

Maryland's Watermen: End of An Era

Teacher's Guide

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Objectives:

After working with this lesson, students will:

- Connect Maryland history with current environmental problems and their effects upon Maryland watermen.
- Describe how living in the Chesapeake region has affected people's lives.
- Explain the impact of technological changes on Maryland's economy.
- Describe the rich diversity of the Maryland watermen and cite the contributions they have made to our state.

Maryland Learning Outcomes:

Social Studies Skills

Students will demonstrate an understanding of historical and current events using chronological and spatial thinking, develop historical interpretations, and frame questions that include collecting and evaluating information from primary and secondary sources.

- Find, apply, and organize information specific to social studies disciplines by reading, asking questions, and observing.

Geography:

Students will use geographic concepts and processes to examine the role of culture, technology, and the environment in the location and distribution of human activities and spatial connections throughout time.

- Identify and locate physical and human-made characteristics of places and explain how those characteristics have affected people living there.
- Describe the relationship between physical characteristics of a place and the location of human activities.

Economics:

Students will develop economic reasoning to understand the historical development and current status of economic principles, institutions, and processes needed to be effective citizens, consumers, and workers participating in local communities, the nation, and the world.

- Explain how producers combine resources to provide goods and services to satisfy economic wants
- Explain how changes in technology (factories, machinery, transportation, communication, new technology) impact Maryland's economy.

Materials needed:

- Reference and resource books on the Chesapeake, oystering, crabbing and clamming.
- Samples of well designed flyers.
- Map of Maryland to show the site of the proposed Maryland Watermen's Monument
- Materials, such as construction paper and paint supplies, to make flyers.

Worksheets Used in This Lesson:

- Waterman's Worksheet (K-W-L)

Selected web sites Referenced in this Lesson:

- Annual skipjack races: <http://skipjack.net/races/results.html>
- Blacks on the Chesapeake: <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/irc/watermen.html>

Teacher Background Information:

The mention of Chesapeake Bay watermen usually conjures up romantic images of the solitary dredger tonging for oysters and the crabber hauling up pots at the end of the day. Their days are never quite over – there are always nets to mend and eels to catch. These farmers of Chesapeake Bay continue their struggle to live a free and independent life in the outdoors. The way of life of watermen in Maryland and throughout the Chesapeake area adds color and character to our traditions.

However, the Maryland watermen's life style is threatened with the loss of "product" to harvest. At one time, a waterman could make a good living crabbing, oystering, and clamming on the Bay. Today it is becoming a dying art. Some old timers are still trying to scrape together a living working off their skipjacks and fishing boats. But on some days, it is not worth turning on the engine. A third generation skipjack captain, Wadey Murphy of Tilghman Island, has the oldest skipjack on the Chesapeake. The *Rebecca T. Ruark* was built in 1886. After spending a lot of money trying to keep the skipjack afloat, he says, "If there are no oysters to harvest, what's the point of keeping an old boat going and beating her up to dredge for oysters that ain't there?"

The seafood industry was once a huge business in Maryland, and oysters were king. However, these days are gone, perhaps for good. For instance, the harvest in 1992-93 was under 150,000 bushels, compared to 1.5 million bushels harvested ten years before. During the disastrous 1992-93 season, many skipjacks went dredging north of the Bay Bridge for the first time because most of the disease-stricken oysters south of the Bridge were dead. The men of the skipjacks were out of work. The demand for oysters and crabs remains high in Maryland and across the United States, but our Bay can no longer keep up with the demand.

The reasons for the decline of product in Chesapeake Bay are complex and worthy of extensive study. However, the answer, in brief, is "People!" as Earl White, the Admiral of the Bay, says. "People done it all. By the time they realize what they was doing, it was to late." Some of the things people do include:

- Farmers around the Bay put fertilizer on their fields to make the crops grow better. The fertilizer runs off into the Bay and makes algae grow. This blocks the sunlight from getting to the bottom, so the grasses that the baby crabs need for food die. Since they don't have enough food, the baby crabs die, too.
- Cities and industries in the state need to get rid of the waste that people make. They dump pollutants, like oil, sewage, and industrial waste, into rivers that lead into the Bay. These pollutants kill the fish.
- School children – from Cumberland to Frederick to Baltimore to Chestertown to Salisbury – throw plastic bags onto the ground. Rain washes the plastic bags into storm drains. The storm drains empty into streams that empty into rivers that empty into Chesapeake Bay. Ducks eat the plastic bags, get sick, and die.

Students will investigate these and other indicators of the health of Chesapeake Bay as they work through this and other *Maryland Explorations*, especially the units on environmental concerns.

Despite these limitations, some watermen continue to struggle to maintain their quintessentially Maryland way of life. Many of those still struggling are Black. When people think of Maryland watermen, they rarely think of Blacks – and yet African Americans have been harvesting and sailing the Bay since first coming to these shores. Though long and rich, this tradition has until recently remained largely undocumented. Through the efforts of Vincent Leggett and the Blacks of the Chesapeake Foundation, the contribution of Black watermen are beginning to be recognized.

As a way to recognize the contribution of all the watermen of the state, a Maryland Watermen's Monument is being planned. Queen Anne's County Commissioner George O'Donnell is spearheading a campaign that plans to build a larger-than-life sculpture to honor this tradition. The monument will be located at Kent Narrows at the end of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge on the Eastern Shore. The monument will be a fitting tribute to a colorful and rich heritage that deserves preservation.

Teaching Tips:

- Collect books and other resources for the students to have available in your room ahead of time.
- Contact the Watermen's Association, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, or the Queen Anne's County Tourist Bureau to obtain additional information.
- Have copies of a Maryland map available so the students can locate the proposed site of the Watermen's Monument.
- Read some Maryland folklore or personal interest stories to the students beforehand, so they understand that this is an important human interest story that has both economic and cultural significance.
- Encourage students' individual talents and provide them resources and opportunities as they develop their own flyer promoting the Watermen's Monument.

Introduction/Motivation:

The economy of Maryland has long been tied to Chesapeake Bay. The decline in Bay output has had a negative impact on the economy of the state. For instance, the restaurants and seafood markets that depend on the watermen who work the Bay for clams, crabs, oysters, have suffered because there has been less to sell. The art of wooden boat building and the fleet of oyster-dredging skipjacks have also declined. Families that have been watermen for years have had to find other ways to make a living.

Tell students that you are going to read a few quotes from people who have spent their lives making a living on the Bay. Tell them to listen to the quotes and give examples of the specialized work that people did and describe the changes that have occurred and the effects of these changes.

- *“When I left Crisfield in the early 1950s, there were 26 crab and oyster houses with plenty of work for anyone who wanted it. Now there is only two or three left in the town. You wouldn’t believe that this place went from the biggest seafood processing industry in the world to where it is now. “*
- *“Francis Goddard’s fleet of wooden workboats is for sale, but there doesn’t seem to be much demand anymore for the likes of a 50 foot oyster-dredging skipjack or a 64-foot buy boat. The oysters are gone. Can’t drudge for ‘em with a drudge boat, or buy ‘em with a buy boat.”*
- *“Dependable oyster shuckers are harder and harder to find because it’s seasonal work and people want full-time jobs. If we shuck 100 gallons a day, I’m satisfied.”*

Lesson Development:

In this lesson, students:

- Collect and record data about watermen using a Know-Want to Know-Learn Worksheet.
- Listen to an audio clip from Queen Anne's Country Commissioner George O'Donnell explaining what a waterman is.
- Watch a video clip by Earl White, "Admiral of the Chesapeake," that explains that people are the root cause of the decline in seafood harvests.
- Read an article about an "old timer" from the *Waterman's Gazette* on the web.
- Look at pictures on the web from the 1999 Skipjack Race off Deal Island.
- Study pictures on the Blacks on the Chesapeake web site.
- Listen to an audio clip about the proposed Maryland Watermen's Monument.
- Design, write, and produce a flyer promoting the construction of the Watermen's Monument.

Thoughtful Application:

Throughout this lesson, students gather information and ideas about Maryland watermen and the challenges of trying to survive with the decline of crabs and oysters. The lifestyle of the Maryland watermen is strongly connected with the social, cultural, political, and economic life of the state. Students learn about the importance of the watermen and think about ways to support and honor their hard work and dedication to a traditional, but dying, way of life.

As their final activity, students are directed to design a flyer targeted at citizens and businesses encouraging support for the construction of the Watermen's Monument at Kent Narrows on the Eastern Shore. To help students successfully complete their tasks, show them examples of good flyers. Provide them with suitable materials, such as construction paper and paints, to make their flyers.

Scoring Tool:

Students will receive	
3 Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If their flyers are written in clear and precise language. • Include a description of the project and at least three reasons to support it. • Include at least two facts about Maryland watermen. • Is attractive to look at and easy to read.
2 Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If their flyers are written in proper language. • Include a description of the project and at least one reason to support it. • Include at least one fact about Maryland watermen. • Is attractive to look at and easy to read.
1 Point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If their flyers have grammatically errors. • Include a description of the project but no convincing reasons to support it. • Do not include facts about Maryland watermen. • Is messy or unattractive.

Extensions:

- Have the students study legislative actions taken in the past to support or oppose the problems that continue to plague Chesapeake Bay and threaten the lives of watermen. A discussion of such legislation can be found in back issues of the *Watermen's Gazette* - either in the newspaper or on web site.
- Find articles in the newspaper about the Bay and watermen.
- Interview a waterman and/or invite one to your school.
- Take a field trip with Captain Earl White and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.
- Take photographs of watermen working and/or harvesting crabs, oysters, or clams for your flyer.
- Distribute copies of your class' flyers to people in your community.

Additional Resources:

- The *Star Democrat* from Easton, MD, published an excellent series of articles on Black watermen in August 1998. Entitled "Black Men, Blue Waters," the series was written by Harold Anderson. Titles include:
 - August 5, 1998, "African Americans on the Chesapeake"
 - August 12, 1998, "Being a Weatherman, The Hardest Work in the World"
 - August 16, 1998, "Harsh life at Sea was a Step Up From Slavery"
- *Geography of Maryland*, Vera F. Roll, Maryland Historical Press. #0-017882-10-5.
- *Maryland, My State, Teacher's Resources*, Houghton Mifflin. #0-395-54722-9.
- *America the Beautiful: Maryland*, Gregory A. Stiverson, Maryland Historical Press. #0-516-00466-2
- *Maryland Personalities: The Black Experience in Maryland*, Vera F. Rollo, Maryland Historical Press.
- *Awesome Chesapeake*, Marcy Dunn Ramsey, Tidewater Publishing Company.
- *The Maryland Colony*, Dennis Brindell Fraden. #0-516-00394.
- *Maryland's Vanishing Lives*, John Sherwood, John Hopkins University Press. #0-8018-5249-8.
- *Working the Water, The Commercial Fisheries of Maryland's Patuxent River*, Paula J. Johnson, Calvert Marine Museum Publishing, Va. #0-8139-1156-7.
- *The Last Waterman*, by Glenn Lawson, Crisfield Publishing Co.
- *Where Did all the Water Go?*, Carolyn Sterns, ill. David Aiken, Tidewater Publishing Co. #0-870033-506-5.
- *Turning the Tide*, Tom Horton, Island Press, Washington, DC. #1-55963-100-7.
- *Watermen's Gazette*, monthly newspaper published by the Watermen's Association, Annapolis, Maryland. Also on the web at:
<http://www.MarylandWatermen.com/index.htm>