

The HERP Project Puppet Presentation

A Day in the Salt Marsh (adapted from the story by Kevin Kurtz)

Characters

Narrator



Terrapin



Crab



Otter



Fish (held by a dowel rod)



Mouse



Raccoon

Narrator: “The sun’s coming up in the salt marsh, and the birds respond with song.
If you decide to stay awhile, you’ll see changes all day long.
It’s 9:00 in the salt marsh; the tide is coming back.
And on the muddy bank, you will hear a quiet crack!
A terrapin is eating while resting on the ground.
It bites into a snail’s shell and makes a popping sound.”

[terrappin appears]

Terrapin: There are very few reptiles that live in the salt marsh except for me, The Diamond Back Terrapin! I am probably the only turtle in the world that lives in brackish-water; which makes me pretty special, don’t you think? Brackish means that the water is slightly salty, but not as salty as seawater. I need the salt marsh to find the food that I like to eat such as shrimp, clams, crabs and especially periwinkle snails. Periwinkle snails live on the grasses in the marsh. The snails eat the decaying bits of plants and dead animals that are left on the grass by the high tide and then I eat the snails. I also lay my eggs in the sand on the shore during the high tide.

Although Terrapins can be found on the coast from Cape Cod to Texas our numbers have been dwindling since the early 1800s. That is because we were hunted to make Terrapin soup! There are laws that protect us now, but we still face many dangers and most of them are caused by people. One major problem is destruction of the coastal marsh habitat where we live. Another is cars that run over us when we are crossing roads to lay eggs. We also are in danger from

boat propellers and crab traps. Crab traps are left sitting on the bottom of the marsh to try to catch crabs. However, since we like to eat crabs we sometimes go into the traps and can't get out. We have lungs and must breathe air just like you do; so when we get caught in the crab traps we can't get to the surface to breath and we drown. And then there are always the raccoons, muskrats, skunks, and crows that eat our eggs. [raccoon and mouse puppet pop up briefly]

Narrator: "It's 11:00 in the salt marsh; the tide is getting high. Over in the tidal creek, a blue crab skitters by. The blue crab isn't picky and will eat 'most any dish. It even eats sea cucumber or a stinky piece of fish."

[crab appears]

Crab: Did you know that salt marshes rank among the most productive ecosystems on earth! Microscopic organisms such as bacteria, fungi and small algae attach to dead plant matter and break down the parts that are not digestible by animals. I then eat the decaying plant material, along with the bacteria, fungi and attached organisms! It's quite yummy! I use my claws to shovel food into my mouth. You would probably call me a scavenger because I eat dead pieces of plant and animals but I am an important part of this ecosystem because I help to recycle the nutrients in the salt marsh. [looking left and then right] However, this means that I have to watch out for Diamondback Terrapins, Birds, Fish and even other Blue Crabs because they like to eat me!

Narrator: "It's 1:00 in the salt marsh; the tide is very high. The grass is under water, and yet it doesn't die. The spartina grass drinks saltwater as the wind blows it about. The leaves hold in the water, but spit the salt back out. The marsh is like a nursery where little fish can hide. They eat the food that's brought their way with each new rising tide."

[fish appears]

Fish: The eggs and babies of many ocean fish are brought by the currents into the salt marsh. Young fish like myself, hide in the shallow water among the grass and feed off of tiny plants and animals until we are big enough to swim back into the ocean. The grasses provide a safe place for us to hide although there are still many dangers. For example, the Great Blue Heron and the Egret with their long legs stalk quietly through the grass hunting for small fish to spear with their long sharp beak. You might even think of the salt marsh as a nursery for all kinds of babies, not just fish. Other migratory birds stop over in the marsh while traveling between summer and winter habitats. I really have to keep my eye out for all of those birds!

Narrator: “It’s 3:00 in the salt marsh, and on and off all day, running, splashing, swimming, the river otters play. Two pups begin to wrestle, a game of one-on-one. At first their mother watches, then joins them in the fun.”

[otter appears]

Otter: We might look like we are playing but we are really learning important survival skills such as fighting and hunting. We have as much fun on the land as we do in the water. We don’t get cold in the water like you do because we have a thick, water-repellent coat of fur. Fish is our favorite food, but we also will eat various amphibians, turtles and crayfish.

Narrator: It’s 5:00 in the salt marsh; the oysters no longer hide. They’re out in the sunlight, uncovered by the tide. Oysters hold up the banks, so that the grass can grow. Grass supports the food web in the daily salt marsh show.

[Terrapin reappears]

Terrapin: That’s right. Not only is there an amazing show going on in the salt marsh, it is also very important in shielding and protecting coastal areas from storms. The marsh is an important shoreline stabilizer because it dampens the effect of waves. The salt marsh also clean water by filtering sediments, nutrients, heavy metals, and other toxins from upland runoff.

Narrator: We are lucky to live in North Carolina, where we can see this Salt Marsh show. Why don’t you plan a visit to the coast to enjoy if for yourself. Just three hours to the east...ready, set and go!

**Most of the Narrator lines in this script are from the book, *A Day in the Salt Marsh* by Kevin Kurtz (2007) Sylvan Dell Publishing.