The fish in this story has a problem. Listen to the story and pay attention to how the character solves the problem.

Big Al

By Andrew Clements

In the wide blue sea there was a very friendly fish named Big Al. You could not find a nicer fish.

But Big Al was also very, very, scary.

Other fish seemed to have at least one friend. Some had many. But Big Al had none.

What is the problem in this story?

He did not really blame the other fish. How could he expect little fish to trust a great big fish with eyes and skin and TEETH like his?

So Big Al was lonely, and cried big salty tears into the big salty sea.

But Big Al really wanted friends, so he worked at it.

Which detail in the first part of the story explains why Big Al doesn’t have any friends?

First he tried wrapping himself up with seaweed. He thought it was a great disguise, but no one else did. Who wants to stop and talk to a floating plant that has big sharp teeth?

What does the word “disguise” mean?

Then he thought that if he puffed himself up round, the other fish would laugh and see how clever and silly he could be.

All they saw was how BIG he could be, and they steered clear.

Very early one morning, Big Al went down to the bottom and flopped and wiggled himself into the sand until he was almost covered up. He looked much smaller. When other fish came near, Big Al talked and joked with them and had a
delightful time. But then one scratchy little grain of sand got stuck in his gills – and he... and hehe... and he sn... and he SSSNEEEEEEZZED.

When the clouds of sand cleared away, all the other fish were gone.

Big Al even changed his color one day so he could look like he belonged to a school of tiny fish passing by. He bubbled along with them for a while, laughing and feeling like he was just one of the crowd.

But he was so big and clumsy that when all the tiny fish darted to the left and then quickly back to the right, Big Al just plowed straight ahead. He went bumping and thumping right into the little fish. Before he could even say “Excuse me,” they were gone, and he was all alone again, sadder than ever.

**How does what we have read so far add to the character’s problem?**

Just when Big Al was starting to be sure that he would never have a single friend, something happened.

He was floating along sadly watching some of the smaller fish, and was wishing they would come closer. As he watched, a net dropped down silently from above, and in an instant, they were caught.

Big Al forgot all about being lonely, and he forgot all about being sad. His eyes bulged out bigger and rounder than ever, and with a mighty flip of his tail he opened his mouth and charged straight at the net! The net was strong, but Big Al was stronger. He ripped right through it, and all the little fish rushed out through the hole.

**How would you describe Big Al so far? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.**

But when Big Al tried to turn around and go out of the hole, he got all tangled up in the net. He was stuck!

The net went higher and higher toward the bright surface of the sea, and the little fish watched Big Al as he disappeared above them.

When the little fish were able to speak again, all they talked about was the huge, wonderful fish that had saved them. How great to be free, but what a shame that the big fellow had been captured.

Just then there was a tremendous, crashing splash above them, and the small fish dashed away. Was it the net again?
Not at all – it was Big Al. Those fishermen took one look at him, and threw him right back into the ocean.

And now there is one huge, puffy, scary, fierce-looking fish in the sea who has more friends than anyone else:

Big Al.

**How was the character’s problem solved?**

**Writing Long About Reading:**

a. What is Big Al’s problem?

b. Explain how Big Al’s problem is solved.