

Ozzie and the Snortlefish

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

Original by Denny O'Neil; adapted for script by Connie Barlow

(Note: Denny O'Neil wrote Batman comics for many years)

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 blue or turquoise for Ozzie; dull gray for the Snortlefish (go to a fabric store and purchase 1/2 yard width of unwrinkly fabric that doesn't fray, so no sewing necessary). Decide whether you need **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, **Denny O'Neil**, wrote Batman comics for many years, and this story is a playful way to teach about an actual event in the history of life on Earth, long before humans evolved. [*Don't tell the audience what the evolutionary transition is; keep it a surprise.*]

Recruit from audience 3 volunteer readers: (1) “Ozzie” (protagonist); (2) “Snortlefish” (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 their 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 “Ozzie and the Snortlefish”

INSTRUCTIONS TO NARRATOR:

1. Your parts to read aloud appear in **bold**.
2. Notice the red **“him/her”** and **he/she** in your script. You will need to choose the correct word while you are reading, depending on the gender of the 2 actors.
3. Notice the strange **blue words** in your first paragraph. That is a real scientific name of a fossil fish — and it is impossible to pronounce. So trying to say it can be funny!
4. Read your part at a **normal pace** — not slowly or melodramatically.
5. Make sure Ozzie and the Snortlefish (whose nickname is KUMP) are both on stage and ready before you start reading your part.

NARRATOR: Once upon a very, very long time ago — 380 million years ago, more or less — there lived an ambitious young fish. This fish’s real name was **Panderichthys elpistostege**. But since that's a bit hard to say, we'll call **him/her** Ozzie.

Ozzie did pretty much what **his/her** brothers, sisters, and cousins did, which was to putter around the bottom of a pond, looking at the sand and dirt, waving fishy fins, and trying to keep from being eaten by larger fish. That was what bottom-dwelling fish did in those days, and in these days too.

One morning, Ozzie was skimming along the ooze at the bottom of the pond when **he/she** met a sleeping Snortlefish named Kumpfrumple.

Kumpfrumple had no friends because **he/she** was an extremely rude fish — as well as being lazy, ill-tempered, and occasionally flatulent. But if Kumpfrumple had had friends, they would surely have called **him/her** “Kump” for short, and so shall we.

Kump opened one eye, looked at Ozzie, and said . . .

KUMP: “Hey stupid! You think you're better than me, right?”

OZZIE: “I beg your pardon?”

NARRATOR: Kump waved a very flat fin in Ozzie's direction and said . . .

KUMP: "Those things growing out of your body: The rest of us fish don't have those, so you must think you're better than us!"

NARRATOR: Ozzie looked down at four stout appendages jutting from his/her flanks.

OZZIE: "Oh these? You are wrong when you say I'm the only one who has them. Actually, a lot of my relatives seem to be growing them, too."

KUMP: "What are they good for?"

OZZIE: "I've been wondering that myself. Mostly, I use them to help guide me around the pond. I also rub them in the mud and sand, which can be fun if you're in a certain mood. But mostly, I just use them to push and to pull."

KUMP: "Sounds dumb to me!"

OZZIE: "Last night I had a dream. I dreamed that some day I'll climb out of the water and onto the stuff that surrounds the pond: The not-water."

KUMP: "The not-water! Preposterous! No fish has ever ventured into the not-water!"

NARRATOR: Ozzie sighed and turned away, wiggling his/her appendages. Then Ozzie began to speak again — and with renewed conviction.

OZZIE: "These strange things will grow thicker and stronger — I just know it! One day I'll use them to pull myself out of the pond and to move across the not-water by putting one in front of the other."

KUMP: "Does this dumb activity have a name?"

NARRATOR: Suddenly an idea stopped the little fish in his/her tracks.

OZZIE: "*Walking!* How does that sound? — *walking!* I think it has a certain ring to it. If you ask me, it could catch on!"

KUMP: "That's it?! All that trouble just to do *walking*?!"

NARRATOR: Ozzie was now bursting with energy and exclaimed . . .

OZZIE: "We'll jump! . . . We'll kick balls! . . . We'll dance! . . . We'll play ring-around-the-rosey!"

KUMP: "Awwwww! What does any of that mean?!"

OZZIE: "I guess I don't really know."

KUMP: "It all sounds stupid! Why would any sane fish want to do any of that?!"

OZZIE: "To see! To learn! To explore! To understand! To become!"

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

OZZIE: "I dreamed that we will change and change and change again. Some of us will soar high above the pond!"

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

OZZIE: "Some of us will become mighty creatures a hundred fishes high!"

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

OZZIE: "Some will become wise!"

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

OZZIE: "The wise ones will someday come to know who they are and why they exist. They may even understand everything that is — and they will celebrate everything they understand!"

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

NARRATOR: Kump settled back into the ooze, and with a slap of a fishy tail released a cloud of mud into the water.

KUMP: "Sounds unlikely!"

OZZIE: "Maybe some of it is — and maybe not! We'll never know unless we climb out of the pond."

KUMP: "Seems like a lot of bother with no guaranteed return. A smart fish will stay right here and enjoy life. Now you go swim out of here — or *walk*, if that's what makes you happy. Me? I'm late for my nap."

NARRATOR: Well, that's the end of the story. But you may want to know a little of what happened next.

That afternoon, the sleeping snortlefish was eaten by a much larger fish. Within a couple of hundred thousand years, a similar fate befell the entire snortlefish clan — which is why nobody has ever heard of them.

What about Ozzie? Well, Ozzie never did get out of the pond. But later, some of Ozzie's descendants did.

How much of the rest of Ozzie's dream came true?

THE END.

ALL: *[As audience applauds, take a bow together.]*

Ozzie Role for “Ozzie and the Snortlefish”

INSTRUCTIONS TO OZZIE:

You are the **hero**. You are a friendly fish, and you are optimistic and enthusiastic.

It will be important to **flap or wiggle your arms** (or a scarf, if you have been given one) when the script calls for you to move them.

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.

Face audience as much as possible while speaking, rather than looking at Kump.

OZZIE: [*Begin play by standing near center stage and near the Snortlefish, whose nickname is “Kump.” Act out what you hear the narrator say about you. Don’t look at your script again until Kump says to you, “Hey, stupid!”*]

NARRATOR: [*speaks for about a minute*]

KUMP: “Hey stupid! You think you're better than me, right?”

OZZIE: [*politely*] **“I beg your pardon?”**

NARRATOR: Kump waved a very flat fin in Ozzie's direction and said . . .

KUMP: “Those things growing out of your body: The rest of us fish don't have those, so you must think you're better than us!”

OZZIE: [*wiggle your arms or scarf*]

NARRATOR: Ozzie looked down at four stout appendages jutting from his/her flanks.

OZZIE: **“Oh these? You are wrong when you say I'm the only one who has them. Actually, a lot of my relatives seem to be growing them, too.”**

KUMP: “What are they good for?”

OZZIE: "I've been wondering that myself. Mostly, I use them to help guide me around the pond. I also rub them in the mud and sand, which can be fun if you're in a certain mood. But mostly, I just use them to push and to pull."

KUMP: "Sounds dumb to me!"

OZZIE: [*face audience*] "Last night I had a dream. I dreamed that some day I'll climb out of the water and onto the stuff that surrounds the pond: the not-water!"

KUMP: "The not-water? Preposterous! No fish has ever ventured onto the not-water!"

NARRATOR: Ozzie sighed and turned away, wiggling his/her appendages. Then Ozzie began to speak again — and with renewed conviction.

OZZIE: "These strange things will grow thicker and stronger — I just know it! One day I'll use them to pull myself out of the pond and to move across the not-water by putting one in front of the other." [*gesture*]

KUMP: "Does this dumb activity have a name?"

NARRATOR: Suddenly an idea stopped the little fish in his/her tracks.

OZZIE: "*Walking!* How does that sound? — *walking!* I think it has a certain ring to it. If you ask me, it could catch on!"

KUMP: "That's it?! All that trouble just to do *walking*?!"

NARRATOR: Ozzie was now bursting with energy and exclaimed . . .

OZZIE: [*act out*] "We'll jump! . . . We'll kick balls! . . . We'll dance! . . . We'll play ring-around-the-rosey!"

KUMP: "Awwwww! What does any of that mean?!"

OZZIE: "I guess I don't really know."

KUMP: "It all sounds stupid! Why would any sane fish want to do any of that?!"

OZZIE: "To see! To learn! To explore! To understand! To become!"

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

OZZIE: *[face audience]* **"I dreamed that we will change and change and change again. Some of us will soar high above the pond!"** *[point up]*

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

OZZIE: **"Some of us will become mighty creatures a hundred fishes high!"**

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

OZZIE: **"Some will become wise!"**

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

OZZIE: **"The wise ones will someday come to know who they are and why they exist. They may even understand everything that is — and they will celebrate everything they understand!"**

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

NARRATOR: Kump settled back into the ooze, and with a slap of a fishy tail released a cloud of mud into the water.

KUMP: "Sounds unlikely!"

OZZIE: **"Maybe some of it is — and maybe not! We'll never know unless we climb out of the pond."**

KUMP: "Seems like a lot of bother — with no guaranteed return. A smart fish will stay right here and enjoy life. Now you go swim out of here — or *walk*, if that's what makes you happy. Me? I'm late for my nap."

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

Snortlefish Role for "Ozzie and the Snortlefish"

INSTRUCTIONS TO SNORTLEFISH (nickname = KUMP):

You are the **antagonist** — a gruff, nasty, grumpy, and lazy fish.

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.

Face audience as much as possible while speaking, rather than looking at Ozzie.

KUMP: *[Begin play by standing near center stage and near Ozzie. The Narrator will read an introduction for 2 minutes. Listen and act out what you hear the narrator saying about you. Don't look at your script again until the Narrator says, "Kump opened one eye and looked at Ozzie and said . . ."]*

NARRATOR: *[speaks for about 2 minutes]* . . . Kump opened one eye, looked at Ozzie and said . . ."

KUMP: "Hey stupid! You think you're better than me, right?"

OZZIE: "I beg your pardon?"

NARRATOR: Kump waved a very flat fin in Ozzie's direction and said . . .

KUMP: "Those things growing out of your body: The rest of us fish don't have those, so you must think you're better than us!"

NARRATOR: Ozzie looked down at four stout appendages jutting from his/her flanks.

OZZIE: "Oh these? You are wrong when you say I'm the only one who has them. Actually, a lot of my relatives seem to be growing them, too."

KUMP: "What are they good for?!"

OZZIE: "I've been wondering that myself. Mostly, I use them to help guide me around the pond. I also rub them in the mud and sand, which can be fun if you're in a certain mood. But mostly, I just use them to push and to pull."

KUMP: [turning & moving away a meter or so in a huff] **"Sounds dumb to me!"**

OZZIE: "Last night I had a dream. I dreamed that some day I'll climb out of the water and onto the stuff that surrounds the pond: The not-water."

KUMP: **"The not-water? Preposterous! No fish has ever ventured onto the not-water!"**

NARRATOR: Ozzie sighed and turned away, wiggling his/her appendages. Then Ozzie began to speak again — and with renewed conviction.

OZZIE: "These strange things will grow thicker and stronger — I just know it! One day I'll use them to pull myself out of the pond and to move across the not-water by putting one in front of the other."

KUMP: **"Does this dumb activity have a name?"**

NARRATOR: Suddenly an idea stopped the little fish in his/her tracks!

OZZIE: "*Walking!* How does that sound? — *walking!* I think it has a certain ring to it. If you ask me, it could catch on!"

KUMP: **"That's it?! All that trouble just to do *walking*!?"**

NARRATOR: Ozzie was now bursting with energy and exclaimed . . .

OZZIE: "We'll jump! . . . We'll kick balls! . . . We'll dance! . . . We'll play ring-around-the-rosey!"

KUMP: **"Awwwww! What does any of that mean?!"**

OZZIE: "I guess I don't really know."

KUMP: **"It all sounds stupid! Why would any sane fish want to do any of that?!"**

OZZIE: "To see! To learn! To explore! To understand! To become!"

KUMP: **"Hmmpmph!"**

OZZIE: "I dreamed that we will change and change and change again. Some of us will soar high above the pond!"

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

OZZIE: "Some of us will become mighty creatures a hundred fishes high!"

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

OZZIE: "Some will become wise!"

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

OZZIE: "The wise ones will someday come to know who they are and why they exist. They may even understand everything that is — and they will celebrate everything they understand!"

KUMP: "Hmmmmph!"

NARRATOR: Kump settled back into the ooze, and with a slap of a fishy tail released a cloud of mud into the water.

KUMP: "Sounds unlikely!"

OZZIE: "Maybe some of it is — and maybe not! We'll never know unless we climb out of the pond."

KUMP: "Seems like a lot of bother — with no guaranteed return. A smart fish will stay right here and enjoy life. Now you go swim out of here — or walk, if that's what makes you happy. Me? I'm late for my nap." [yawn and pretend to sleep for a few seconds.]

NARRATOR: Well, that's the end of the story. But you may want to know a little of what happened next. That afternoon, the sleeping Kumpfrumple was eaten by a much larger fish. . .

KUMP: *[Look up, frightened and sad.]*

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