

Hunter Owens
Grade 7
Thomas Hunter Middle School
Mathews, Virginia

Aw Shucks!

A rock - a stone - a pebble? No - an oyster! Some things are not always what they appear to be and with an oyster that is true!

A Powerhouse of Filtration

This “Rock” is one of the main sources of filtering and clearing the water in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries! Oysters filter the water by moving large amounts of water through their gills that catch algae, plankton, and other small organisms. They use these (organisms) for nourishment in order to grow and reproduce. A matured oyster can filter up to 50 gallons (189.27 liters) of water every day.

Food Source Through the Ages

Oysters have been enjoyed by people all over the world for thousands of years. Around 100 B.C., ancient Romans grew oysters on so called “farms” along the coast of what is now Italy. They are commonly found in Roman towns, villas, and forts, as well as many other places. Inside a cave in South Africa, scientists and archeologists discovered evidence of oysters being consumed dating back as far as 164,000 years ago. All through human history, the masses have loved the oyster!

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Mountains of Sadness

Unfortunately, the oyster is becoming extinct in many places. Eighty-five percent of the world's native oyster reefs, which are vital places where many oysters live, have been lost. About seventy-five percent of the world's oyster population live in North America and a lot of the reefs they live in are functionally extinct (they don't play a large role in the ecosystem). The reason for the naming of this section is that the indigenous peoples of Manhattan consumed so many oysters that the abundance of shells created mountains which could be used as landmarks and other markers. One hundred years ago you could purchase a quart of fully shucked oysters for a quarter!

The Interesting Life

Usually, an oyster must be in relatively warm waters (about 68 F) to trigger spawning. After they spawn, they settle on a hard surface and become spat. An Eastern oyster produces about 15-115 million eggs. It usually takes about 18-24 months for an oyster to grow to a marketable size. If you consume a spawning oyster, it will not hurt you, but it will taste acidic.

My History with Oysters!

The process of raising and harvesting oysters is unique and time consuming! As well as many other people along the Chesapeake Bay, I have a strong connection with oysters and the water. To begin with, my family consists of at least 5 generations of watermen. They drudged/potted for crabs, raked and

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tonged clams, tonged/drudged oysters, and netted fish. I am very well acclimated to the stories told by my Dad and Grandma about him and my Grandpa! Over the years, I have gained knowledge by watching and helping my Dad raise and shuck oysters (hence the name of this essay).

“Consider the Oyster”

In order to appreciate the work and love that most watermen have for raising and harvesting oysters, as well as other seafood, one would have to actively participate in the process to reap its reward. In all of this, one must “Consider the Oyster” to fully understand the complexity and importance of an oyster’s life cycle. Although oysters filter the water, it is still imperative to ensure that mankind uses/enforces as many precautions and restrictions as necessary to protect the water and keep it safe for oysters to spawn and grow in a timely manner. Keeping all of this in mind, we need to remember and emphasize that the oyster is there for mankind to consume. Therefore, in order to reap its full benefits, we must “Consider the Oyster”.