# tiny, floating Coral

**This story starts with a tiny coral planula** floating through the ocean in a soup of plankton. **It is an animal looking for the perfect place to settle, divide and grow.** Learn about the remarkable life of coral, how it feeds, starts a colony and becomes a part of Australia's Great Barrier Reef – the largest coral reef ecosystem on Earth. **This story ends with a fold-out map.** Are you ready to think big?


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START SMALL, THINK BIG

Unfold a world of discovery with this series that takes readers from the small and familiar to new areas of knowledge where you really have to think big.







TINY, FLOATING CORAL

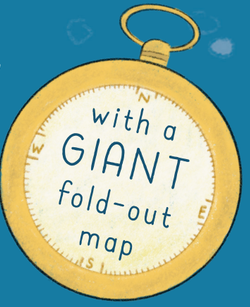
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START SMALL, THINK BIG

# tiny, floating Coral

by Mary Auld




illustrations by La Scarlatte



**Here I am, a tiny floating coral planula.** I am a minute animal drifting through the ocean, looking for the perfect place to live and grow.

*A planula is the early stage in the life cycle of the tiny animals called polyps that form a coral reef.*

*Ocean water is full of microscopic life – lots of different plants and animals too small for us to see.*

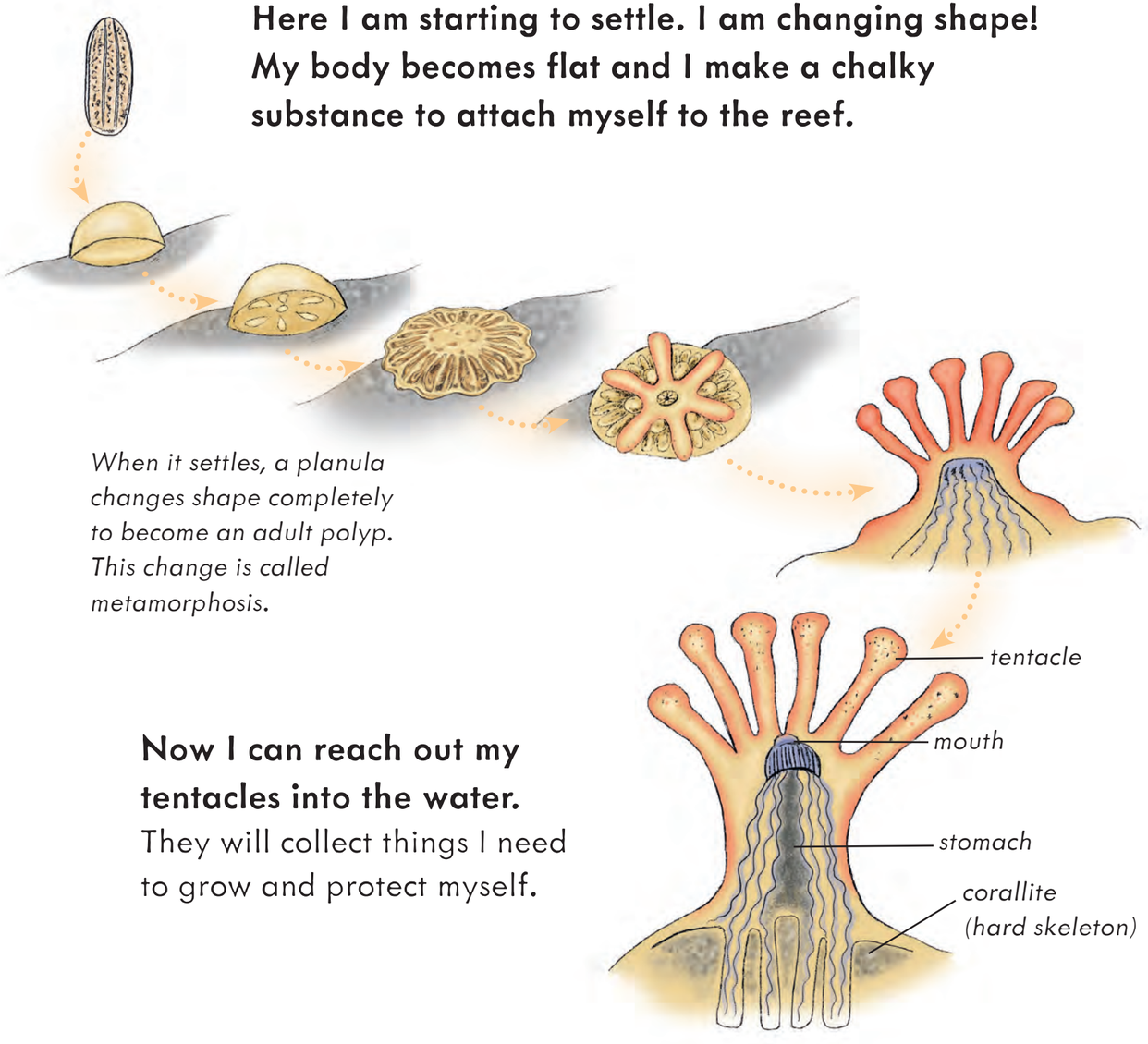
**Here is a coral reef.** I will settle here, where the sea is warm and calm. Can you find me?

*Coral reefs grow in shallow water off the coast, in warm, tropical seas and oceans.*

*A planula usually settles on healthy coral reefs where there is lots of other life around.*

*A planula senses a good spot to grow. It uses tiny hairs to move down to a space on the reef.*

**Here I am starting to settle. I am changing shape! My body becomes flat and I make a chalky substance to attach myself to the reef.**




*When it settles, a planula changes shape completely to become an adult polyp. This change is called metamorphosis.*

**Now I can reach out my tentacles into the water.**
They will collect things I need to grow and protect myself.

**Here I am splitting in two!**
**I am budding – making a new polyp.**
This new polyp will split, too. We do this again and again. We will become a coral colony.

*A colony is group of animals that lives and works together.*

*An adult polyp splits to make a copy of itself.*

*Each polyp makes a hard skeleton, connected to the previous one. The hard skeletons build an amazing shaped coral colony.*

**Here is my colony. We are called smooth cauliflower coral. To grow fast, we need food!**

*Corals need energy to grow. They get some of this energy from microscopic food they catch in the seawater, but they need much more.*

*smooth cauliflower coral*

**We have a secret food supply. Tiny life forms called algae live inside us.** Algae make food from sunshine and share their food with us.




*The coral protects the algae inside its body. In return, the algae give some of their food to the coral.*

*The algae inside the coral polyps are called zooxanthellae (zoo-zan-thell-ay).*