

“The Lucky Little Seaweed”

A Great Story Parable for 2 Actor-Readers & 1 Narrator

Original by Mark McMenamin; adapted for script by Connie Barlow

(Note: Prof. McMenamin is a paleontologist at Mt. Holyoke College)

www.TheGreatStory.org/parables.html

Instructions for Facilitator: This short script takes about **12 minutes** for **volunteer readers** to recite and act out. **No rehearsal** or preparatory reading is necessary! It has been “performed” many times by adults or older children in classrooms and other settings — and it works very well!

Advance preparation: Print out and staple each of the **3 scripts** in this document. Acquire **2 long scarves** to drape around neck: bright green for the Seaweed; dull brown or gray for the Fungus (go to a fabric store and purchase 1/2 yard width of unwrinkly fabric that doesn’t fray, so no sewing necessary). Determine whether you need to have **a sound system**: one microphone for the narrator and one for the Seaweed and Fungus to share.

Speak to audience: Explain the concept of evolutionary parables to the audience . . .

EVOLUTIONARY PARABLES
(a form of [Readers Theater](#))
dramatic **scripts** and **stories** for
a fun, poignant, and virtues-rich way of teaching
the science-based [Epic of Evolution](#) ([Big History](#))

The author of the original text, **Professor Mark McMenamin**, is one of the world’s experts in the evolutionary transition portrayed in this parable. *[Don’t tell the audience what the evolutionary transition is; keep it a surprise.]*

Recruit from audience 3 volunteer readers: (1) “Little Seaweed” (protagonist); (2) “Fungus” (antagonist); and (3) Narrator. *Hand them scripts + scarves.*

Invite the volunteers to relax and enjoy this playful parable. There is no advance preparation, so “mistakes” are expected – and can add to the humor! (Evolution, after all, proceeds by “mistakes.”)

Volunteers only need to read the top part of the first page of script before the play begins, as that top part tells them about the script and what their personality is.

Overall, allow only a minute or two after passing out scripts/scarves before you get the play started.

Narrator Role for "The Lucky Little Seaweed"

*INSTRUCTIONS TO NARRATOR: After Seaweed and Fungus get their scripts and read about their personalities (top paragraph), **direct Seaweed** to stand at center stage and **Fungus** to begin off-stage. You stand off from center. When everybody is ready, start reading your part (**bold**) aloud. Note: "Hyphae" is pronounced "HIGH-fee".*

*What you need to read is always in **bold** type.*

***Stage directions** for you are in [italics] type.*

*Read your part at a **normal pace** — not slowly or melodramatically.*

NARRATOR: Once upon a very long time ago (430 million years ago, to be more precise) there lived a sad little seaweed near the shore of a shallow sea. The little seaweed loved its warm and well-lit aquatic home, but the neighborhood was becoming more dangerous with each passing week.

Big, fast-growing seaweeds were beginning to crowd the area and shade out the smaller, less aggressive forms. Voracious animals who swam or crawled within the ocean had developed a taste for seaweed salad. These animals were becoming more numerous every day and were even beginning to threaten the seaweeds that lived right next to shore in the saltiest water — a zone that used to be safe. The sad little seaweed was feeling the pinch of increased competition.

One dreary morning, in the shade of a newly grown patch of aggressive seaweed, the little seaweed was visited by an aquatic fungus, who was passing by. The fungus was first to speak . . .

FUNGUS: "Excuse me, Little Seaweed, but I am about to infect and eat you."

SEAWEED: "Why would you want to do that?"

FUNGUS: "Well, it is getting harder and harder to make a living on this part of the sea floor. You see, I normally prefer to eat dead organic matter—like old decayed parts of seaweeds. But voracious animals have been devouring my favorite foods before I get my share. With their fishy fins or crabby

claws, these animals move faster than I can stretch my fungal fingers.”

SEAWEED: "Hey, I have a similar problem. Beneath these big seaweeds, I can't find enough light to grow. The big seaweeds are shading me out, leaving me weak. The future looks bleak. So you might as well infect me and get it over with.”

NARRATOR: The fungus was happy to oblige. Fungal fingers – what scientists call hyphae – gently probed the little seaweed, entering here and there, beginning to suck away the living fluids, molecule by molecule. Just then there was a major earthquake! *[Gesture wildly and make a rumbling sound, while characters act out.]*

[Speak loudly and excitedly:] A portion of the seafloor heaved upward, becoming land, and the seawater drained away. The big seaweeds went tumbling back into the ocean, carried along by the ebbing water. But the little seaweed, anchored as it was to the fungus, was left stranded ashore. Little Seaweed was the first to speak. . .

SEAWEED: "Now what?! The water is way down there, but we're up here. Even if you do finish me off, how can you possibly survive when exposed to the drying air like this?"

FUNGUS: "No problem! My hyphae can grow down, down into the mud, just as easily as I can grow deeper and deeper into you. I can grow my fungal fingers down as far as I need to. When they reach water, I just suck it up!

So you see, I am in no danger of drying out. But you are. I suppose I ought to get as much out of you as I can before the sun bakes you to a crisp!"

NARRATOR: The fungus continued sucking out the living fluid from the little seaweed, molecule by molecule. But in the bright sun, the little seaweed was beginning to taste different. The fungus discovered that the living fluids it was feasting upon were becoming sweeter and sweeter.”

FUNGUS: "Golly, you are a sweet little seaweed! I would like to taste your sweetness forever. It seems a shame to kill you.”

SEAWEED: "I'm sweet because I am finally getting enough sunlight. There are no other seaweeds up here shading me out. And when I get enough sunlight, I can create lots of sugar by photosynthesis."

FUNGUS: "That is a most admirable talent."

NARRATOR: The fungus was beginning to see the little seaweed in a new light. . . Suddenly, the fungus had a bright idea . . .

FUNGUS: "Little Seaweed, I have a proposal for you!"

SEAWEED: "I'm listening. . ."

FUNGUS: "You know, my hyphae can *provide* nutrition as well as take it away. That is my special talent — controlling the flow of water and nutrients. The interesting thing is that I can just as easily *send* you fluids as suck them out of you."

NARRATOR: The little seaweed felt a glimmer of hope shimmer through its bright green gelatinous skin. . . The seaweed now turned toward the fungus and begged with excitement . . .

SEAWEED: "Oh, Fungus! Please tell me more!"

FUNGUS: "Well, if I provide you with water and mineral nutrients, can you guarantee me a continuous supply of sugar?"

SEAWEED: "Oh yes! In this bright sunlight I can produce much more sugar than I could possibly use all by myself. I am afraid of drying out, of course. But you appear to have already solved that problem — and for both of us!"

NARRATOR: The two former enemies now turned to face one another.

FUNGUS: "I think we have a deal."

SEAWEED: "Indeed!"

BOTH: [*shake hands*]

NARRATOR: *[speak loudly if audience is laughing]* Thus began the most “fruitful” collaboration of all time — the coming together of seaweed and fungus to form an entirely new kind of life on Earth: *Land Plants*.

So now, every time you admire a great oak tree, or run across a lovely green lawn, or munch on a salad, remember the Lucky Little Seaweed and this tale of teamwork at the ocean’s edge. . . THE END!

[All 3 bow together, as audience applauds.]

Seaweed Role for "The Lucky Little Seaweed"

INSTRUCTION TO LITTLE SEAWEED: You are a gentle, somewhat pathetic, victim. Make sure you face the audience while reciting, even though you will occasionally glance at the Fungus, to whom you are speaking. Feel free to act and gesture. At the beginning, and again when the earthquake happens, the narrator will be describing your actions. At these two places, stop looking at your script; just act out what is happening.

*What you need to read is always in **bold** type.*

Stage directions for you are in [italics] type.

*Read your part at a **normal pace** — not slowly or melodramatically.*

SEAWEED: *[Begin play by standing silently at center stage, where you will act out what Narrator is saying about you. Don't look at your script until Fungus comes onstage and says to you, "'Excuse me, Little Seaweed, but I am about to infect and eat you.'"]*

NARRATOR: *[recites a long paragraph]*

FUNGUS: "Excuse me, Little Seaweed, but I am about to infect and eat you."

SEAWEED: *[surprised]* **"Why would you want to do that?"**

FUNGUS: "Well, it is getting harder and harder to make a living on this part of the sea floor. You see, I normally prefer to eat dead organic matter—like old decayed parts of seaweeds. But voracious animals have been devouring my favorite foods before I get my share. With their fishy fins or crabby claws, these animals move faster than I can stretch my fungal fingers."

SEAWEED: *[face audience and gesture]* **"Hey, I have a similar problem. Beneath these big seaweeds, I can't find enough light to grow. The big seaweeds are shading me out, leaving me weak. The future looks bleak. So you might as well infect me and get it over with."**

SEAWEED: *[Listen and act out what narrator says. Only look at script again when you hear narrator say, "Little seaweed was the first to speak."]*

NARRATOR: . . . "Little seaweed was the first to speak . . ."

SEAWEED: *[with anguish]* **"Now what?! The water is way down there, [gesture] but we're up here. Even if you do finish me off, how can you possibly survive when exposed to the drying air like this?"**

FUNGUS: "No problem! My hyphae can grow down, down into the mud, just as easily as I can grow deeper and deeper into you. I can grow my fungal fingers down as far as I need to. When they reach water, I just suck it up. So you see, I am in no danger of drying out. But you are. I suppose I ought to get as much out of you as I can before the sun bakes you to a crisp."

NARRATOR: The fungus continued sucking out the living fluid from the little seaweed, molecule by molecule. But in the bright sun, the little seaweed was beginning to taste different. The fungus discovered that the living fluids it was feasting upon were becoming sweeter and sweeter.

FUNGUS: "Golly, you are a sweet little seaweed! I would like to taste your sweetness forever. It seems a shame to kill you."

SEAWEED: *[face audience]* **"I'm sweet because I am finally getting enough sunlight. There are no other seaweeds up here shading me out. And when I get enough sunlight, I can create lots of SUGAR by photosynthesis."** *[Look up and SMILE, extending arms like you are gathering sunlight.]*

FUNGUS: "That is a most admirable talent."

NARRATOR: The fungus was beginning to see the little seaweed in a new light. Suddenly, the fungus had a bright idea.

FUNGUS: "Little Seaweed, I have a proposal for you!"

SEAWEED: **"I'm listening. . ."**

FUNGUS: "You know, my hyphae can *provide* nutrition as well as take it away. That is my special talent — controlling the flow of water and

nutrients. The interesting thing is that I can just as easily *send* you fluids as suck them out of you."

SEAWEED: *[smile and wiggle your whole body with excitement!]*

NARRATOR: The little seaweed felt a glimmer of hope shimmer through its bright green gelatinous skin. . . The seaweed now turned toward the fungus and begged with excitement . . .

SEAWEED: "Oh, Fungus! Please tell me more!"

FUNGUS: "Well, if I provide you with water and mineral nutrients, can you guarantee me a continuous supply of sugar?"

SEAWEED: "Oh yes! In this bright sunlight I can produce much more sugar than I could possibly use all by myself. I am afraid of drying out, of course. But you appear to have already solved that problem — and for both of us!"

NARRATOR: The two former enemies now turned to face one another.

FUNGUS: "I think we have a deal."

SEAWEED: "Indeed!" *[Shake hands with Fungus and smile.]*

BOTH: *[Face audience silently as narrator reads a concluding paragraph. After Narrator says, "The End", all 3 bow together.]*

Fungus Role for "The Lucky Little Seaweed"

*INSTRUCTION FOR THE FUNGUS: You are an assertive, selfish character; the antagonist. Read your parts (in **bold**). Make sure you face the audience when you speak, even though you will occasionally look toward the Seaweed. Remember to act and gesture, using your arms and fingers as "fungal hyphae". **You begin the play off-stage**, and then enter after the narrator's first paragraph. When the earthquake happens, let your script hang and just act out what you hear the narrator reading.*

Note: "Hyphae" is pronounced "HIGH-fee".

*What you need to read is always in **bold** type.*

Stage directions for you are in [italics] type.

*Read your part at a **normal pace** — not slowly or melodramatically.*

FUNGUS: *[Stand off-stage to begin.]*

NARRATOR: Once upon a very long time ago (430 million years ago, to be more precise) there lived a sad little seaweed near the shore of a shallow sea. The little seaweed loved its warm and well-lit aquatic home, but the neighborhood was becoming more dangerous with each passing week. Big, fast-growing seaweeds were beginning to crowd the area and shade out the smaller, less aggressive forms. Voracious animals, who swam or crawled within the ocean, had developed a taste for seaweed salad. These animals were becoming more numerous every day and were even beginning to threaten the seaweeds that lived right next to shore in the saltiest water, a zone that used to be safe. The sad little seaweed was feeling the pinch of increased competition.

FUNGUS: *[begin to walk toward seaweed]*

NARRATOR: One dreary morning, in the shade of a newly grown patch of aggressive seaweed, the little seaweed was visited by an aquatic fungus, who was passing by. The fungus was first to speak:

FUNGUS: *[loud and taunting]* "Excuse me, Little Seaweed, but I am about to infect and eat you."

SEAWEED: "Why would you want to do that?"

FUNGUS: *[face audience]* "Well, it is getting harder and harder to make a living on this part of the sea floor. You see, I normally prefer to eat dead organic matter—like old decayed parts of seaweeds. But voracious animals have been devouring my favorite foods before I get my share. With their fishy fins or crabby claws, these animals move faster than I can stretch my fungal fingers." *[reach toward Seaweed and wiggle fingers]*

SEAWEED: "Hey, I have a similar problem. Beneath these big seaweeds, I can't find enough light to grow. The big seaweeds are shading me out, leaving me weak. The future looks bleak. So you might as well infect me and get it over with."

FUNGUS: *[Act out while narrator describes your next actions. Only look at script again when Seaweed starts talking.]*

NARRATOR: *[describes action]*

SEAWEED: "Now what? The water is way down there, but we're up here. Even if you do finish me off, how can you possibly survive when exposed to the drying air like this?"

FUNGUS: "No problem! My hyphae can grow down, down into the mud, *[gesture]* just as easily as I can grow deeper and deeper into you *[gesture]*. I can grow my fungal fingers down as far as I need to. When they reach water, I just suck it up! So you see, I am in no danger of drying out. But you are! I suppose I ought to get as much out of you as I can before the sun bakes you to a crisp!"

NARRATOR: The fungus continued sucking out the living fluid from the little seaweed, molecule by molecule. But in the bright sun, the little seaweed was beginning to taste different. . .

FUNGUS: *[pretend you are tasting something sweet and good!]*

NARRATOR: The fungus discovered that the living fluids it was feasting upon were becoming sweeter and sweeter.

FUNGUS: “Golly, you are a sweet little seaweed! I would like to taste your sweetness forever. It seems a shame to kill you.”

SEAWEED: “I’m sweet because I am finally getting enough sunlight. There are no other seaweeds up here shading me out. And when I get enough sunlight, I can create lots of sugar by photosynthesis.”

FUNGUS: “That is a most admirable talent!”

NARRATOR: The fungus was beginning to see the little seaweed in a new light . . .

FUNGUS: *[Look at Seaweed with surprise!]*

NARRATOR: Suddenly, the fungus had a bright idea. . .

FUNGUS: “Little Seaweed! I have a proposal for you!”

SEAWEED: “I’m listening. . .”

FUNGUS: “You know, my hyphae can *provide* nutrition as well as take it away. That is my special talent — controlling the flow of water and nutrients. The interesting thing is that I can just as easily **SEND** you fluids as suck them out of you.”

NARRATOR: The little seaweed felt a glimmer of hope shimmer through its bright green gelatinous skin. The seaweed now turned toward the fungus and begged with excitement. . .

SEAWEED: “Oh, Fungus! Please tell me more!”

FUNGUS: *[facing audience]* “Well, if I provide you with water and mineral nutrients, can you guarantee me a continuous supply of sugar?”

SEAWEED: "Oh yes! In this bright sunlight I can produce much more sugar than I could possibly use all by myself. I am afraid of drying out, of course. But you appear to have already solved that problem — and for both of us!"

NARRATOR: The two former enemies now turned to face one another.

FUNGUS: "I think we have a deal."

SEAWEED: "Indeed!"

FUNGUS: *[Shake hands with Seaweed.]*

BOTH: *[Face audience silently as narrator reads a concluding paragraph. After Narrator says, "The End", **all 3 bow together.**]*