

Name _____

Date _____

STUDENT READING

Daisy's Big Day

This story takes place in the late 1950s when the pace of life along the Chesapeake Bay was a little slower. There were more working watermen, and they were very busy harvesting oysters. In this fictional piece, a young girl helps her father and learns much about the life of a waterman!

The Day Begins

A young girl by the name of Daisy lived in southern Anne Arundel County, on the West River, in Maryland. Her father was a waterman who kept his workboat tied to a wooden pier on Parrish Creek. Daisy's dad had asked her to help him on this Saturday, because the young man who usually worked with him had been invited to a wedding. They were going oystering near the mouth of the West River and had to leave very early in the morning. Because it was late fall, Daisy dressed very warmly, taking gloves and a hat.

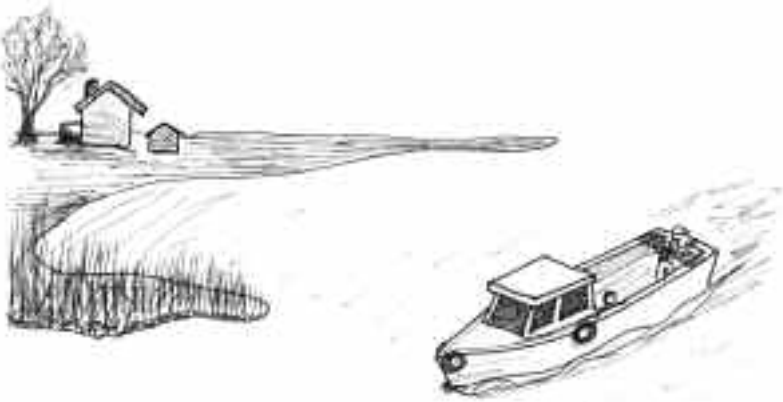
Daisy and her dad were greeted by other watermen on the creek who were checking their equipment before heading out. Daisy's mom had made soup and sandwiches as well as a thermos of coffee, which Daisy stowed in the cabin of the boat. Daisy's dad checked his equipment and made sure the patent tongs and culling board were in their proper places and in good shape. He started the engine and asked Daisy to pull the lines so they could head out of the creek to the river and then to the Chesapeake Bay.

Out on the River

As Daisy's dad steered the boat carefully through the sandbars at the mouth of the creek, she looked for landmarks that characterized this special area. The marsh grasses had faded some since the end of the summer, but they still offered plenty of hiding places for ducks and other creatures. There were a few low clouds, with just a little light peeking

through and a few birds starting to call in the morning light.

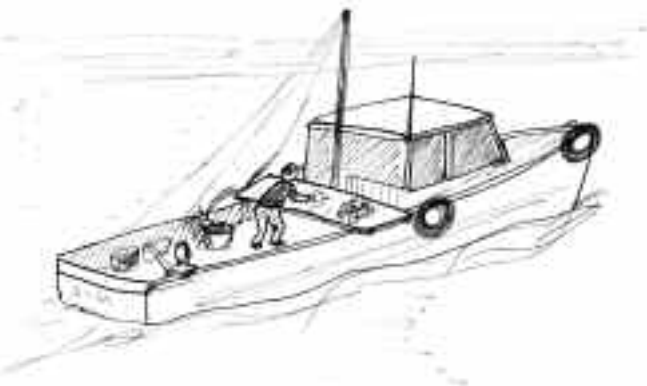
Daisy's Dad told her they were going to Dutchman Bar since he had been catching a lot of oysters there recently. The boat came



to a stop near the mouth of the river, and Daisy's dad lowered the heavy patent tongs. Daisy asked, "How do you know where the bar is?" Daisy's father replied, "The oyster beds are shown on charts, but now I just look for certain landmarks, such as that house and that stand of trees. When the boat's angled right in line with them, I figure I'm in the best spot to find oysters! But now I want you to watch where you stand. I don't want you to be in the way of the tongs." Daisy was careful and watched from the other side as he swung the tongs over the side of the boat.

As the oysters were brought on deck, Daisy's dad went through them and checked to see if they were the right size. Even Daisy put on a pair of rubber gloves and culled oysters, using the culling gauge to check the size of the oyster. Her father usually didn't need the gauge as he could tell

which oysters were the legal size just by looking at them.



Before long, they saw a boat heading toward them and recognized it as the Marine Police. Daisy knew one of the policemen and hoped it was Mr. Howard. The Marine Police were responsible for making sure watermen caught the right

size oysters and fish. As he pulled alongside Daisy's father's boat, Daisy recognized Mr. Howard and waved hello. He waved back at Daisy and asked, "Hey there, may I come aboard to check the oysters?" Daisy's father responded, "Sure, but check Daisy's closely, we want to make sure she's doing a good job!" Mr. Howard laughed and looked at the oysters. As he

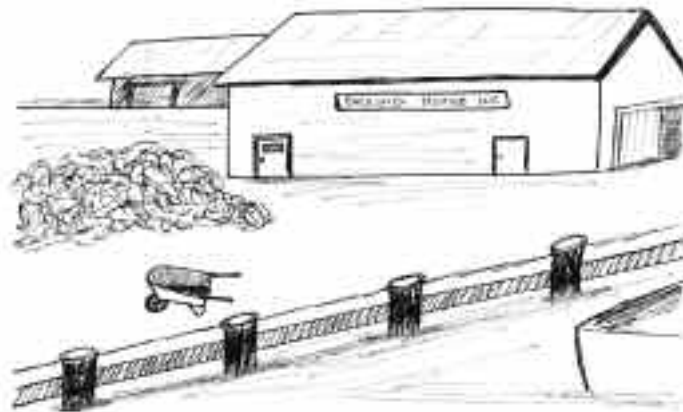
checked them, he remarked, "Looks good," and then boarded his boat. "See you again. Good job, Daisy!" he called and waved as he headed out to check the catch of the other watermen.

Uncle Fred's Buy Boat

The putt-putt of another larger boat could be heard and, as it came into view, the two captains waved and called to each other. The boat was a buy boat owned and operated by Daisy's Uncle Fred. His job was to buy the catch from watermen working on the water and take it to market. This allowed the watermen to keep working and catch more oysters.

Uncle Fred anchored his buy boat in a calm spot at the mouth of the Rhode River, just beyond Dutchman Bar. Here he hoisted a flag up on his mast to let the watermen know he was ready to buy oysters. Daisy's dad motored over to Uncle Fred's boat and pulled up alongside. Uncle Fred called out, "How are you two? Nice to have you here, Daisy. Did your Mom send some extra sandwiches?" The two men shook hands and discussed the catch of the day while Daisy retrieved the thermos and sandwiches from the boat's cabin.

After they ate lunch, Daisy's dad loaded the oysters into the buy boat's bushel measures under Uncle Fred's watchful eye. Uncle Fred kept tally with oyster shells, one shell per bushel. After paying Daisy's dad for the oysters, Uncle Fred asked, "Daisy, would you like



to come with me for the rest of the day? I'll take you up to the McNasby's Packinghouse in Eastport, Annapolis, and you can see where the oysters go. Besides, it might be a bit warmer there." Daisy looked at her dad and asked, "Is it okay with you? Are we almost finished?"

"Sure, you go. I only have a little more to do. I'll meet you and Uncle Fred back at West River, okay?" said her dad. He patted her on the head, told her to mind Uncle Fred, and waved good-bye as she and Uncle Fred rumbled off up the Bay.

At the Packinghouse

Uncle Fred steered the buy boat, which was full of oysters from many watermen, up the Severn River to McNasby's Packinghouse. As he pulled alongside the dock, two young men came out to meet the boat with wheelbarrows and shovels. They tied up the boat and boarded



it to start shoveling oysters into metal tubs. The metal tubs were very large and were used to measure the number of bushels harvested that day. The boat rocked and swayed gently as the young men scraped the deck to pick up all the oysters and load them into the tubs. The filled tubs were then dumped into wheelbarrows, which were rolled into the packinghouse. Daisy and Uncle Fred walked inside the large building so he could speak to the manager about payment for his oysters.

Daisy stopped to stare at the mound of shells outside the packinghouse. Most of these shells would be used for the next generation of oysters. They would be hosed overboard to lie on the bottom of the river to create a good place for young oysters to attach and grow. The empty shells were also used for creating roads and ground into dust as lime for farmers to use as fertilizer.

Inside the packinghouse, the oyster shuckers greeted Daisy. Most of them were women who stood on shucker's stalls. A stall was a wooden box standing on its narrow end with a step in the bottom and a top like a table. It helped keep the workers off the floor where all the empty shells were. The shuckers had gloves on their hands and held a round-tipped knife in their shucking hand. They would hold the oyster with one hand on a block of wood and pry open the shell with the knife. The oyster was cut out of the shell and plopped into a large bucket. The shuckers then tossed the shells on the floor.

Nellie, a young woman shucking oysters, asked, "Would you want to try opening an oyster? See if you can find the right spot to open it!" She got down from the box and said, "Stand up on that step and put

your oyster on top of the block. Like this.” She handed Daisy the gloves and the knife. It was very hard work and took Daisy a long time to open the shell. Nellie showed Daisy how to look for the best place to open the oyster (away from its hinge), but Daisy still had trouble. When Daisy got down from the block, Nellie proceeded to open another oyster quickly and easily. Daisy knew she wouldn’t want that job even though Nellie made it look simple!

When Nellie’s bucket was full, she told Daisy to come with her while she took it to the next room. There, Nellie introduced Daisy to the skimmer man named Joe. “Hello, Daisy! Here with Fred? Let me show you what happens now,” exclaimed Joe. He told Daisy to tag along to see where the bucket of oysters would go. Joe showed Daisy how he measured



the oysters and gave Nellie credit for shucking a gallon of oysters. He put a mark on a board beside Nellie’s name. Each shucker had their name on the board with many tallies beside their names. At the end of the day, Nellie and the others would be paid according to the number of quarts of oysters they had shucked.

Canning the Oysters/The Oysters Continue Their Journey

Joe introduced Daisy to Sam who was the packer man. Sam took the buckets of oysters from Joe and put them in a large tub filled with freshwater called the Oyster Blow Tank.

Sam explained to Daisy that the oysters were cleaned in the tub by gently blowing air through the water. Sam occasionally used a big paddle to stir the oysters to help the sand and grit fall to the bottom of the big tub. “Here Daisy, you take a turn stirring the oysters. Do it very carefully,” said Sam.





When the oysters were cleaned, Daisy watched as Sam removed them from the Blow Tank and carefully packed them into pretty blue, white, and silver cans. On each can were the words “Famous Pearl Brand Chesapeake Bay Oysters, McNasby Oyster Co.”

After the cans were sealed tightly, Sam and a helper put them in boxes to be shipped to the market and stores. The young men who had shoveled oysters from the buy boat now took boxes of canned oysters to a truck for the trip into town.

Heading Towards Home

Daisy’s Uncle Fred had finished talking to the manager of the packinghouse and called Daisy to meet him at the boat. Daisy said goodbye to the others and climbed on board Uncle Fred’s boat. She pulled in the lines so Uncle Fred could maneuver the boat from the wharf and out into the Severn River. As they headed out to the Chesapeake Bay, Daisy looked for other watermen’s boats, but they were gone, finished for the day.

As they motored into West River, Daisy recognized some of the shoreline she had seen in the morning. They waited patiently for her dad to motor to them, watching the sky turn colors as dusk settled in. Her father had been waiting for her and getting his equipment ready for the next day. He and Uncle Fred shook hands again, and Daisy’s dad asked her about her big day. “I met some very nice people, and one of them was named Nellie. She let me try to open an oyster, but it was hard work, and Sam let me stir the oysters in the tank, too!” she declared. “Would you like to go out with me on Monday?” her Dad asked, teasingly. Daisy replied, “Dad, you know I have school!” He winked at Uncle Fred, knowing very well she would be asleep when he left before daylight Monday morning. But Daisy smiled. She had had a very Big Day today, and she couldn’t wait to get to school to tell her tale!