

Catch a Bay Critter

Once you get to the boardwalk, have the group form a semicircle at the start of the boardwalk to discuss the activity, rules, and guidelines.

A. Introduction to marshes

- a. You have just arrived at one of the most important habitats at CBEC and in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. What type of habitat is this? (Point to the marshes)
- b. This type of marsh is called a salt panne
- c. Marshes are important habitats for several reasons:
 - i. Food
 1. Some animals and bacteria feed on the grasses, while most other animals feed on smaller animals and plankton that live in the marshes.
 - ii. Filter
 1. The roots and bodies of the grasses catch sediment and pollution entering in marsh and slow down its progress. The sediment and other types of water pollution settle out of the water and stay in the grasses, while the water continues to flow slowly through the marshes. Think of marshes like big sponges!
 - iii. Flood control
 1. Marsh grasses slow down wave action that would otherwise erode beaches
 2. When a storm causes flood conditions, water flows into marshes and can fill up spaces between the grass roots. In places where marshes have been destroyed for development, flooding is a huge problem.
 - iv. Habitat
 1. Many animals live in marshes because there are lots of food sources and places to hide.
 2. Many animals will lay eggs or have young in marshes so that their young will be protected.
 3. Animals that molt to get bigger (crabs, horseshoe crabs, etc) will move into marshes to molt for protection
- d. Marsh Dance!
 - i. Act out the 4 important functions of the marsh

B. Diversity

- a. Ask students where they think you will find a greater diversity of animals: in the Bay or in the tidal pool surrounded by marsh grasses?
 - i. You may need to define diversity: a variety of different types of animals