

# Who's Killing Our Fish?

Adapted from MAUI MAUI by Stephen Cosgrove, with permission from Price Stern Sloan, Inc., Los Angeles, CA.

**Subject:** Science, Reading

**Duration:** 60 minutes

**Location:** Classroom

**Key Vocabulary:** Habitat destruction

**Related Activities:** Where Have our Plants and Animals Gone?; Lake Okeechobee, the Everglades, and the Rainy Season in Three cups; What's That Slippery Mess?; Shrimp Scampers; The Incredible Shrinking Habitat

**Florida Sunshine State Standards:** LA.4.2.1.2, SC.4.L.17, LA.5.2.1.2, SC.5.L.15, LA.6.2.1.2



## Materials

- Copies of "Tortuga"
- Projection of "Where Are We?" from the activity "Locating South Florida's National Parks"

**Objectives:** The student will be able to: a) locate the Dry Tortugas, b) analyze the effects of overharvesting on various fish populations, and c) discuss reasons that make wildlife restrictions important to the survival of populations.

**Method:** The students will read a short play which displays habitat destruction by fishermen in the Dry Tortugas and demonstrates why various wildlife restrictions are necessary.

**Background:** Like a strand of beads hanging from the tip of Florida, reef islands trail westward into the Gulf of Mexico. Almost 70 miles west of Key West lies a cluster of seven small islands called the Dry Tortugas. The Tortugas are known for their coral reefs, which develop in the shallow waters of the outer edge of offshore tropical islands. The Tortugas reef complex supports a wealth of marine life including sea fans, sea anemones, and many types of reef fishes. Sooty terns gather here each year by the thousands between April and September to nest.

## Suggested Procedure

1. On a map, locate the Dry Tortugas in relation to the Florida Keys and describe their importance.
2. Read the play "Tortuga" with your students, assigning different students various characters to read.

## Evaluation

Discuss what is being demonstrated in this play. Ask students if they can identify reasons for population decline. Ask students to propose ways of reducing population decline.

# Tortuga

Adapted from Maui Maui by Stephen Cosgrove

**Narrator:** The Sooty Terns soared like butterflies over the clear blue waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Their wings dipped and tipped the waves as the wind gently floated them to some unknown destination far from the Dry Tortugas Islands.

Suddenly, the stillness of the water was broken by a great “whoosh” of air (Tortuga “whooshes”) and the head of a great sea turtle lifted from the waves. Soon the water was awash with a large group of turtles waving their flippers at one another and sunning themselves. They played and floated and they drifted off to sleep in the blue water.

Far off on the horizon a dozen or so strange little boats suddenly appeared and the quiet of the turtles was broken by the loud, squawky voices of small, furry creatures called Amomonies, who manned the boats. The turtles, with an unspoken signal, slid beneath the sea and swam away. The Amomonies, residents of the nearby Keys, were very loud. With much yelling, arm waving, and screaming, they threw their nets into the water and began their daily chore of fishing.

**Amomonie:** (Scream, call, chatter) As soon as the net is full we must dump it in the boat and throw it back out again .... quickly!

**Narrator:** Their nets caught everything and anything: Little, big, and medium fish, tuna, and even odd octopus that, to their misfortune, happened to be swimming by. The Amomonies really didn't care. They just threw them in the bottom of the boat, tossed the nets back in the water, and fished some more! They were always in such a big rush to catch fish that one, or sometimes even two, of the Amomonies would slip on a fish and fall into the water, catching himself on the net .... and yet, nobody would care. They would just haul in their net and dump their soggy friends into the bottom of the boat with all the fish. All this went on for hours and hours until their boats would almost sink from the weight of all those fish. Then they would sail for home. At home, all of the other Amomonies would help unload, and it didn't really matter if one or two dozen fish spilled because there were soooooo many! When all the fish were cleaned, the queen of the Amomonies --- Mom Amomonie --- would cook.

**Mom Amomonie:** Ah, Yes! Such a nice load of fish my dears!!! I will make you fish cake and frosting, bouillabaisse with wine and fish sauce, fish soup and fish pizza!

**Narrator:** Mom Amomonie always cooked too much .... much more than they could eat ---- because there were always more fish in the sea. The very next morning, the Amomonies went out as usual to fish, screaming and yelling. But, just as they went to pull in their nets, a giant sea turtle jumped into their nets. Try as they would, they could not pull their net in, so they cut it.

**Amomonie:** Oh guys, oh gals, what will we do now? Think, think! Our nets are in the drink! Crazy turtle! I've got it .... those old fishing lines we used to use!

**Narrator:** So they gathered all their old fishing gear together; poles, lines, and hooks. Just as they were about to hook their first fish, that same old turtle came and pulled the line right out of their hands!

**Amomonies:** This will never do! We must go back to the islands and ask the queen what to do! Sail for home!

**Narrator:** Everyone expected boats full of fish, as usual; this time however, the boats were empty.

**Mom Amomonie:** What's the meaning of this? These empty boats?

**Amomonies:** We tried oh great MOM, but whenever we tried to net, a giant sea turtle came and stole our nets. And our fishing poles too! We didn't know what to do.

**Mom:** Poppycock!!! I will go out myself tomorrow and talk to this great shelled creature and demand him to leave you alone!

**Narrator:** So, with the toss of her tree snail royal earrings, she stomped off. Early the next morning, she set out. She sailed all day, but saw no sea turtle.

**Mom:** Those lazy fishermen, that was all a story! I'll show them. I'll fish myself.

**Narrator:** No sooner had the net hit the water than a great turtle came and took hold of her net.

**Mom:** Now see here, just who do you think you are? Give back my net. I am causing you no harm!

**Tortuga:** Oh yes you are! My name is Tortuga, and I am the leader of the sea turtles. We didn't mind when you first came to our islands and began to fish in the sea, but now, because of you and your wasteful ways, there are no more fish to eat for my creatures. We are going hungry.

**Mom:** Oh POOH! There are always fish in the sea.

**Tortuga:** All right, I guess I will have to show you. Hop aboard and I will take you for a ride.

**Narrator:** So the queen got on Tortugas' back and took a tour of the sea. All the while they saw not one fish, not even an octopus. At the end of the day, Tortuga took the queen back to her boat.

**Mom:** I don't understand, where have all the fish gone? What will happen to my amomonies? Without fish they will surely starve!

**Tortuga:** Come, let me tow you in to land and I will teach you and your people how to share the sea.

**Narrator:** When they got back, all of the Amomonies were scared to see the giant turtle. But the queen set them at ease. Tortuga taught them to catch only the full grown fish and to throw the little ones back so they would grow. He taught them to fish only for what they needed and to gently put any octopus back into the water. But most of all he taught them to love and respect the sea the way a farmer loves his land and cares for his animals.

From that day on, the Amomonies worked hand in flipper with the turtles to make the ocean and the Dry Tortugas Islands a finer place to live. The only time they ever had any trouble was when one or two strange sails appeared on the horizon --- strange little boats sailed by smooth-skinned creatures called men!

