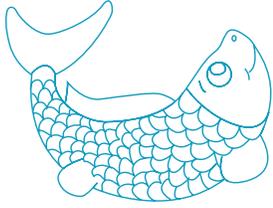




# ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

## SPECIAL OFFERINGS

HUNGER • DISASTER • DEVELOPMENT



## Gracie and the Fishing Net

Gracie and her friends were bored. It seemed like every day was like every other day. They woke up and did the same things and played the same games. They had met many new friends during their time on the Red Sea coral reef, but all of these friends seemed to have other things to do and Gracie's old friends were feeling cranky with each other, because there was nothing new to see or do.

"All right," Gracie said, taking charge, "I've created a new game. Everyone has by the time I count to 100 to find one new object on the coral reef and bring it back here. Maybe we can create something new with all the objects we find."

"Wow! That does sound different, Gracie," said Angie Angelfish, Gracie's best friend, who was always willing to support her in her plans.

"Well, it sounds better than complaining about how bored we are," Benji Butterflyfish said with a sigh. "When do we start?" asked his sister, Belinda.

"Right now," said Gracie, "1, 2, 3 ..."

The fish began to scatter. Gus Grouper went to the cave on the other side of the branch coral colony. He knew that the smaller fish would be too scared to go in there. Benji and Belinda stayed together and headed toward where the crabs lived, as they often would find objects and use them to build forts to mark their territories. Angie headed to her garden hoping to find a new underwater plant. Ephraim Eel slithered in and out of the coral colony to the other side, hoping to find something new.

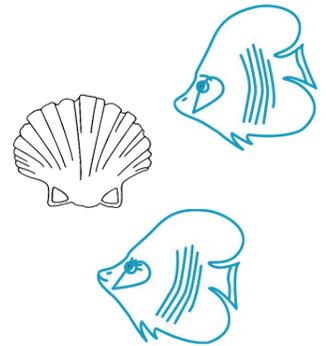
Gracie finished her counting, "98, 99, 100," and the fish began to return with the things they had found. Gus had found a pretty rock with shiny silver sheets of mica on it. Benji and Belinda brought back a beautiful scallop shell that they had found near where the crabs live. Angie contributed a seed that was unlike any she had seen before and wondered what would grow from it.

"These are all beautiful," thought Gracie, "but I'm not sure what we can make from a rock, a shell and a seed."

Then, Ephraim arrived, and he was all excited. "I have found the most wonderful thing on the other side of the reef, but it was too big to bring to you. You all have to come and see this."

So, all the fish swam to the other side of the reef. What they saw was a large object made of twine that was tied and knotted together so it made almost a carpet on the sandy bottom.

"Let's all take a strand of this in different places and pull it out, so we can see how large it is," said Gracie.



All of them took a piece of the twine and pulled the large object so it was stretched out in all directions. It was much bigger than Gus, who was the biggest fish among them.

“I wonder what we could do with this,” Benji said as he gripped the twine in his mouth.

“Let’s make it go up and down,” said his sister, Belinda.

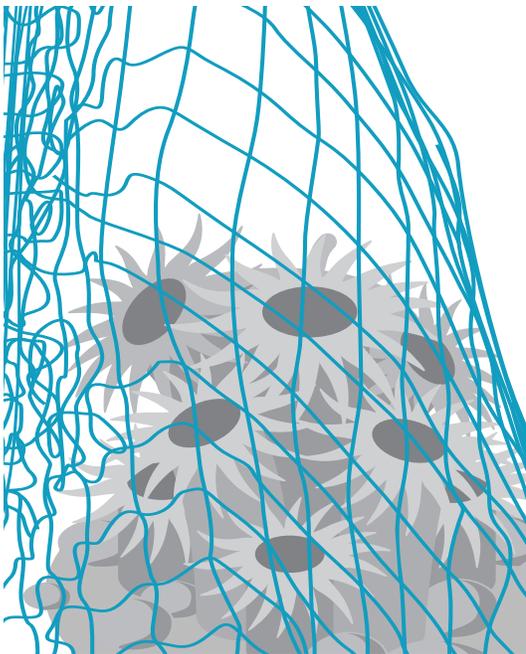
The fish lifted their parts of the object up and down and created some small waves that some of the nearby creatures enjoyed trying to ride, almost like they were surfing.

“Let me try,” said Gracie and she released her portion of the twine and felt the wave carry her along in the water.

Each fish took a turn as the others continued to hold the twine. They were having a great time, when suddenly they heard a voice from one of their classmates saying, “Hey, guys! You’re going to be late for school. Better hurry!”

The fish dropped the twine they were holding, and it gently settled on some sun coral. They hurried on to their school, where Old Cod Fish was just ending a lesson on the ecosystem of the coral reef.

“And so, my students, we are all linked together within the ecosystem of this coral reef and everything we do affects those around us,” concluded Old Cod Fish.



Gracie and her friends tried to sneak in without being seen, but Old Cod Fish was a wise fish and was not fooled by his students’ antics. “I see you there, Gracie, Gus, Ephraim, Angie, Benji and Belinda. Perhaps you could share with the class why you were late this morning.”

“We found something new, sir,” Gracie stated politely. “We were playing with it and I guess we lost track of the time.”

“Let’s go see this new thing,” Old Cod Fish said. “Perhaps it will help us see what happens when something new enters an ecosystem.”

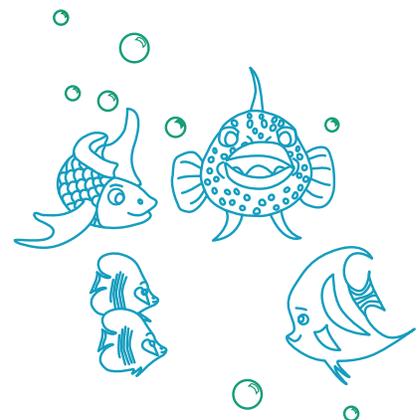
The whole class was excited about the prospect of a field trip and headed out to the reef. They showed Old Cod Fish and the others the large object they had found with excitement.

“This is a fishing net,” said Old Cod Fish sadly. “It must have fallen off one of the fishing boats headed back to port. It is an object that can be dangerous to some sea creatures when it is used in a certain way, but right now it is a danger to this sun coral colony. Let’s all take a piece of it and pull it off of them together, putting it in a safe place on the ocean floor.”

So, each fish took a bit of the fishing net in their mouths and stretched the net out to its full size. Once they had taken it off of the sun coral, they swam with it until they were over a bare spot in the ocean bottom and dropped the net.

As it settled to the ocean floor, Old Cod Fish looked at the net and said, “Gracie, I think you and your friends have found the perfect object to go along with my lesson. It is all connected by the twines and knots you see, and it took all of us working together to keep it safe and to protect the coral, as well. Let’s all say a bubble prayer to the God of the Seas for bringing us together today and showing us how we are all connected through our care for each other.”

And so, they prayed together, and as Gracie thought back on her day, she smiled, because it hadn’t been a boring day after all and they had learned something new about their world.



### For younger children:

- 🕒 With a group of friends, get a ball of yarn and toss it to each person in the group, holding on to a piece of the yarn as you throw it to another. After everyone is holding on to the yarn, look at the web you have created. It will look something like the fishing net in this story. Can you make it go up and down like Gracie and her friends did by working together? Think together about how we all may be connected even when we're not holding the yarn.
- 🕒 Many of Jesus' friends were fisherman, who made their living from using nets like this. When Jesus invited them to come with him, he told them they would be fishing for people. What do you think he meant by this?
- 🕒 Gracie and her friends were trying to think of new ways to have fun. When you get your fish bank this year, think of new ways to fill it up with coins. Maybe you put so many coins in for each meal you eat or maybe you create an internet-connected web of families who are all raising money for One Great Hour of Sharing, where you celebrate in some way for each dollar raised for others.

### For older children:

- 🕒 Discarded fishing equipment is a real threat to coral reefs around the world. See this blog for information on this and other threats to coral reefs: [blog.marinedebris.noaa.gov/how-does-marine-debris-affect-coral-reefs](http://blog.marinedebris.noaa.gov/how-does-marine-debris-affect-coral-reefs). What can you do to raise awareness about these issues to protect this important ecosystem?
- 🕒 Jesus uses fishing nets in many of his teaching stories with the disciples, probably because so many of them made their living through fishing. Read several of these and think of what role the net plays in the story. (Here are some examples: Matthew 4:18–22; Matthew 13:47–48; Luke 5:1–11; John 21:1–8.) How is this the same or different than it is used in Gracie's story?
- 🕒 Old Cod Fish talks about an ecosystem where all are connected to each other. How does One Great Hour of Sharing create a net or ecosystem that connects us with those who have been in natural disasters, those who are hungry and those who would like to start a business of their own design? How can you help strengthen these connections?

