it heavy," he explained.



Maya frowned. "But how does it swim fast?" she asked. Leo showed her the webbed feet on the model. He pulled a string, and the feet kicked back and forth. The model zoomed through the water toward the toy fish. "The webbed feet push the water," Leo said. "And the sleek body slips through easily." Maya clapped. "It really works!" she cheered.



Leo thought of one more thing. He added a tiny flashlight to the model's head to show the special eyes. "The cormorant can see underwater even when it's dark," he said. He turned on the light, and it glowed through the murky water. "Wow!" Maya gasped. "It's like a superhero bird!" Leo grinned. "Every part of its body helps it hunt," he said.



On Saturday, Leo set up his model at the harbor festival. He put a sign that said: How a Cormorant Dives. People stopped to watch. Leo pushed the model down, and it sank. He pulled the string, and the webbed feet kicked. The little light glowed. "The cormorant has special adaptations," Leo explained. "That means its body is built for its own way of life."



A fisherman nodded. "I've seen those birds dive a hundred times," he said. "But I never knew how they did it." Maya stood beside Leo, handing out little cards with drawings of the cormorant's feet and beak. "Different birds have different tricks," she said proudly. Leo smiled at his sister. Her questions had helped him explain everything so clearly.



That evening, Leo and Maya sat on the harbor wall. The cormorant perched on its post, emerald eyes scanning the water. "It's like the model," Maya said. "But real." Leo nodded. "Every creature is built for its own way of life," he said. "The cormorant dives. A duck paddles. A seagull soars. And they all fit perfectly in their own way."



Maya leaned against him. "I'm glad we watched the cormorant," she said. Leo opened his notebook and wrote one last line: Special bodies help animals live and hunt. He closed it with a smile. The sea whispered against the wall, and the cormorant dove one more time. Leo knew he would keep watching, keep wondering, and keep building models to share what he learned.