

**Background** Maureen Crane Wartski was born in Ashiya, Japan, in 1940. Her European and Asian heritage and her deep connection with nature have strongly influenced her writing. In addition, Wartski is an accomplished artist. Like her writing, her watercolors often portray the natural world. Here she writes about dolphins, which, like whales, travel together in groups called “pods.”

# The Pod

Short Story by Maureen Crane Wartski

CLOSE READ  
Notes

1. **READ** ▶ As you read lines 1–19, begin to collect and cite text evidence.

- Circle the question at the beginning of the story.
- In the margin, explain how the question helps you understand how Jesse feels about Pete at the beginning of the story.
- Underline text that explains the reasons for Jesse’s feelings about Pete and the rest of his family.

Couldn’t Pete talk about anything but *fish*?

Jesse Waring tried to block his cousin’s voice but there was no escape.

“Dolphins aren’t fish, they’re mammals,” Pete was lecturing. “They look big and tough, but they can get stressed or scared, like the stranded dolphin we rescued. . . .”

“Jesse?” His mother was standing beside him, her eyes full of concern. His parents were always worrying about him these days, Jesse thought, **irritably**, and the other relatives were just as bad.

- 10 *Poor Jesse, it’s a shame about the accident. He used to be a great athlete. . . .* Even when they didn’t talk to him, he could feel their pitying thoughts.

“Can you go to the store for me?” his mother was saying. “We’ve run out of milk. That is,” she added quickly, “if you’re not too tired. . . .”

irritably:

“ . . . And I want to make sure to visit the Cape Cod Stranding Network.” Pete was droning on. “They have a hotline, and they do great work. . . .”

*Yada, yada, yada.* “Sure Mom,” Jess said. *Anything to get away from Pete’s lectures and all those pitying eyes.*

20 He snatched up car keys from the table in the entryway, grabbing his windbreaker as he limped out the door. Once outside, he wished he’d brought his parka—the wind had an icy sting—but he wasn’t going back into the house.

He’d always enjoyed the annual Waring family reunion, when cousins, uncles and aunts from all over the country got together and rented a house on New England’s Cape Cod, but this March was different. It was the first time the clan had gathered since the accident.

Jesse didn’t want to think about how a man driving a pickup had jumped a red light, slamming into his car and fracturing his legs.

30 Until then Jesse had been the star of the school soccer team, certain of an athletic scholarship.

“Not anymore,” he muttered, then frowned as he realized he’d passed the store. Well, OK, there was a convenience store about 30 miles away, and the drive would give him some needed alone time.

At first, the silence was great.

But as Jesse drove on the road that wound beside the ocean, he kept thinking how his future had been smashed along with his legs. Pep talks that people gave him made it worse. He was a cripple, and

2. **REREAD** Reread lines 7–14. How does Jesse respond to the accident? Explain what this tells you about his character. Support your answer with explicit textual evidence.

---

---

---

---

3. **READ** As you read lines 20–40, continue to cite textual evidence.

- Underline the text that shows what Jesse was like before the accident.
- Note in the margin how this event has changed him.

40 he knew it. These days Jesse always felt as if there was a tight, hard knot in his chest.

On **impulse**, he turned the wheel, pulling into an empty parking lot that faced the water. He got out and limped down some stairs. Except for screeching seagulls and a few scattered rocks, the beach was deserted.

Suddenly, Jesse tensed. *That rock . . . did it move?* He took a step closer and saw that it was no rock.

50 The dolphin wasn't very big, not even four feet long. When Jesse hobbled over, the big fish . . . *mammal*, according to Pete . . . rolled an eye at him. How long had it been there? It was breathing, but its sides were heaving painfully.

Fragments of Pete's endless **monologue** came back to him. His cousin had said that a dolphin's rib structure wasn't built to protect it on land. The body weight of this creature was slowly compressing its vital organs, and if it didn't get back into the water soon, it could die. It was going to low tide and the waves seemed far away. The best thing to do was to call Pete, who would know what to do. Jesse reached for his cell phone.

It wasn't there. He'd left it in the pocket of his parka! He could drive home and get Pete, but that would mean leaving the dolphin.

impulse:

monologue:

4. **◀ REREAD** As you reread lines 28–35, compare Jesse's life before and after the accident. Why do you think he misses the convenience store? Support your answer with explicit textual evidence.

---



---



---



---

5. **▶ READ** As you read lines 41–61, continue to cite textual evidence.
- Underline the text that tells what Jesse thinks about immediately after he sees the stranded dolphin.
  - Circle the text that shows how Jesse's feelings toward Pete have changed, and restate the change in the margin.

empathy:

60 Would it be alive when he got back? He knew nothing about this creature except that it was helpless.

The dolphin's eyes rolled again, and Jesse felt a sudden jolt of **empathy**.

It looked as scared as he had felt when they'd wheeled him into the emergency room that afternoon.

"Hey, Bud, . . ." Jesse knelt down beside the dolphin. "OK, I just can't leave you here to die. But how do I get you back into the water?"

arcing:

70 Even if he managed to drag this creature that weighed — what? maybe 75 pounds? back into the water, the coarse sand might damage its skin. Jesse looked helplessly toward the gray ocean and was surprised to see dark shapes **arcing** out of the waves. A *pod*<sup>1</sup>—Pete's word—was out there.

"I think your family's waiting for you, Bud." Carefully, Jesse reached out and patted the dolphin. Was it his imagination that his touch made the dolphin calmer?

contraption:

Jesse didn't want to waste time thinking about that. He was trying to remember what Pete had said about how, when he'd helped rescue a stranded dolphin, he had put the creature on a sort of blanket sling and carried that **contraption** down to the water. Well, he didn't  
80 have a blanket handy, so his windbreaker would have to do.

Carefully, Jesse scooped a hollow in the soft sand under the dolphin's head, then eased part of the windbreaker under it. He was streaming with sweat by the time he managed to maneuver as much of the dolphin as possible onto its makeshift "blanket," then began to drag the dolphin toward the water.

<sup>1</sup> **pod**: a school (or family) of dolphins or other sea mammals.

6. ◀ **REREAD AND DISCUSS** *Irony* is a contrast between what is expected and what actually happens. With a small group, discuss how Jesse's feelings about Pete's lectures may be changing. What makes this change surprising?
7. **READ** ▶ As you read lines 62–75, continue to cite textual evidence.
- Underline the text that demonstrates how Jesse continues to benefit from Pete's lecture as he cares for the dolphin.
  - Circle the text that shows that Jesse is comparing himself to the dolphin.

Twice, his legs buckled under him, tumbling him backward onto the sand, but he kept going until water was lapping around his ankles.

“Almost there, Bud,” Jesse gritted.

As Jesse waded knee-deep into the water, the dolphin made some  
90 kind of noise and then began to swim.

“Woo hoo!” Jesse yelled, then yelped in **dismay**. The dolphin was swimming back toward the shore.

What was wrong with the crazy creature? Pete’s voice began to drone in Jesse’s mind again, recounting his own dolphin rescue; “*The dolphin was **disoriented**. It kept heading for the shore. We had to guide it back into the deep water. . .*”

Jesse waded deeper, past the breakers. Icy waves broke against him as he tried to head off the young dolphin. When he’d finally managed that, it wouldn’t turn. He wished he had paid more attention to Pete’s  
100 lecture, but wishing never helped.

Waves sent freezing spumes into his face. “Bud, you’ve got to save yourself.” Jesse gritted through chattering teeth. “Nobody’s going to do it for you. If you give up, you’re finished. . .”

Suddenly, as if it had at last understood, the young dolphin turned toward deeper water and began to swim toward the pod. Waiting dolphins arced nearer as if in welcome, and watching them, Jesse thought of his own family. They’d be worried because he’d been gone so long.

*My pod, he thought.*

dismay:

disoriented:

8. **◀ REREAD** Reread lines 66–75. What does Jesse do to care for the dolphin? How do his actions show that Jesse is changing as the story moves forward? Support your answer with explicit textual evidence.

---



---



---



---

9. **▶ READ** As you read lines 76–117, continue to cite textual evidence.
- Underline the actions Jesse takes to get the dolphin back into the water.
  - In the margin, tell why it is ironic that Jesse remembers Pete’s words.

110 He was freezing as he limped back to his car, but he was grinning, and he was happier than he'd been in a long while.

He was going to drive to the nearest store and call Pete, who would probably contact the Cape Cod Stranding Network hotline that he'd been talking about. The CCSN would make sure that Bud didn't strand again.

"But that's not going to happen anyway," Jesse said aloud.

He had a feeling the young dolphin was finally on the right track.

10. ◀ **REREAD** As you reread lines 101–117, explain why what Jesse says to the dolphin could really be applied to himself. To whom might Jesse be referring when he says that the young dolphin is "on the right track"?

---

---

---

---

## Short Response

**Cite Text Evidence** Explain how events in the story change Jesse's feelings about his cousin Pete. How does this response to Pete show that Jesse himself has changed as he struggled to rescue the stranded dolphin? **Cite text evidence** to support your response.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---