

The River is My Life by Jocelyn Sigue, photography by Kim Hairston. Crystal Lake, IL: Rigby, 1997. ISBN 0-7635-3180-4

Literature Annotation: This is an interview with George Ambrose Chisley, an oysterman in Southern Maryland. The photos shows pictures of oysters, how they are harvested, and the boat and tools that are used.

Grade Level: Grade 4

Duration: One 40-50 minute period

Economic Concepts: Economic Resources, Production, Specialized Work

Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC):

Economic Standard: Students will develop economic reasoning to understand the historical development and current status of economic principles, institutions, and processes needed to be effective citizens, consumers, and workers participating in local communities, the nation, and the world.

- 4.A.2. Describe how limited economic resources (natural, human, and capital) are used to produce goods and services to satisfy economic wants in Maryland. (Grade 4)
- 4.A.4.a. Explain how available resources have influenced specialization in Maryland in the past and present. (Grade 4)
- 4.B.1.a. Provide examples of tradition in the Maryland economy, such as businesses and skills that are handed down through families
- 4.B.1.b. Give examples of the kinds of goods and services produced in Maryland during different historical periods

Reading Indicators and Objectives (VSC):

- 1.E.2 Use strategies to prepare for reading (before reading) (Grade 4)
- 2.A.4.h. Distinguish between a fact and opinion (Grade 4)
- 2.A.4.c. State and support main ideas and messages (Grade 4)
- 3.A.1.a Listen to critically, read, and discuss a variety of literary texts representing diverse cultures, perspectives, and ethnicities and time periods (Grade 4)

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will describe the resources that are used to harvest oysters by identifying the tools and equipment that oystermen use to catch oysters.
- Students will explain how available resources have influenced regional specialization in Maryland by identifying why Bo became an oyster catcher.

Economic Vocabulary:

economic resources -the natural, human, and capital resources that are used to produce goods and services: also call factors of production.

natural resources- The renewable, and nonrenewable gifts of nature that can be used to produce goods and services, including but not limited to land, water, animals, minerals, tress, climate, soil, fire, seeds, grain and fruits.

human resources-The health, strength, talents, education and skills that humans can use to produce goods and services.

capital resources-the goods that are manufactured and constructed by people and used to produce other goods and services, including but not limited to factories, warehouses, roads, bridges, machinery, ports, dams, and tools. (money is not a capital resource.)

Additional vocabulary

Interview
News reporter
Tongs
Shuck

Teacher Materials:

- Oyster shells
- Pictures of prepared oyster dishes
- Pictures of canned oysters in the past
- Transparency of “Economic Resources for Harvesting Oysters,” Resource Sheet 3

For each student

- One copy of *The River is My Life* by Jocelyn Sigue
- One copy of “The River is My Life-Anticipation Guide,” Resource Sheet 1
- One copy of “MSA Activity-The River is My Life,” Resource Sheet 2
- Optional: “Economic Resources for Harvesting Oysters,” Resource Sheet 3

Teacher Background: Additional information on oystering and the oyster industry in early Maryland, teachers may use *Oystering on the Chesapeake*, published by the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels, Maryland.

Lesson Development:

Display the oyster shells. Have students to identify the shells. Then show the pictures of oyster cans and oyster foods. Ask students if they have ever eaten oysters. Have students list some different kinds of food that have oysters, such as oyster stew or soup, fried oysters, oyster fritters, and raw oysters.

Activities:

1. Have students look at the pictures on the front cover, the title page, and the copyright page. Ask students to describe what the man is doing on the picture on the inside of the front cover. Then have students read the first page of text, p. 3.
2. Have students complete the “Before Reading” on the left side of the Anticipation Guide. At the bottom, have students write a question or two that would like to ask Bo about oyster catching.
3. Have students look at the pictures and the maps on pp. 4 and 5. Discuss the location of the Chesapeake Bay, Wicomico River and Newburg, Maryland. (Southern Maryland, Charles and St. Mary’s counties)
4. Have students note the text set-up with the reporter asking a question and Bo answering. Have students read the rest of the book.
5. Have students complete the “After Reading” on the right side of the Anticipation guide. Discuss the correct answers to each statement.
6. Have students recall how Bo learned to catch oysters. Have students discuss some of the things that they learn from their parents, brothers, and sisters. Explain that this is an example of a tradition in the Maryland economy. Fathers and mothers teach younger members of the family the skills and knowledge, which allows the business to pass from generation to generation.

7. Have students list some of the tools and equipment that Bo and Chris use to catch oysters. (Possible answers include tongs, a boat, baskets, buckets, pier, an oyster measuring tool, rubber gloves, and boots.)
8. Display a transparency of “Economic Resources for Harvesting Oysters,” Resource Sheet 3. Have students name the natural, human, and capital resources used to harvest oysters.
9. Ask students to tell how Bo feels about his job as an oyster catcher. Have students verify their conclusion with text support. Ask students to explain why Bo and Chris became oystermen. Have students identify the natural resources that were available. Discuss why Bo’s father had become an oyster catcher. Have students explain how the available natural resources influenced the job that Bo and his father chose, such as the available river and bay containing oysters. Tell students that this is an example of how available resources have influenced specialization in Maryland in the past, and that available natural resources still influence economic choices workers make today.

Assessment:

10. Have students complete “MSA Activity- The River is My Life.”

Additional Activities and Resources

- *Oystering on the Chesapeake* published by Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum has lessons about oyster industry.
- The website for Rock Hall Museum on the Eastern Shore of Maryland has some excellent photos of oystering and boat at <http://www.rockhallmd.com/museum/watermen.php>.
- The Mariner’s Museum has information on early oystering, starting with the Native Americans and continuing up to the 20th century at <http://www.mariner.org/chesapeakebay/waterman/wat009.html>
- Information on “Who are Watermen?” is also found at The Mariner’s Museum site at <http://www.mariner.org/chesapeakebay/waterman/wat000.html>.

The River is My Life Anticipation Guide

Before Reading		After Reading
True or False	1. Oysters are caught all year.	True or False
True or False	2. Tongs to catch oysters may be 26 feet long.	True or False
True or False	3. There are about 300 oysters in a bushel.	True or False
True or False	4. There are no laws about oyster catching in the United States.	True or False
True or False	5. Oysters live at the bottom of oceans and rivers.	True or False

On the lines below write one or two questions that you would like to ask Bo about oyster catching.

MSA Activity – “The River Is My Life”

1. According to the text, **shucking** is –
 - taking the oysters out of the tongs.
 - pulling the oysters out of the shell.
 - getting the oysters out of the water.
 - dumping the oysters out of the bucket.

2. In which of these sentences is Bo stating a fact?
 - “Many people like to eat oysters.”
 - “There’s nothing like a taste of oysters.”
 - “I catch oysters on the Wicomico River.”
 - “It’s fun to have someone on the boat with me.”

3. After reading this book, someone would know that –
 - Bo doesn’t like his job as an oyster catcher.
 - Bo catches oysters but doesn’t like to eat them.
 - Bo and his family make a living from the river.
 - Bo was the first member of his family to catch oysters.

4. Bo helps to make sure that there will be oysters for next year by –
 - using tongs 26 feet long to catch oysters.
 - putting back oysters smaller than 3 inches.
 - catching oysters during spring and summer.
 - shucking oysters and selling them to restaurants.



Go on 

5. Use information from your book to explain why did Bo and his father both became watermen who specialize in catching oysters. Be sure to include ways that natural resources available in an area may influence the specialized type of work that people choose.

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Accept all reasonable answers. Possible responses should include the following key points.

- Bo and his family live near the Wicomico River.
- It is close and easy to go out on the river and bay.
- The Wicomico River and the Chesapeake Bay have a lot of oysters and fish.
- Bo’s father and brother could teach him how to catch oysters.
- The tools and equipment were already owned by his family.
- There are boats and piers along the river.

Economic Resources Chart for Harvesting Oysters

Natural Resources (Nature's Gifts)	Human Resources (Workers)	Capital Resources (Equipment and tools)