

## The Intertidal Zone

Lynn Noel, QLF/Atlantic Center for the Environment

1985

- NOTES:** This skit was created for Ocean Horizons 1985, a residential environmental education camp for youth 11-15 in Newfoundland, Canada. It was originally part of a recruitment presentation for the Norris Point (NFLD) Youth Group in June 1985. Costume and rehearsal time was three hours; this ease of production makes the skit suitable for groups without access to elaborate materials. The puffin's lines were largely improvised, the intertidal dwellers' scripted in advance. The order of the characters is random, with the puffin approaching each in turn. All parts can be played by either gender, with each character encouraged to develop distinctive mannerisms and style. The skit was later presented as part of an evening program, "Music and Drama About the Sea," for OH, and for Gros Morne National Park by special invitation. It served as a lead-in to a field ecology lesson on the intertidal zone. Its effectiveness can perhaps best be judged by this reaction: at the lesson the day after the skit, one camper dashed up to the instructor with a dripping handful of mussels, complete with fibers, and said, "Look! It's Cynthia!"
- CAST:** Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*), starfish (*Henricia*, blood star), rock crab (*Cancer irroratus*), kelp (*Laminaria longicrusis*, or rockweed, *fusus vesiculosus*), barnacle, sea urchin (*Strongylocentrotus droebachiensis*)
- COSTUMES:** are best improvised from available materials. The cast offers these descriptions as suggestions.
- PUFFIN:** Foam beak decorated with red, blue, yellow magic marker, attached with large rubber bands or elastic; black beret; white sweatshirt with pillow stuffing; navy rain parka; black tights; red socks and/or red construction paper feet.
- STARFISH:** red windbreaker with front pocket (for stomach); red pants; swim goggles; large foam "arms" with construction paper suckers, on wire ring around neck; plumber's plunger.
- MUSSEL:** black bristol board "sandwich" cut in shell shape with painted white rings, OR blue undershirt with rings of masking tape; navy blue bandanna headband; blue or black running shorts; black tights and running shoes; embroidery floss "fibers" in white, blue, grey & black; anchor "tattoo" on bicep.

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ROCK CRAB: foam crab shell, spray-painted yellow and braced with 1/8" dowel; foam claws, attached with string and duct tape; mirrored sunglasses; turtleneck and jeans; oversized yellow rubber boots

KELP: green rainsuit; green socks or boots; 12 green balloons (3 for each arm and leg); long hair or green cellophane

SEA URCHIN: oversized sleeping bag, hair spiked with gel

BARNACLE: White sheet gathered onto coat-hanger-wire circle (72 x 60"); white cotton mini-mop or dish scrubber.

PROPS: Large blue plastic tarp and a box of Tide detergent

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**NARRATOR:** (character with easiest costume to don.) You are now going to travel on a very strange journey. **CLOSE YOUR EYES** and imagine that you are a young puffin, just out of your burrow. You are caught by a huge storm and blown far out to sea, far from your family and your home. Swept by the winds and the tides, suddenly you are swamped by a huge wave. When you awake, it will be in a strange and mysterious place, where you will meet many weird and bizarre creatures unlike anything you have ever known, It is like nowhere you have ever been before, and soon you will arrive. **OPEN YOUR EYES.** (During this speech, cast assembles on “stage” in semicircle, **PUFFIN** in center.)

**PUFFIN:** Oh, my head! (groan) What—what happened? (moan) All I remember is this big wave, and a big **BUMP**, and...oh, my beak! Oh, I ache all over. (gasp) Where **AM I**?

**STARFISH:** (sepulchrally) Little did the young puffin know, that (s)he had just entered: **THE INTERTIDAL ZONE.** (Doo-doo-**DOO**-doo, Doo-doo-**DOO**-doo) (cast mimics “Twilight Zone” theme, dying away into character noises: plunging plunger, rattling balloons, “filtering,” wave sounds, etc.)

**PUFFIN:** (to **STARFISH**) What—what was that? Who said that? It was **YOU!** Who are you?

**STARFISH:** What’s huffin’, young puffin? What’s the latest posish?  
I’m the man with the moves; I’m Mr. Starfish.  
And here’s the big news when you tune to my station:  
I’m the highest-level predator in this zonation.  
I just slide around the tidepools in my custom-made shoes  
And grab a little crab, or a winkle with the blues.  
Mom always said my eyes were bigger than my stomach  
So I turns my stomach inside out! Now ain’t that comic?  
I just wrap it round my dinner in one big lunge  
And when the tide comes in, I take the big plunge.  
These shoes are big suckers when the waves come swishin’  
So come on, sucker! Stomach out—let’s go fishin’!

**PUFFIN:** You mean you—you **EAT** like **THAT**?

**STARFISH:** Sure, cat, sure—aren’t you hungry?

**PUFFIN:** Oh, I’m starving! But I can’t turn my **STOMACH** inside out! That’s gross!

**STARFISH:** Way it goes, man!

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- PUFFIN: I'm so hungry! Where will I find something to eat? ...Hello! I'm a puffin, and I'm hungry! Who are you?
- MUSSEL: I'm a big bivalve, a real Ms. (Mr.) Mussel  
When the tide comes in , I'm ready for the tussle!  
I just take these fibers and fasten to the rocks  
And when the waves come crashing, I'm ready for the shocks.  
I'm tied to the table, never need to wrestle  
I sit down to my dinner, so they call me sessile.  
I just open up my valves and run the water through my shell  
And I've got enough nutrients for seconds as well!  
So come on, little puffin. Tie YOUR fibers to the beach  
And we'll wait for the waves to come within our reach.
- PUFFIN: Fibers? I don't have any fibers! And my feet are so big, they just slip and slide all over the rocks. I don't tie myself to the table!
- MUSSEL: You don't? Well, you'll have a rough time balancing there while you open and shut your valves.
- PUFFIN: And I don't have any valves, either. Just my beak, and it wishes it had some good fat capelin in there now. I guess you wouldn't have any in your shell.
- MUSSEL: Nope, just diatoms and algae. Sure you won't try some?
- PUFFIN: Uh, no, thanks. ...Oh, HI! I'm a puffin, and I don't have anything to eat. Can you help me? Who are you?
- KELP: I'm a plant, and a primitive—only one cell.  
I'm a seaweed; they call me a Kelp.  
All you animals, you have to work for your food  
But I never need any help.  
I make my own food, from the rays of the sun  
So I'm green from my head to my toe.  
I never need sunscreen, or Burger King;  
I can picnic wherever I go.  
I just float on the tide with my greenish balloons  
(Which some nasty folks like to POP!)  
Then I fasten myself by the roots of my toes  
To a sunny rock where I can flop.  
My whole family's here, plus the algae and moss  
We're a mellow and peaceable bunch.  
We're beyond vegetarian—food chain starts here!  
Won't you join us and soak up some lunch?

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- PUFFIN: You mean you can eat just by lying out here in the sun?
- KELP: Yeah, sometimes it's easy being green. C'mon, try it!
- PUFFIN: But I don't have a single green feather on my body! I guess I can't eat with you.
- KELP: Poor kid. Have to work for your lunch, critter! So long—I'm catching a ray sandwich.
- BARNACLE: I'm an arthropod—don't that sound silly?  
But my friends call me Barnacle Billy.  
I'm really a shy, stay-at-home kind of guy  
'Cause I'm stuck to this rock, willy-nilly.  
I eat plankton I gather together  
With this filter that looks like a feather.  
All the algae I sweep in a neat little heap  
For my dinner, whatever the weather.  
In my house at the edge of the ocean  
I can dine without any commotion.  
Now I think I'll go hide while I wait for the tide.  
You can join me if you've got the notion.
- PUFFIN: Oh, great! (makes as if to climb inside BARNACLE'S shell)
- BARNACLE: (horrified) No, no, NO! Not in here! There's only room in here for ME! Go build your own house!
- PUFFIN: How do I do that? My mom and dad dug me a burrow, but this rock's too hard for that. Where do you get this white stuff?
- BARNACLE: Why, you just make it! You secrete it into these walls, and build up a little more every year.
- PUFFIN: You mean out of your body? I don't think I can do that. All I can do is gather twigs and dig in the ground, and I don't have one of those filter things either. My wings would just get all draggly. I guess I can't eat with you.
- BARNACLE: Well, if you ever do decide to take up filter feeding, just make sure you get the right attachments.
- PUFFIN: Yeah, thanks.....I guess. Now what am I going to do? Oh, what's this?
- ROCK CRAB: Oh no you don't! You're one who'll grab but you'll never get the chance to eat this crab.

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I hide in the weeds, never sit in the sun  
'Cause birds like you like to eat this one.  
But if you make me a promise not to make me your meal  
I can give you directions to some food we can steal.  
Myself, I say scavenger's my true vocation  
Of all the best leftovers in this location.  
So c'mon, grab that beak of blue, yellow and red  
And we'll nab dinner crab-wise—a feast on the dead.

PUFFIN: You eat DEAD things?

ROCK CRAB: You got it; whatever washes in, I'll clean it up. You might say I'm kind of an intertidal sanitation engineer. Nice, succulent rotting capelin...mmm-MM!

PUFFIN: Yeah, well, I eat capelin too, but only when they're alive and swimming in the sea. Dead ones...yuck! I certainly won't eat lunch with you. But wait a minute! Didn't my mom say crabmeat was nice and tender?

ROCK CRAB: I knew it! Oh, no you don't. (scuttles away)

PUFFIN: Boy, (s)he's a tough one to crack. Dead rotten fish—bleah! Maybe if I go out a little deeper here I'll find some live ones. Oops! Who are YOU?

URCHIN: I look like a plant, but I'm really a creature  
Whose hide is his (her) pride—my most prominent feature!  
I have spines all around me to aid in my searchin'  
For snacks in the cracks of the rocks—I'm Sea Urchin.  
I just crawl 'round the wall of my favorite tidepool  
Scooping up algae and keeping my hide cool.  
And if you should flip me (don't do that! It tickles!)  
I can stand on my hands with the aid of my prickles.  
You're lucky to see me—the tide must be falling  
'Cause I'm not one for hot sun or long-distance hauling.  
I just creep in the deep at the edge of the ocean  
Where my friends the anemones show me the motion.  
So, you're a puffin with nuffin' to stuff in your tummy?  
Run the brine through your spines just like mine—algae's yummy!

PUFFIN: Gosh, you eat with your spines? This place just gets weirder and weirder!

URCHIN: No, no. I eat with my stomach, just like you do. I just use my spines to get around. Where are yours?

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PUFFIN: Uh, well, I've got wings, and they feel all salty and spiny right now from all the salt that's dried on them. I'm going to have to oil them some more before I can fly out over the ocean to look for capelin. I hope I can do that soon, 'cause there sure isn't anything for me to eat here.

URCHIN: Well, there is for me, and here comes dinner now—a fresh wave of algae! Be seeing you!

PUFFIN: Oh! Look! The Tide's coming in! (prearranged volunteer from the audience runs across stage carrying a box of Tide detergent)

INTERTIDAL DWELLERS (variously): Oh, tide's coming! Dinnertime! Sup-sup-supertime! Bring on the algae! Hey, suckers! Surf's up! Bye, puffin! Good luck! Good eating! Don't forget your filter! And your green feathers! Next time, bring your fibers! (INTERTIDAL DWELLERS huddle together as PUFFIN helps two audience volunteers pull blue plastic tarp over their heads, then exits carrying Tide.)