



Name _____

Date _____

What Happened to the Chesapeake Bay Filtering System?

“Look at this,” said Maggie. She pointed to a page in an old book. “It says that long ago there were millions and millions of oysters in the Chesapeake Bay. In John Smith’s time, ships had to steer around huge oyster beds.”

“I wish it were still like that,” said Maggie’s friend, Nick.

“Are there fewer oyster beds?” asked Maggie.

Nick nodded. He put down his pencil. He had been drawing a picture of the Bay. “My grandfather told me that in 1973 there were over 15 million bushels of oysters taken from the Bay.”

“Wow,” said Maggie. “I bet the number isn’t that high anymore. Let me guess, were there only seven and a half million bushels of oysters taken last year?”

“Wrong,” said Nick. “You’re way off. Guess again.”

Maggie thought for a minute. “One million?” she asked.

“No, only 53,000 bushels,” said Nick. “That’s hard for people who need the money they make from harvesting oysters.”

“It must be,” Maggie thought. Then she said, “I imagine that fewer oysters mean more problems for the Bay, too.”

“Yes, our class took care of an oyster garden last year. That’s when I found out that oysters are the filtering system for the Bay. An oyster can filter about 5 liters of water each hour. That means that algae and nutrients in the Bay water are ‘cleaned’ through an oyster’s system.”

“I bet the Bay water does not get filtered as much now,” said Maggie.

Nick nodded. “My grandfather says that when there were a lot of oysters they probably filtered all the water in the Bay every three or four days.”

“Wow, that’s a big filtering system! I imagine oysters did other good things, too,” said Maggie.

“Yes,” nodded Nick. “He says that the oyster reefs, which are thousands of oysters laying on the bottom of the Bay, made lots of hiding spaces for other Bay animals to use as habitat.”

“I imagine that fewer oysters also mean problems with the food chain,” said Maggie.

“You got it,” said Nick. “Shore birds can’t always find a meal of oysters.”

“You said something about an oyster garden. What’s that?” asked Maggie.

“Come on. I’ll show you,” said Nick as he put his drawing and pencils into his backpack.

Science and Solutions

Nick talked about an oyster garden. What do you think this is?

Read Nick's notes about an oyster garden.



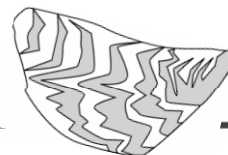
August – Pick up young oysters called spat. Put them in special cages in the water.

August/September – This is a time of growth. Be sure to keep the cages clean.

October/November – Watch the oysters. Collect data.

December through February – Dormant oysters are fine in cold water, even in water that is frozen. They are not OK in frozen air.

March – Plant the oysters on a special reef.



What if you could help at an oyster garden? What would you do? Write about this.

Science As Inquiry

Good scientists try to understand WHY something happens. Think about oysters in the Chesapeake Bay. Why do you think oysters are disappearing?

1.

2.