

# MAGIC MAILBOX

**Ever wonder what a clam is?** A clam is a bivalve - a water creature that lives inside two shells attached to each other. Other examples of bivalves are oysters, mussels and scallops. Some bivalves live in the saltwater of the ocean and some live in the freshwater of rivers, lakes and ponds. Note: Some water creatures, such as conches, live inside a single shell; these are called univalves. **Ever what a bivalve looks like inside its shells?** The bivalve shells you find on the beach are usually broken apart, and the creature that used to live inside is gone. But if you find two shells that are still completely connected, chances are the creature is still inside! This creature has a mouth, stomach, heart and other parts. For example, a scallop has eyes that peek out of its shells; a clam has a “foot” that reaches out of its shells to help dig down into the sand or mud. These parts are all covered by a layer called a mantle, which is much like a thick layer of skin. The mantle is very important because it makes something called mother-of-pearl, which the bivalve uses to cover the inside of its shells to make sure that the shells are a smooth, comfortable place to live. **Ever wonder how oysters make pearls?** Sometimes a bit of sand or dirt gets inside an oyster’s shells and makes it an uncomfortable place to live. To get rid of the irritation, the oyster covers the sand or dirt with mother-of-pearl to make it smooth. Once several layers have been applied, the bit of sand or dirt becomes a pearl! Most bivalves can make pearls, but pearls are most commonly found in oysters.

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