The Chesapeake’s Best Crab Cakes

A Study in Geography, Social Studies, and Economics

A 5E lesson developed by the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in coordination with Talbot County Public Schools
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Overview

The Chesapeake's Best Crab Cakes: A Study in Geography, Social Studies, and Economics focuses on the relationship between the natural environment and the way people live and work on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Featuring the Chesapeake Bay blue crab and its journey from the Bay to our dinner plates, students learn about the watermen who catch the crabs, the seafood pickers and packing house operators who process the crabs, and the cooks who prepare crab dishes in local restaurants. Through the program, students develop new skills, insights, and a more complete understanding of the issues facing the people who work in the Chesapeake’s seafood industries.

This program is adapted from a collaboration between the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum and Talbot County Public Schools as part of the third grade social studies unit on Talbot County. The activities are aligned with the Maryland State Curriculum in Social Studies, Science, Environmental Literacy, and Financial Literacy.

The Chesapeake’s Best Crab Cakes immersive tour program begins in the classroom with a 5E model lesson designed to help students explore the blue crab and its impact on people. Students work in the classroom through the Engage, Explore, and Explain sections. For the Evaluate section of the lesson, teachers bring students on a field trip to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum where students visit a waterman’s wharf, find out about crab picking, and role play in the Miles River Seafood Restaurant. After the Museum visit, teachers lead students in the final Evaluate section to assess the depth of student knowledge. Additional informative teacher resources are listed at the end of the lesson.
Chesapeake’s Best Crab Cakes
5E Model Lesson

The Teaching Process

Grade Level(s): K to 5

Subject Areas: Social Studies/Science

Lesson Overview: This 5E model lesson complements the *Chesapeake’s Best Crab Cakes* immersive tour at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum. Providing a sequence of pre- and post-visit activities, the lesson melds classroom and museum learning, as students explore the impact of the blue crab on a variety of different people in the Chesapeake region.

Compelling Question: How does the blue crab impact the lives of different people?

List of Materials:
- Crabbing Brainstorm Web to project or hang on the board (*Engage*)
- copies of the Learning Menu for students (*Explore*)
- copies of activities to complete the Learning Menu (*Explore*)
- Youtube link for Crab Cakes video ([https://goo.gl/OAdEFP](https://goo.gl/OAdEFP)), computer and projector (*Explain*)
- yarn or ball of string for Crabbing Industry Interactive Job Web activity (*Explain*)
- Script for Crabbing Industry Interactive Job Web activity (*Explain*)
- Cards for Crabbing Industry Interactive Job Web activity (*Explain*)
- Student Field Trip Evaluation (*Elaborate*)
- copies of Evaluation activities (*Evaluation*)

Instructional Process

Engage

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<tr>
<th>Teacher Does</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Ask students to brainstorm what they already know about crabs. This might be a class discussion, or begin with a small group turn-and-talk small discussion first. Record student answers using the Crab Brainstorm Web diagram. Continue the discussion by also asking students:</td>
<td>Students brainstorm and discuss what they already know about crabs.</td>
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<td>• how they learned this information about crabs</td>
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<td>• what categories of information are on the web (i.e. eating crabs, parts of crabs)</td>
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<td>2. Introduce the lesson’s compelling question. To answer this question, students will investigate and learn about the blue crab in the classroom and on a field trip to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum.</td>
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**Explore**

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<tr>
<td><strong>Grades 3-5:</strong> Introduce the Learning Menu to your students. Depending on</td>
<td>Students select activities from the Learning Menu to learn more about the</td>
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<td>your class, you may choose to have your students work alone or in groups to</td>
<td>blue crab.</td>
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<tr>
<td>complete one or more tasks from each section of the menu. For reading</td>
<td><em>Recommended:</em> Ask students to complete one “Appetizer” activity, one “Soups</td>
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<td>activities, you may read the stories as a class, and then have students</td>
<td>and Salads” activity, and one “Dinner” activity.</td>
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<td>answer the close reading questions as the Learning Menu activity.</td>
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<td><strong>Grades K-2:</strong> You may use the Learning Menu OR select menu activities for</td>
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<td>students to learn more about the blue crab.</td>
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**Explain**

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<td>1. Based on the exploration activities that students completed, ask them</td>
<td>1. Students complete the Crab Vocabulary activity and review answers as a</td>
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<td>if they can match up the vocabulary terms with their definitions. Students</td>
<td>class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>may work independently or in pairs. Review answers with the class.</td>
<td>2. Watch the Crab Cakes video</td>
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<td>2. Introduce and play the Crab Cakes video ([<a href="https://goo.gl/fqgjxe">https://goo.gl/fqgjxe</a>](https://</td>
<td>3. Complete the hands-on webbing activity to discuss the different jobs</td>
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<td>goo.gl/fqgjxe](<a href="https://goo.gl/fqgjxe">https://goo.gl/fqgjxe</a>)). Before playing, ask students to</td>
<td>involved with getting the crab from the Bay to the plate.</td>
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<td>silently note how many different jobs they see in the video.</td>
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<td>3. After the video, make a list and discuss the different jobs of people</td>
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<td>involved in the crabbing industry. Who is involved? How does their work</td>
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<td>relate to the blue crab?</td>
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<td>4. As a class, complete the interactive Crabbing Industry Interactive Job</td>
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<td>Web activity. Randomly distribute job cards to all students. Read through</td>
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<td>the Crabbing Industry Interactive Job Web script, one line at a time. The</td>
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<td>student whose card matches the first line should hold the end of the ball of</td>
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<tr>
<td>yarn or string. As students hear the description on their card, they will</td>
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<td>take the ball of yarn and hold on to a piece of it to create a large group</td>
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<tr>
<td>web. Once everyone has been connected to the web, ask students to hold their</td>
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<td>arms up so the web is over their heads. Ask what they notice about all of</td>
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<tr>
<td>the people in the crabbing industry, and hold a brief discussion about the</td>
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<td>interconnections between different jobs.</td>
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**Elaborate**

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| Arrange to visit the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum to participate in the *Chesapeake's Best Crab Cakes Immersive Tour*. | Groups will rotate through four stations:  
  - examine the biology of the blue crab at Waterman's Wharf  
  - trotline activity to learn how watermen catch crabs  
  - crab picking simulation at the Maryland Crab Company  
  - order from a menu at the Miles River Seafood Restaurant |
| For more information or to make a reservation inquiry, check out [cbmm.org/learn/school-programs](http://cbmm.org/learn/school-programs). | |

**Evaluate**

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| Choose an Evaluation Activity for your students to complete or give them a choice of activities:  
  - Create a Crab Comic by captioning illustrations  
  - Catching Crabs Writing Task about the methods of harvesting crabs  
  - Read “Crab Talk” by Gilbert Byron and illustrate the story or write a poem about your experiences with the blue crab | Students demonstrate the depth of their understanding by completing an Evaluation Activity to show what they have learned about the blue crab. |
Crabbing Brainstorm Web
Learning Menu

Appetizers (Chesapeake Blue Crabs)

#1. Blue Crab Biology
Learn the parts of the crab and where it lives.

#2. Crab Math
Solve six word problems about crabs.

#3. Chesapeake Crab Maps
Analyze maps about crabs in the Chesapeake Bay.

Soups and Salads (The Crab in History)

#4. Make a Timeline of the
Chesapeake Crab Industry
Organize a timeline of events in the crab industry.

#5. Why the Sideways Scuttling Crab
Has No Head folk tale
Read a folk tale about the crab in other cultures.

Dinners (People in the Crab Industry)

#6. Chesapeake Voices
Read about the experiences of Eastern Shore crab pickers.

#7. J.M. Clayton Seafood Co. Celebrates 125 Years of Crab Picking on the Eastern Shore
Learn about the world's oldest crab picking company.
Can you identify the parts of the blue crab?

Shell
Claws
Legs
Eyes
Back Fin

Fill in the blanks using the words listed below.

warmer    molting    saltier    soft    eggs    eelgrass    hibernate

In the winter, female crabs swim to the southern part of the Bay where the water is __________ and __________. Here they will lay their _______. When the weather gets cold, male crabs head for deep water where they _________ by burying in the mud.

Crabs shed their shells as they grow. This process is known as _______. The crab’s new shell is_________. Soft shell crabs hide in ____________ to avoid being eaten by fish or other crabs. Their new shell will start to harden in a few hours after shedding.
Can you identify the parts of the blue crab?

Fill in the blanks using the words listed below.

warmer molting saltier soft eggs eelgrass hibernate

In the winter, female crabs swim to the southern part of the Bay where the water is ______________ and ______________. Here they will lay their __________. When the weather gets cold, male crabs head for deep water where they ______________ by burying in the mud.

Crabs shed their shells as they grow. This process is known as __________. The crab’s new shell is __________. Soft shell crabs hide in ______________ to avoid being eaten by fish or other crabs. Their new shell will start to harden in a few hours after shedding.
1. Ocean Odyssey Seafood Restaurant in Cambridge uses 150 pounds of crabmeat each week. If they are open 5 days a week, how much crabmeat do they use each day? Remember to label your answer.

2. Elise has 12 crabs. Each one is 5 inches long from point to point. If she lines them up, how long will her line of crabs be? Write your answer in inches and feet.

3. A waterman earns $1.00 for one peeler crab. If he catches 13, how much money will he earn when he sells his peelers? Show your work.

4. Tyrone's trotline is 96 feet long. He ties on a chicken neck as bait every 3 feet. How many chicken necks does he use to bait his trotline?

5. Maria keeps 2 crab pots on her dock. She wants to have a crab feast on Friday. She started catching crabs on Monday and kept them in a floating cage until the feast. On Monday she caught 3 crabs. On Tuesday she caught 4. On Wednesday she only had 1 in each pot. On Thursday she found 6. On Friday she caught 5 crabs. How many crabs does Maria have for her feast?

6. A waterman is paid $90 for a bushel of crabs. If he catches 4 bushels of crabs, how much money does he make that day?
1. Ocean Odyssey Seafood Restaurant in Cambridge uses 150 pounds of crabmeat each week. If they are open 5 days a week, how much crabmeat do they use each day? Remember to label your answer.

\[150 \div 5 = 30 \text{ lbs.}\]

2. Elise has 12 crabs. Each one is 5 inches long from point to point. If she lines them up, how long will her line of crabs be? Write your answer in inches and feet.

\[12 \times 5 \text{ inches} = 60 \text{ inches}\]
\[60 \div 12 = 5 \text{ feet}\]

3. A waterman earns $1.00 for one peeler crab. If he catches 13, how much money will he earn when he sells his peelers? Show your work.

\[1.00 \times 13 = 13.00\]

4. Tyrone's trotline is 96 feet long. He ties on a chicken neck as bait every 3 feet. How many chicken necks does he use to bait his trotline?

\[96 \div 3 = 32 \text{ chicken necks}\]

5. Maria keeps 2 crab pots on her dock. She wants to have a crab feast on Friday. She started catching crabs on Monday and kept them in a floating cage until the feast. On Monday she caught 3 crabs. On Tuesday she caught 4. On Wednesday she only had 1 in each pot. On Thursday she found 6. On Friday she caught 5 crabs. How many crabs does Maria have for her feast?

\[3 + 4 + 1 + 1 + 6 + 5 = 20\]

6. A waterman is paid $90 for a bushel of crabs. If he catches 4 bushels of crabs, how much money does he make that day?

\[90.00 \times 4 = 360.00\]
Use the map of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed to answer the questions.

1. List all of the states labeled on the map.

2. If it rains somewhere in the gray area, that water will eventually end up in the Chesapeake Bay. What happens if there is pollution in that area? How does that impact the Chesapeake Bay?

3. Which states are responsible for the health of the Chesapeake Bay? Why?

4. Creatures like the blue crab depend on a healthy Chesapeake Bay. What are two things you can do to help protect the Chesapeake Bay?
Use the graphs to answer the following questions.

1. In what year was the Chesapeake Bay crab population at its highest?

2. On average, how many crabs live in the Chesapeake Bay?

3. In 2012, about how many millions of pounds of crabs were harvested?

4. How did Maryland's crab harvest change between 2010 and 2014?

5. How does a decline in the crab population impact watermen’s harvests?

6. Brainstorm two reasons the Chesapeake crab population might have improved in 2016?
Use the map of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed to answer the questions.

1. List all of the states labeled on the map.
   
   New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, and Virginia

2. If it rains somewhere in the gray area, that water will eventually end up in the Chesapeake Bay. What happens if there is pollution in that area? How does that impact the Chesapeake Bay?

   Pollutants move into the ground water and eventually wind up in the Bay. These pollutants can hurt the animals and plants in the Chesapeake.

3. Which states are responsible for the health of the Chesapeake Bay? Why?

   Water from all parts of the watershed run into the Chesapeake, so every state in the watershed is responsible. (NY, PA, MD, DE, VA, and WV)

4. Creatures like the blue crab depend on a healthy Chesapeake Bay. What are two things you can do to help protect the Chesapeake Bay?

   Students should list two ways they can help protect the Bay.
Use the graphs to answer the following questions.

1. In what year was the Chesapeake Bay crab population at its highest?

   1993

2. On average, how many crabs live in the Chesapeake Bay?

   approximately 460,000 crabs

3. In 2012, about how many millions of pounds of crabs were harvested?

   approximately 58 million pounds

4. How did Maryland’s crab harvest change between 2010 and 2014?

   decreased by 47 million pounds

5. How does a decline in the crab population impact watermen’s harvests?

   If there are fewer crabs in the Chesapeake Bay, there are fewer crabs for watermen to harvest.

6. Brainstorm two reasons the Chesapeake crab population might have improved in 2016?

   Students should list plausible reasons for the population to improve.
Make a Timeline of the Chesapeake Crab Industry

Arrange these events on the timeline in the correct order.

1940  Old Bay Seasoning is invented by Baltimore spice dealer, Gustav Brunn.

1870  The crab scrape, a tool used to harvest soft-shells crabs, is invented by L. Copper Dize.

1850  African-Americans along the Potomac River in Maryland develop the fish pepper to spice their cooking crabs.

2009  Crab dredging is outlawed in Virginia to protect the population of female sponge crabs, and to boost the overall Chesapeake crab population.

2012  Maryland begins the “True Blue” certification program to recognize restaurants that serve Chesapeake crabmeat exclusively.

1983  Tilghman crabbers go on strike after crab prices are cut.

1916  The first crab conservation laws are passed in Maryland. Laws limit the size of crabs, ban the catching of sponge crabs, and regulate the length of the crabbing season.

1900  The J.M. Clayton Company begins processing crabs in Cambridge, Maryland.

1990  Phillips Seafood opens the first international crab packing operation in Indonesia.

1891  The railroad comes to St. Michaels, and Talbot County seafood is shipped by rail all over the U.S.

1928  The wire crab pot is invented by Benjamin Lewis of Virginia. Watermen now have a new method of crabbing.

1910  A system for sorting crabmeat into backfin, special, regular, claw, and lump is invented by Frederick Jewett of Coulbourne and Jewett Seafood Packing Company in St. Michaels.

1972  Hurricane Agnes destroys much of the Chesapeake Bay’s underwater grasses that provides a habitat for blue crabs.

20__  My class goes on a field trip to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum.
### Make a Timeline of the Chesapeake Crab Industry

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Make a Timeline of the Chesapeake Crab Industry

1850  African-Americans along the Potomac River in Maryland develop the fish pepper to spice their cooking crabs.

1870  The crab scrape, a tool used to harvest soft-shells crabs, is invented by L. Copper Dize.

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1990  Phillips Seafood opens the first international crab packing operation in Indonesia.

2009  Crab dredging is outlawed in Virginia to protect the population of female sponge crabs, and to boost the overall Chesapeake crab population.

2012  Maryland begins the “True Blue” certification program to recognize restaurants that serve Chesapeake crabmeat exclusively.

2012  My class goes on a field trip to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum.
Once upon a time, long ago, the mother of the earth, Nzambi Mpungu, was resting after creating the plants, flowers, lakes, mountains, streams, and oceans. She sighed with happiness as she looked around at the jungles, forests, and savannas. The waters were blue and green, and the skies were clear blue with the occasional fluffy cloud. There were jungles, deep and dark, forests of green and gold, savannas with waving grasses, and white sand beaches with foaming surf.

After her rest, Nzambi Mpungu was ready to take on a great task. First she created the happy monkey. She made limber and strong legs and arms so that they could swing from the branches of the trees and from the hanging vines. Soon the sounds of playful monkeys chattering to each other was heard throughout the forests. Then she made the elegant gazelles, and all types of antelopes, with their shiny coats and a variety of wonderful horns. The savannas were filled with herds of these antelopes racing about!

The next day, Nzambi Mpungu set about on weighty matters. She created the large elephant, hippopotamus, and rhino. The gentle hippo thanked Nzambi for its impressive shape, its very clever ears which rotated in different directions at the same time, and for the wonderful water holes on the savanna where the hippo loved to live and play. The big strong rhinoceros appreciated his thick skin, almost like armor! He strolled across the savannas, and all the animals thought Nzambi very creative to have given him a horn like no other animal. The rhino’s horn was hard all the way through. He didn’t mind in the least that he was a little near-sighted! Nzambi went on to the grand elephant. As the night deepened, Nzambi grew tired, and she told the elephant that she would finish him in the morning. The patient and respectful elephant told Nzambi Mpungu to have a good sleep. In the morning, refreshed, Nzambi was true to her word, and finished up the elephant... with an amazing trunk that reached all the way to the ground, and a pair of handsome ivory tusks! He was indeed a grand animal!

Crabs are important in many cultures beyond the Chesapeake. In this story, read how some Africans feel about the crab and the lessons it can teach us. After you read, answer the close reading questions. Make sure to look back at the text!

Why the Sideways Scuttling Crab Has No Head

An African Folk Tale
Nzambi continued her work until the world was filled with animals. There were proud lions, sleek tigers, parrots, and other birds that flashed their colors in the skies, playful zebras with their wild stripes, and gentle giraffes with their breathtakingly long necks. She filled the oceans, lakes, and streams, with silvery fish. She created the beautiful flamingo and the colorful snakes. Indeed the world was filled with life, and the animals appreciated Nzambi Mpungu. They praised her talent, patience and creativity. But, she was not yet done. She started on a crab. She gave the small crab a hard circular shell, and many legs. She skillfully fashioned not two, not four, but eight jointed legs! Now the stars were twinkling in the night sky, and she was tired.

“Well, little crab, I am tired, and I will finish you tomorrow, by giving you a handsome head,” sighed Nzambi. Nzambi noticed that the little crab was strutting about flexing each of his eight legs in a little dance. He was skittering sideways by the side of a pond, clicking his pincers, and admiring himself in the reflection of the water. “Did you hear me, my little crab?” she questioned.

“Oh yes, Nzambi, I will have to wait until tomorrow to get my surely magnificent head,” replied the crab, admiring himself all the while. Nzambi was slightly confused by the tone of this reply, but she was so very tired, and she went to sleep quickly.

The little crab was far from tired! Off he scuttled, waving his eight legs prominently, and noisily clicking his pincers wherever he went. He spoke to many of the animals that night. He told the giraffe and antelope to make certain to come to Nzambi Mpungu’s early the next morning to see him get what was sure to be the most magnificent head in all the land. He called up to the birds to be sure to come and see his new head in the morning. He remarked that it had taken Nzambi only part of a day to make the mighty lion, but as anyone could see, she was going to work on him for two days! Now, this was not entirely accurate, but that is indeed what the little crab said. Then he went on, becoming more bold with each encounter. He told the lion that he had eight legs to the elephant’s four, he told the zebra that his bright colors were brighter than those of most animals, he told the monkeys that he had infinite mobility with his eight legs that could skitter to the front, back or sideways! All these traits, the little crab boasted, surely made him a wonderful creature, and surely, he promised, Nzambi had been saving the best for last! The head she had promised would be the most intricately shaped, the most beautiful, and the most clever!

I am sorry to tell you, but the little crab boasted all night long, whipping all the other animals into a frenzy of excitement over tomorrow’s creation of the crab’s head. The stories of what Nzambi had promised grew bigger and more elaborate as the night turned from its darkest to a shimmering of dawn. In the morning all of the animals were assembled outside of Nzambi’s, waiting with great anticipation! Nzambi awoke; after all, it was noisy that morning! She came out and was thoroughly surprised to see all the animals gathered about the crab.

“What is happening here?” she queried.

The kindly elephant slowly advanced and explained that all the animals had assembled to watch the crab receive his magnificent head. He explained that they were all excited to see a creation such as the one that crab had described. He continued to elaborate on the glorious expectations of the crab head. He finished up by acknowledging that all the animals agreed that such a head could only be made by one as brilliant and wise as she, Nzambi Mpungu.

And Nzambi was wise. She saw immediately the folly of conceit, and the dangers of telling a not quite true story! She turned to the preening crab, and quickly gave him two eyes that poked out from the top of his hard shell body. Than she said, “Little crab, I think you are fine the way you are.” Nzambi gave a great yawn, turned, and went back to sleep.

The crab turned and faced all the other animals, then skittered off. Now his sideways gait was from embarrassment!

Adapted from Folktales, Legends, and Myths, Patail Enterprises, 1995.
Why The Sideways Scuttling Crab Has No Head

Close Reading Questions

Using the folk tale you just read, answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. In paragraph 1, who is Nzambi Mpungu?

2. According to the story, what was the first animal to be created?

3. What was the last animal that was created?

4. What did the crab do after Nzambi Mpungu went to sleep?

5. Who explained to Nzambi why all the animals were gathered, and what did he say?

6. Why did Nzambi Mpungu only give the crab two eyes instead of a head?

7. What is the story's lesson or moral?

8. Write your own crab story on a separate piece of paper.
Why The Sideways Scuttling Crab Has No Head

Close Reading Questions

Using the folk tale you just read, answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. In paragraph 1, who is Nzambi Mpungu?
   
   She is the Mother of the Earth who created the plants, waters, and mountains before creating the animals.

2. According to the story, what was the first animal to be created?
   
   The first animal to be created was the happy monkey.

3. What was the last animal that was created?
   
   The last animal to be created was the crab.

4. What did the crab do after Nzambi Mpungu went to sleep?
   
   After Nzambi Mpungu went to sleep, the crab boasted about how magnificent her head would be when Nzambi Mpungu made it the next day.

5. Who explained to Nzambi why all the animals were gathered, and what did he say?
   
   The elephant explained that the animals had gathered to watch the creation of the crab’s head.

6. Why did Nzambi Mpungu only give the crab two eyes instead of a head?
   
   The crab was boastful and did not tell the true story.

7. What is the story’s lesson or moral?
   
   Lead a class discussion about this question.

8. Write your own crab story on a separate piece of paper.
My father worked at Charles Parks when I was a child back in the ‘20s and ‘30s—they’re still in crab picking even today. And my mother picked crabs there, Mrs. Parks taught her. This factory was where the steamboats came. The floor was wooden in the factory; there was no cement floor like today. At one time, my mother and father lived right there. They had an apartment above the crab house, which was way out in the water on the long wooden wharf. I would think because of the steamboat, it had to be out in the channel. And I learned to count to a hundred there, to count peeler crabs from the crabbers bringing them in.

—Evelyn Robinson, crab picker from Dorchester County. She has picked crabs for over 45 years.
When I was a kid, I would work every summer doing all those little things that no one else wanted to do. All the cans for the day had to be dipped in a sanitizer. So I’d be given a stack of a thousand cans and had to dip every one of them. Turn them upside down; count them out in lots of a hundred, made sure everyone had ice in their bin, made sure everyone had paper towels, and carrying the meat up and bringing it back to the pickers—things like that. And I did that every summer, for years. It was always my summer job.

—Tim Howard, owner and manager, Maryland Crab Meat Company. He grew up working in the packinghouse, and ran the company until it closed in 1999.

Where my sisters and I live in Mexico is a big city—an industrial city. We have a university, big clinics and buildings, but there are not too many opportunities for work. Here we have an opportunity to earn more money. If I work very hard here, what I would make in Mexico working for one whole month, I can earn here in one week—and I spend less here. Yes, everything is worthwhile—the effort, the sacrifice, the pain involved in the work we do. That is why we keep coming back, because there is an advantage for us in this work and that is why we leave our families behind to work here from April through November.

—Guadalupe Garcia Ortiz, crab picker from Mexico. She comes to the Chesapeake each summer and fall to pick crabs.

Coordination’s everything in picking a crab. If you don’t have coordination, then you can forget it, because really you’re not doing very much. And that’s why anybody pick crab long enough, if they’re any good at it at all, they say they’re a professional. I always say that, but it’s an art to doing all this. That’s why these ladies can talk and not have to look at what they’re doing, because they know their hands are working together.

—Donald Cephas, the fastest claw cracker on the Eastern Shore.

We didn’t have babysitters back then on Hooper’s Island, so mama would take us to the crab house—some people even brought their playpens in there. There wasn’t any law then that you couldn’t keep the children out of the crab house—and even after there was, I still brought my own kids down. We thought we were having a good time because we didn't know any different, you know. It was just the way that everybody lived.

—Laurena Collemer, crab picker from Dorchester County. She picked crabs for over forty-five years and now trains Mexican pickers.
Chesapeake Voices
Close Reading Questions

Using the folk tale you just read, answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. In paragraph 1, how did Ms. Evelyn learn to count to 100?

2. In paragraph 2, Mr. Tim Howard shares his summer job. Who was Mr. Howard and where did he work?

3. According to paragraph 3, why does Ms. Garcia Ortiz come to pick crabs each year?

4. In the opinion of Mr. Cephas in paragraph 4, what skill is important for picking crabs? Why?

5. Describe the atmosphere in a crab house according to Ms. Collemer's explanation in paragraph 5.
Chesapeake Voices
Close Reading Questions

Using the folk tale you just read, answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. In paragraph 1, how did Ms. Evelyn learn to count to 100?

   Ms. Evelyn learned to count to 100 by counting peeler crabs as the watermen brought them in.

2. In paragraph 2, Mr. Tim Howard shares his summer job. Who was Mr. Howard and where did he work?

   Mr. Howard owned the Maryland Crab Meat Company, but he grew up working in the packinghouse.

3. According to paragraph 3, why does Ms. Garcia Ortiz come to pick crabs each year?

   Ms. Garcia Ortiz comes to pick crabs each year because she can make as much money in one week as she would make working for a month at home in Mexico.

4. In the opinion of Mr. Cephas in paragraph 4, what skill is important for picking crabs? Why?

   Mr. Cephas says that coordination is most important for picking crabs because your hands need to work together to successfully and quickly pick the crab meat.

5. Describe the atmosphere in a crab house according to Ms. Collemer’s explanation in paragraph 5.

   Ms. Collemer describes the crab house as a family atmosphere with mothers bringing their children to work with them.
In a Pinch:

J.M. Clayton Seafood Company celebrates 125 years of crab picking on the Eastern Shore.

By Rafael Alvarez - July 2015

The first day of crab-picking season at the J.M. Clayton Seafood Company in Cambridge was April 16. That's a little later than usual, thanks to a long winter's freeze.

The crack of the first claw at Clayton was the start of eight months of processing crabmeat on the Choptank River, a season that almost exactly parallels baseball season. And just like the national pastime, the big prizes come in September and October, the time of the greatest blue crab harvests in the Chesapeake Bay.

Some people think of steamed hard crabs with Fourth of July cookouts and vacations down by the ocean, but autumn “is when the crabs are migrating,” says William “Bill” Brooks. Mr. Brooks' great-grandfather was John Morgan Clayton (known to all as “Captain Johnnie”) who started the company. Since the late 19th century, J.M. Clayton Seafood has moved ton upon ton of oysters and crabs from Maryland waters to kitchen and picnic tables, thanks to five generations of the Clayton family and many thousands of employees.

J.M. Clayton Seafood was started 125 years ago on Hoopers Island and is believed to be the oldest working crab-processing plant in the world. Clayton's crabmeat is desired by restaurants. It is marketed under the name Epicure, the name of Captain Johnnie's boat.

Captain Johnnie, a native of Accomack County, VA, started the company named after him in 1890 along a wooden pier on Hoopers Island. Business was good for the next 30 years. After the invention of telephones, trucking, and trains, Captain Johnnie realized that things could be even better if he had greater access to major markets such as Wilmington, DE, the Midwest, and Baltimore. So in 1921, he packed up the whole kit-and-caboodle—including his workers and their families—and moved the operation about 30 miles north to Cambridge.

“J.M. Clayton is vital to the survival of the state's crabbing industry,” says Steve Vilnit, former director of fisheries marketing at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. “These picking houses allow watermen to harvest and sell their product throughout the season. Without them, the history and tradition of crabbing would not survive.” Today, J.M. Clayton works with 30 to 40 watermen, some of them the grandsons of men who dealt directly with Captain Johnnie.

Now in charge of J.M. Clayton are three of Captain Johnnie's great-grandsons. They are the sons of John Clayton Brooks: Jack, Bill, and Joe. Jack Brooks, 63, the current president, took over in 1989. Brother Joe “can do it all,” and Bill works the books and directs the wholesale market.

“I'm a seat-of-the-pants businessman,” says Bill Brooks of the unpredictable crab industry. “Every day we wake up and react to what comes our way.”
Jack's son Clay is 36 and the fifth generation. He oversees operations and has a very valuable skill: he can speak some Spanish to the mostly Mexican workforce of about 60 people.

According to Joe, J.M. Clayton Seafood always tells the watermen that they will buy all the crabs the watermen can catch.

“All the crabs” at Clayton has been as high as 483,000 pounds of crabmeat in the bountiful 1980s, and dipped as low as 200,000 during a bad spell in the 1990s. In the past five years, the trend has fluctuated between 234,000 and 350,000 pounds per season. Explaining the deal with watermen, Bill Brooks says, “We don't want them looking for hot markets and then just selling us what they cannot sell other places. They have a market for all their crabs here every day they fish, and we expect them to sell us all of their catch.”

Clayton handles both oysters and crabs before shipping them out again for sale. But it is the meat of callinectes sapidus for which it is known.

Many of the business’s employees have worked at J.M. Clayton’s for a long time, like Fronie Dorothy Jones. “That was my mother,” says 81-year-old Nicie (pronounced Nice-y) Jones, a recently retired Clayton picker. As a child, Nicie recalls, “I went out to pick crabs early in the morning, go to school, and then come home and crack more claws in the afternoon. I loved it, loved all the carrying on with my mama and the women I knew in the picking room. Oh honey,” she says, summing up her long life of work, “it was lovely down at that crabhouse.”

Both of Nicie’s parents worked at Clayton’s. Her mother picked there for eight decades before her death in 1992, starting as a child on Hoopers Island and staying at it—paid by the pound, what was called “piece work” in factory language—until she was nearly 90. In her prime, Nicie could pick about 40 pounds of crabmeat in a day and says her mother was even faster. The hours were long, the pay was modest, the season only lasted a six to nine months, and workers’ hands took a gouging. Just like today. “People worked until they couldn’t work anymore,” says Brooks.

If the crabbing season follows the baseball season, its pickers are as competitive as the athletes who play ball. Each picker is given a number and their totals are put up on a white board as the day goes by. The number is also printed on each can of Clayton’s crabmeat for reference when complaints (“I found a shell”) or compliments (“best I’ve ever had”) come in.

Fronie was number 10 and Nicie worked under the number 12. “We have retired both of those numbers,” says Brooks.

“I wasn’t the best, but I was right there with them,” says Nicie. “My mama was the best. She didn’t do too much talking, didn’t take many breaks. She just worked.”

For almost all of Nicie’s career, the other women at the picking tables were virtually all African-Americans from the Eastern Shore. The last African-American in the picking room today is Cornelius Johnson, a man over 80 years old. Cornelius retired from regular picking a while back but comes in now and again to crack claws and keep busy.

By the 1970s, workers started leaving for jobs at a new industrial park in Cambridge. It was a challenge to find Americans to work the crabhouse, so
John Clayton Brooks and some friends invented and patented the “Quik Pik,” a crab-picking machine. Although it was never as good as the human hand when it came to getting the good lump meat from inside a blue crab, it could pick 100 pounds in an hour. And while those machines are no longer in use, the company still uses mechanical pickers today.

In 1997, Clayton brought seasonal laborers from Mexico for the first time to keep the business alive. Without the government “guest worker” system, which allows foreigners to work in the U.S. on a temporary basis, the Clayton company would probably have closed.

There are other signs that the crabbing industry is far more shaky than it was in peak times in the 1930s and 40s. Then, Clayton employed more than twice as many pickers as it does today. Brooks said that the average age of watermen is getting older and their children are less likely to work as watermen, too.

Pollution from a range of sources, loss of habitat like vital bay grasses, overfishing, and disease have all contributed to the decline of the Chesapeake Bay blue crab.

Bill takes it all in stride.

Will there be Maryland steamed crabs on your grandchildren’s picnic table on some far off Memorial Day? “Absolutely,” he says. “Nobody wants to be the guy who catches the last crab.”

Adapted from the Baltimore Magazine, http://www.baltimoremagazine.net/2015/7/15/j-m-clayton-seafood-celebrates-125-years-in-maryland

Close Reading Questions

1. Look at paragraph 2. How is the crab season similar to baseball?

2. Why is J.M. Clayton Seafood Company important? Find at least two pieces of text evidence in paragraphs 3-6.

3. In paragraph 11, what does the word “fluctuated” mean? How do you know this?

4. J.M. Clayton has many employees. What kinds of jobs are there, and what skills do those employees need? Find text evidence from paragraphs 7-9 and 13-18.

5. According to paragraphs 9 and 10, why does J.M. Clayton’s buy all of a waterman’s crabs?

6. Reread paragraphs 14 and 15. Why is speed important for a crab picker?

7. Look at paragraphs 19 and 20. How has crab picking changed since the 1970s?

8. List two reasons the blue crab population is declining. Brainstorm one way you can help.
Crab Vocabulary

apron
bushel basket
callinectes sapidus
chicken neck
crab pot
cull
eelgrass
harvest
industry
jimmy
manager
migrant worker
molting
paper shell
peeler
picker
seafood packinghouse
sook
trotline
waterman
Crab Vocabulary

Match the term on the left with its definition on the right.

1. apron ___ A. What many crabbers use for bait
2. picker ___ B. Someone who oversees or directs a business
3. migrant worker ___ C. A female crab
4. sook ___ D. A large-scale business activity
5. jimmy ___ E. A man or woman who harvests crabs to sell
6. eelgrass ___ F. The underside of a crab
7. trotlining ___ G. A crab whose shell is beginning to split
8. chicken neck ___ H. A person who picks the meat out of a crab
9. waterman ___ I. The scientific name of the blue crab
10. manager ___ J. A method of catching crabs using a long, baited line
11. peeler ___ K. To catch animals to use as a food source
12. industry ___ L. A place where seafood is processed and packed into containers
13. bushel basket ___ M. A male crab
14. paper shell ___ N. A soft crab whose shell has just begun to harden
15. seafood packinghouse ___ O. A type of plant in which crabs like to hide
16. cull ___ P. A crab sheds its old, smaller shell as it grows bigger
17. crab pot ___ Q. A laborer who moves from place to place for work
18. harvest ___ R. A container of a specific size in which watermen keep their crabs
19. molting ___ S. To sort crabs by size
20. callinectes sapidus ___ T. A large, wire cage used to trap crabs
## Crab Vocabulary

Match the term on the left with its definition on the right.

1. apron
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<td>Student Card</td>
<td>Teacher Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I am a blue crab swimming in the Chesapeake Bay.</td>
<td>2 (or more) student cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am a waterman working my trotline near Church Creek.</td>
<td>1 (or more) student cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I am a waterman setting my crab pots in the Honga River.</td>
<td>1 (or more) student cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am a DNR officer patrolling the Little Choptank River.</td>
<td>1 student card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am a truck driver delivering crabs to restaurants in Cambridge.</td>
<td>1 student card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am the owner/buyer for a restaurant in Cambridge.</td>
<td>1 student card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am the owner of Lindy's Seafood in Woolford.</td>
<td>1 student card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I am the person who puts the crabs in the steamer at the packing house.</td>
<td>1 student card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I am a crab picker at Lindy's Seafood in Woolford.</td>
<td>1 student card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am the manager of the seafood department at Food Lion in Cambridge.</td>
<td>1 student card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I am the cashier at Food Lion in Cambridge who sells crabmeat to customers.</td>
<td>1 student card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I am the host/hostess at a restaurant in Cambridge.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1 student card</td>
</tr>
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<td>14. I am a crab picker at a restaurant in Cambridge.</td>
<td>1 student card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I am the chef at a restaurant in Cambridge.</td>
<td>1 student card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I am a customer having (crab dish) at (home or restaurant).</td>
<td>as many cards as you need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Home: steamed crabs or crab soup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Restaurants: crab cakes in Cambridge, crab salad in Easton, crab dip in Annapolis, or soft crabs in Baltimore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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I am the manager of the seafood department at Food Lion in Cambridge.

I am the cashier at Food Lion in Cambridge who sells crabmeat to customers.

I am the host/hostess at a restaurant in Cambridge.

I am the waiter/waitress at a restaurant in Cambridge.

I am a crab picker at a restaurant in Cambridge.

I am the chef at a restaurant in Cambridge.
I am a customer having steamed crabs at home with my family.

I am a customer having crab cakes at a restaurant in Cambridge.

I am a customer having steamed crabs at home with my family.

I am a customer having crab salad at a restaurant in Easton.

I am a customer having crab soup at home with my family.

I am a customer having crab dip at a restaurant in Annapolis.

I am a customer having crab soup at home with my family.

I am a customer having soft crabs at a restaurant in Baltimore.
A Visit to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum
Museum Visit Guidelines

• Follow your school’s field trip guidelines in preparing for the trip.

• Based on your group size, please divide students and chaperones into even groups of approximately 10 students. The groups will rotate between four stations: the Waterman’s Wharf station, the Katie G. station, the Miles River Seafood Restaurant station, and the Packinghouse station.

• Students should wear nametags with first names displayed.

• The Museum Educators will meet teachers, chaperones, and students in front of the CBMM’s Welcome Center. Please have any required paperwork or payments ready at this time.

Note: Students may visit the Museum Store at the end of your program. Please allow no more than 10 students with at least one chaperone into the Museum Store at a time.
Student Field Trip Evaluation

Rate the stations: ☑️ = I liked this station.

☒ = This station was just okay.

☐ = I did not like this station.

Circle the face that shows the way you felt about each station you did today.

Waterman’s Wharf Station ☑️ ☒ ☐

Trotlining on Katie G. ☑️ ☒ ☐

Packinghouse Station ☑️ ☒ ☐

The Miles River Seafood Restaurant Station ☑️ ☒ ☐

Choose one station and describe what you liked.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Write one thing you learned:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Write a question you still have?

________________________________________________________________________
Create a Crab Comic
Write a caption for each picture to tell the story of how blue crabs move from the Chesapeake Bay to your plate.

1. 

2. 

3. 

Name __________________________ Date __________________________
Create a Crab Comic
Write a caption for each picture to tell the story of how blue crabs move from the Chesapeake Bay to your plate.

4.

5.

6.
Catching Crabs Writing Task

EVALUATE
Catching Crabs Writing Task

Look at the four pictures. Each shows a different method of catching or harvesting crabs. Use the pictures to answer one of the questions below in complete sentences.

**QUESTION 1:** Which method would you use to harvest crabs? Explain.

**OR**

**QUESTION 2:** Compare two crab harvesting methods. In your answer, include the names of both methods and the equipment used.
CRAB TALK

By Gilbert Byron, © 1942

Mama sent me
To get the crabs
From old Benny,
Down on the creek
Where the shanty men seek
Happiness.
He was mending eel pots,
Tar and twine,
And deft seine needle,
Chewing tobacco,
Spitting fine,
Whistling softly.
He couldn't even see,
Little boys like me.

I heard them scratching
In a covered basket.
Shyly I whispered,
Scared almost dead,
"Are those the crabs, Captain Ben?"
Rolling an eye, he grunted,
"Them's them,"
That's all he said,
"Them's them."

EVALUATION TASKS

After you read "Crab Talk," complete one of the following tasks:

• **Draw a picture to illustrate the story in "Crab Talk."** Use details from the poem and your visit to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum.

• **Write your own poem about one of your experiences with blue crabs.** Think about what you did at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum.

Gilbert Byron lived, worked, and wrote in St. Michaels, Maryland from the summer of 1946 until his death in June 1991. Byron wrote “Crab Talk” while he was living and teaching in Dover, Delaware.
Web, Video and Print Resources

VIDEOS

The Crab Industry in Talbot County
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0teq6cSGbg

Blue Crab molting and mating—SERC
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFG87XDLZ6U

Bay 101 Blue Crabs—Chesapeake Bay Program
http://vimeo.com/25418647

J.M. Clayton Crab Company—Cambridge, MD
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWpr34F_JHg

Hands of Harvest Short Screener
https://vimeo.com/84490820

WEB SITES

Smithsonian Environmental Research Center
Chesapeake Blue Crabs
http://www.serc.si.edu/education/resources/bluecrab/index.aspx

National Geographic—Chesapeake “Then and Now”
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/chesapeake/

Chesapeake Bay Program—Blue crab field guide
http://www.chesapeakebay.net/fieldguide/critter/blue_crab

Chesapeake Bay Foundation
http://www.cbf.org

Chesapeake Bay Journal—“It’s called a Jubilee, but the crabs aren't happy” http://bit.ly/QpvatX

Maryland Sea Grant—Blue Crabs
http://www.mdsg.umd.edu/issues/chesapeake/blue_crabs/

Virginia Institute of Marine Science Sea Grant
http://vaseagrant.vims.edu/

Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum Education blog
http://www.beautifulswimmers.tumblr.com

ARTICLES


CHILDREN’S BOOKS

Chadwick the Crab, by Priscilla Cummings.
Tidewater Publishers, 1986

Dancing on the Sand: The Story of an Atlantic Blue Crab, by Kathleen Hollenbeck. Smithsonian Institution, 1999


Let’s Go Crabbing, by Rick Parks. Bay Books

Crabby’s Water Wish: Tale of Saving Sea Life, by Suzanne Tate.
Nags Head Art Institute, 1992

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