

# 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)

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### *Instructions for Facilitator:*

Explain the concept of evolutionary parables and that some are serious, while some are humorous and playful. This one is playful! Connie Barlow and Michael Dowd have used this with groups on many occasions. The author of the original text, Prof Mark McMenamin, is one of the world's experts in the evolutionary transition portrayed in this parable. Connie adapted his text into a format suitable for improvisational acting.

This script, and scripts of other evolutionary parables, can be downloaded for free by going to [www.TheGreatStory.org](http://www.TheGreatStory.org). Then click on "Parables." This script is designed for 2 Actor-Readers plus 1 Narrator.

THE ACTORS: "Little Seaweed" (protagonist) and "Fungus" (antagonist)

You can't get it wrong! Invite the volunteers to simply relax and enjoy this playful parable. There is no advance preparation, so "mistakes" are expected – and can add to the humor!

NOTE: You may wish to find scarves to drape over actors' shoulders to help viewers remember who is who: bright green for the seaweed, brown for the fungus.

## *Narrator Role for*

### **The Lucky Little Seaweed**

Adapted from a parable by Mark McMenamin

*INSTRUCTIONS TO NARRATOR: Your parts appear in **bold**. Begin reading with Seaweed standing center stage and Fungus off-stage.*

**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." [extend arm and fingers]

SEAWEED: "Hey, I have a similar problem. Beneath these big seaweeds, I can't find enough light to grow. [look up and gesture] The big seaweeds are shading me out, leaving me weak. The future looks bleak. [sigh] 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. [pause for the characters to act out.] 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 [gesture], but we're up here. Even if you do finish me off, how can you possibly survive 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. The fungus discovered that the living fluids it was feasting upon were becoming sweeter and sweeter."**

FUNGUS: "Say, 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 way. 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. [pause for seaweed to shimmy] 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."

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

FUNGUS: "I think we have a deal."

SEAWEED: "Indeed!"

BOTH: [shake hands]

**NARRATOR: [interject through audience laughter] "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."**

## *Little Seaweed Role for*

### **The Lucky Little Seaweed**

Adapted from a parable by Mark McMenamin

*INSTRUCTION FOR THE LITTLE SEAWEED: You are a gentle, somewhat pathetic, victim. Read your parts (in **bold**). Make sure you face the audience, even though you will occasionally look toward 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, let your script hang down and just act out what is happening.*

**SEAWEED:** [Stand in center stage, act out, without looking at script, as narrator introduces you. Don't look at script until Fungus speaks to you.]

**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:** "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." [extend arm and fingers]

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

FUNGUS & SEAWEED: [stop looking at your scripts for the full next paragraph. Listen and act out as narrator explains what is happening!]

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. [pause for the characters to act out.] 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:** [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 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. The fungus discovered that the living fluids it was feasting upon were becoming sweeter and sweeter.

FUNGUS: "Say, 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 extend 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 way. 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. [pause for seaweed to shimmer] 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: [exclaim happily] "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."**

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

FUNGUS: "I think we have a deal."

**SEAWEED: "Indeed!"**

**BOTH: [shake hands; then face audience as narrator reads a concluding paragraph; then bow.]**

## ***Fungus Role for***

### **The Lucky Little Seaweed**

Adapted from a parable by Mark McMenamin

*INSTRUCTION FOR THE FUNGUS: You are an assertive, selfish character; the antagonist. Read your parts (in **bold**). Make sure you face the audience, even though you will occasionally look toward the Seaweed, to whom you are speaking. 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.*

**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."** [extend arm and fingers]

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

**FUNGUS & SEAWEED:** [stop looking at your scripts for the full next paragraph. Listen and act out as narrator explains what is happening!]

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. [pause for the characters to act out.] 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, [gesture] but we're up here. Even if you do finish me off, how can you possibly survive 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: "Say, 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." [look up and extend 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 way. Suddenly, the fungus had a bright idea.

**FUNGUS:** [face audience, tap your head as if thinking, then look astonished and say to the seaweed excitedly] **"Little seaweed, I have a proposal for you!"**

SEAWEED: "I'm listening. . ."

**FUNGUS:** [face audience] **"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. [pause for seaweed to shimmer] 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."

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

**FUNGUS: "I think we have a deal."**

SEAWEED: "Indeed!"

**BOTH:** [shake hands; then face audience as narrator reads a concluding paragraph; then bow.]