

**Source:** Adapted from an activity by Ann-Marie McCoy in **Trees to Seas: educational activities contrasting forest and coastal ecology in New England and tropical climates** to be published by New Hampshire Sea Grant Extension. Used with permission.

## 52. “GRIEF ON THE REEF”: A SOAP OPERA

People trying to reach decisions about coral reef management and conservation can be much like a daytime soap. There are friends and there are enemies, there are triumphs and there are tragedies, there is confidence and there is uncertainty. In order to better understand the complexity of the issues and stakes, students become representatives of various public and private interest groups in a fictitious episode of “Grief on the Reef.”

**DAY ONE:** Write the following roles on slips of paper. You may wish to omit some of the roles.

government authority	conservationist	artist who draws inspiration from nature
commercial fisherman	underwater photographer	owner of a coastal industry that pollutes
coastal native	manager of a souvenir shop	collector of tropical fish for pet shops
recreational scuba diver	scientist	recreational angler
tourist resort developer		

Explain to students that they will be writing and presenting a soap opera drama about a public hearing on how nearby coral reefs will be managed. The production will be called “Grief on the Reef.” Have students draw from a hat to discover their part in the soap opera drama. Then help the students understand the concerns and perspectives of the various characters. Raise questions about policies to protect reefs that might be proposed at the hearing. What would be the consequences to all the parties involved? For example, should coastal industry and development be restricted if these pollute or muddy the seawater? If so, how would restrictions affect the local economy? How much fishing and collecting should be allowed? Will the tourist trade suffer if coral trinkets and shell souvenirs cannot be sold? Would it be wise to make the reef a marine sanctuary that can be visited by divers, or to completely restrict access except to scientists? You may wish to furnish some background information for student research. Discuss what reef management proposals might be offered at the public hearing by the different members of the cast.

**DAY TWO:** Lead the class in deciding on a story line for “Grief on the Reef.” Once a coherent plot has been agreed upon, appoint a group of students to collaborate on writing a script that includes parts for all characters. Place another group of students in charge of scenery and props.

**DAY THREE:** The writing of the script should be completed. After the teacher has edited the script, copies should be made and sent home with students so they can learn their parts.

**DAY FOUR:** Rehearse the play several times. Scenery and props should be ready for the final performance.

**DAY FIVE:** Perform “Grief on the Reef” before another class of students or an audience of parents. If possible, videotape the production, occasionally zooming in on the faces of the characters to create a sense of melodrama. Allow students to replay and critique their soap opera. How do they expect a real public meeting would differ from their theatrical version?

**Correlation to National Standards from McREL ( <http://www.mcrel.org> ) :**

Geography

8. Understands the characteristics of ecosystems on Earth's surface
14. Understands how human actions modify the physical environment
15. Understands how physical systems affect human systems
16. Understands the changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution and importance of resources
18. Understands global development and environmental issues