

GEORGE THE CRANKY GUPPY - BOOK 5 SAMPLE 2

Yechiel's Fishery Farm Adventure

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Book 5 Sample 2

Interlude 3: The Class Visit

A funny STEM scene about brackish water, salt, schedules, biofilters, and one very dramatic killifish.



Interior illustration from Book 5: Yechiel teaches young visitors at the fishery.

Dyslexia-friendly sample for parents, teachers, STEM educators, and young readers ages 7-10.

Interlude 3

The Class Visit

A sample from Book 5: George Finds His Water

The children arrived at Yechiel's Fishery Farm at nine o'clock on a Tuesday morning, in a line of twenty-three, ranging in age from seven to ten, wearing various combinations of enthusiasm and hats.

George knew they were coming before they came through the gate.

He knew because Sir Bubbleton knew, and Sir Bubbleton had assembled the bog.

"My friends," said Sir Bubbleton, in the velvet voice he reserved for announcements of significant gravity - fins held slightly outward, threadlike pelvic fins trailing, the posture of a fish addressing a formal occasion - "today is the day."

"The day for what?" said a molly fry.

"The day," said Sir Bubbleton, "for the children."

A long silence.

"...is it," said the lead killifish, very quietly, "the end?"

"It may be," said Sir Bubbleton, with tremendous dignity, "the end of something."

"The end of days?" said Pinchy.

"The end of the week, certainly. Possibly more."

"THE END OF ALL TIME," said Pinchy. "I KNEW IT. The drought was a warning. The bird in the bog was a warning. The yogurt teacher was a WARNING -"

"Pinchy -"

"I have been noting warnings for two chapters and nobody listened to me and NOW -"

"PINCHY."

Pinchy stopped. He looked at Madame Molly. Madame Molly looked back at him with the expression of a fish who has been patient for a very long time and is drawing on reserves.

"Let us," she said, "wait and see."

The bog waited.

Spike retreated to the deepest part of his cave and arranged himself in front of his empty egg-spot - no eggs currently, but some distances are worth keeping regardless. Greta gathered the fry into the mimic-root bundles and held very still, doing her best impression of not being there, which was, given her transparency, quite good. Cory swept his gravel with the focused intensity of a

fish who needs to be doing something useful with his hands.

Pearl, from her seagrass, watched through the polite glass with the calm of a seahorse who had survived three previous class visits and had opinions.

George floated at the edge of the duckweed.

He watched.

Twenty-three children came through the gate in a line that was, by the time it reached the bog, no longer technically a line. Yechiel was at the front. Maya was at the back, clipboard raised like a small flag. Between them: hats, questions, one child already eating something out of a bag, one child who had stopped to look at a pipe fitting with extraordinary concentration.

"CHILDREN," said a small voice from the direction of the hub.

Several visiting children turned.

In the hub's window, visible through the glass, Avichai was sitting at Maya's computer. He had not looked up from the screen. He had simply heard them and issued a general acknowledgment. His blue star bandana was slightly sideways. Jhonny was on the back of the chair, watching the screen with him.

Several visiting children stared at Avichai. Avichai did not stare back. He was, it was clear, at a very important part of something.

"Is that a parrot?" said one visiting child.

"JHONNY," said Jhonny, without turning around.

Three visiting children immediately wanted to go to the hub instead. Maya, at the back of the line, redirected them with the practiced efficiency of someone who had already anticipated this.

Yechiel walked the class to the edge of the brackish bog.

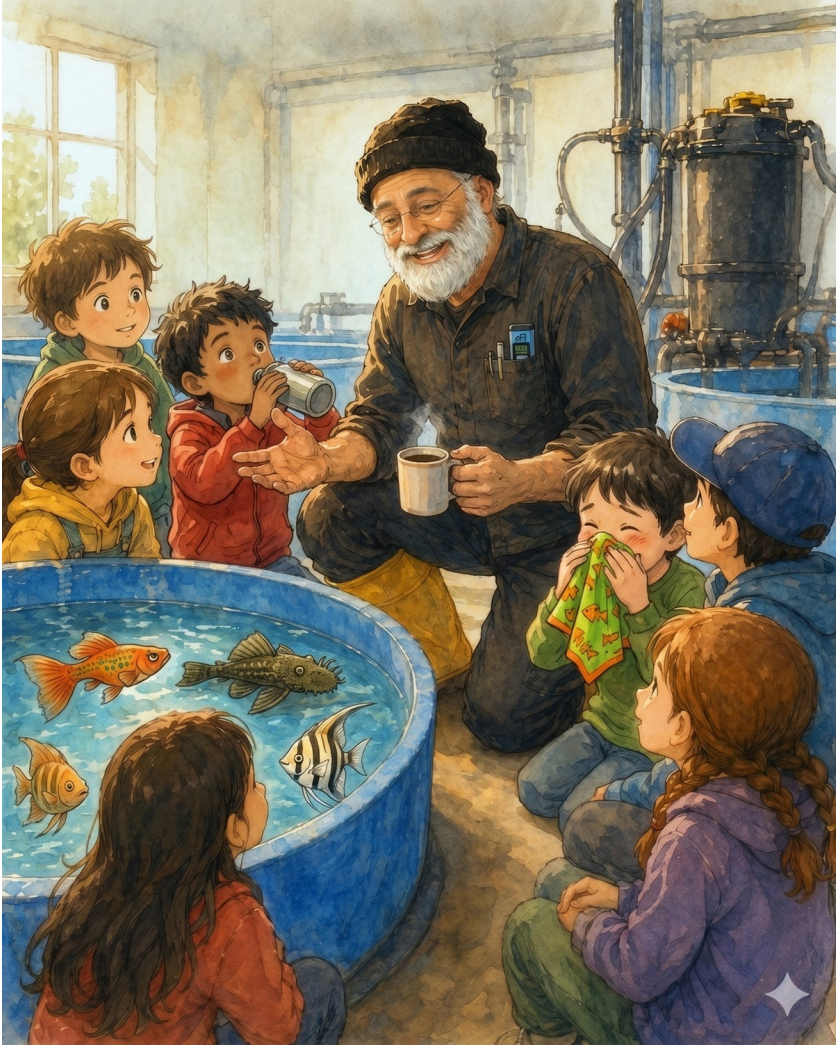
He walked slowly, the way he did everything, and the children came with him in the approximate shape of a crowd. He looked at the water. He looked at the children. He began, in the patient teaching voice that Maya had been learning and writing down for several months, to explain.

"Yechiel's Fishery Farm," he said, "has several different kinds of water. Fresh water - no salt at all, like the water from your tap at home. Salt water - very salty, like the sea. And this -" he gestured at the bog - "is brackish water. In between. Not fully fresh. Not fully salty. The place where a river meets the sea."

"Why?" said a child.

"Because some fish need the in-between. Some creatures live their whole lives in the exact middle, where neither fully belongs."

Below the surface, George went perfectly still.



"Now," said Yechiel. He turned toward the shelf behind him, where the supply bags were stacked. He reached into

a large bag of aquarium salt - the good kind, the kind he had been measuring in careful grams for five summers. He took a handful.

He held it up so the children could see.

"Salt," he said, "looks like this."

He threw it into the bog.

Thirty-seven things happened simultaneously below the surface.

The salt grains caught the morning light as they fell - a small slow constellation of white crystals drifting down through the brackish water, spinning, sinking, settling.

The bog watched.

Every fish, every snail, every crab in the bog watched the salt fall.

It was, George thought, actually quite beautiful.

Then the lead killifish, who had been watching from three centimeters away with the electrified attention of a creature built for quick decisions, made a quick decision.

He darted forward.

He ate a grain.

He stopped moving completely.

"...oh," said the lead killifish.

Everyone waited.

"...oh no," said the lead killifish.

"What?" said the second killifish.

"...it is salty."

"Salt is salty, yes," said Madame Molly.

"It is very salty." The lead killifish looked at himself, as much as a fish can look at himself. "I feel - I feel -" He paused. His small face had achieved an expression of profound personal affront. "I feel like a lox fish."

"You are not a lox fish."

"I feel like I am about to be put in a can," said the lead killifish. "I feel like I am going to be sold in a supermarket. I feel like someone is going to put a small key on the bottom of me and roll back my lid and -"

"Nobody," said Madame Molly firmly, "is putting you in a can."

"I ate salt. Salt is for preserving things. I am now preserved. I am a preserved killifish. I am a product."

"Salt does not work that way from the inside," said Madame Molly.

"Are you certain?"

"Salt," she said, with great patience, "preserves food by killing bacteria and drawing out moisture. One grain, eaten by a fish who lives in brackish water, does nothing except taste bad."

"It tasted very bad."

"Yes."

"We would like it on the record," said the second killifish, to nobody, to everybody, to the general principle of record-keeping, "that we eat plankton. We do not eat salt. This was a mistake. The name is a coincidence. We also make mistakes. The name is still a coincidence."

"On the record," said Madame Molly.

"Also on the record," said the lead killifish, with dignity, "that I feel fine. I am noting that separately from the preserved feeling. Both things are true simultaneously."

"Also noted."

"Thank you."

Above, the class had moved on - down the path toward the greenhouse, in the approximate shape of a crowd, one child still eating something out of the bag, the pipe-fitting child having rejoined the group with some reluctance.

Yechiel's voice carried back, patient and warm, explaining the long tube light and the zz-ZZ it made.

The bog was quiet.

The salt grains had settled.

The water was exactly as it had been.

The bog looked at itself.

"...that's it?" said a molly fry.

George floated.

"That appears to be it," he said.

"Nothing happened?"

"Nothing happened."

"...but Sir Bubbleton said -"

"Sir Bubbleton," said George, with the small private warmth of a fish who has, this summer, become someone who can say this without edges, "was being dramatic."

Sir Bubbleton, across the bog, raised one thread-fin with great dignity and said nothing.

"But the typhoon -" said Pinchy.

"There was no typhoon," said George.

"The end of days -"

"All days end," said George. "Then it is night. Then another day starts. That is what days do."

Pinchy stopped.

"...what?"

"Days end," said George. "That is the definition of a day. It ends. Then a new one begins. It has been doing this for a very long time and shows no sign of stopping."

"I meant -"

"The end of the week -"

"Yes," said George. "A week ends in a weekend. That is why it is called a weekend. It is the end of the week. It has the word end in it. Right there. Week. End. It announces itself."

"George -"

"But the day ENDS," said Pinchy, rallying. "The day itself - it ENDS -"

"Yes," said George. "Like yesterday."

A pause.

"...like yesterday," said Pinchy carefully.

"Yesterday ended," said George. "That is why it is called yesterday. It ended. It is done. It passed. Today is new. Tomorrow is after today ends - which today will, as we

have established, because that is what days do." He tilted his fan-tail, thoughtfully. "All days end. Then a new one starts. It is, if you look at it correctly, not a disaster. It is a schedule."

The bog was very quiet.

Pinchy looked at his clipboard.

He looked at the calm water.

He looked at the salt grains, which had settled harmlessly into Cory's clean gravel and were doing nothing in particular.

He was quiet for a moment.

It was, for Pinchy, quite a long moment.

"...I," said Pinchy, with the expression of a crab who has won every argument and somehow ended up with nothing, "am noting this for the record."

"Please do," said George.

"All of it."

"Yes."

"Every word."

"I agree."

Pinchy tapped his clipboard once. He looked at it. He looked at George. He looked back at his clipboard.

He had, he realized, agreed with everything he came in with and been agreed with about all of it and was somehow, inexplicably, less satisfied than when he had started.

This was the most unsettling outcome he had encountered in five books.

He began, very slowly, to walk.

Clik. Clik. Clik.

"Perhaps," said Madame Molly, and her voice was gentle the way it was gentle when she was saying something she meant very carefully, "perhaps something bad did not happen this time."

The bog listened.

"It can, you know," she said. "A class of twenty-three children can walk along the edge of a bog and look at the water and ask their questions and move on, and everything in the bog can be exactly the same as it was before they came. - It can happen. Not everything is a warning. Not every visitor is a disaster. Sometimes the kind old man throws salt into the water because he is showing a child what salt looks like, and the water processes it, the

way the water processes everything it was built to process, because he built it well." She paused. "Good things happen. Bad things happen. And sometimes - this time - nothing happened at all, except that twenty-three children learned something they did not know before, and went home."

A long quiet.

"...oh," said the lead killifish.

"Yes," said Madame Molly.

"...I still feel slightly preserved."

"That will pass."

"Preserved," said the lead killifish, with the first small trace of equanimity, "but present. I am noting that as well."

At the south root, Snailbert had been composing his response since the moment the salt hit the water.

"...ah," said Snailbert. "...there was. Salt."

"Yes, Snailbert."

"...it fell."

"Yes."

"...we are all right."

"Yes, Snailbert. We are all right."

"...mm." A pause of great length and great peace. "...good," said Snailbert, and meant it completely, and continued on his trail.

From the biofilter, a sound.

It was not, exactly, a voice. Professor Nitra did not have a voice in the way the fish had voices - he had a presence, a hum, a quality of the water that carried his meaning through the system like a current.

"Salt," said Professor Nitra, with the grumpy satisfaction of a microbiologist whose expertise has, at last, been directly invoked, "kills bacteria. High salt concentration, in the wrong place, in the wrong amount, disrupts the osmotic balance of microbial cells and ends them. This is why salt preserves food. This is why it is used in medicine. This is why -" a pause for emphasis - "you need me. You need my colonies. You need every invisible worker in this biofilter. Without us, the nitrogen cycle stops. Without the nitrogen cycle -" another pause - "you are all, in a different and considerably less pleasant sense, in a can."

The bog absorbed this.

"We need you," said George, to the filter.

"YES YOU DO," said Professor Nitra, and returned, with great dignity, to his work.

On the salt bag, at the edge of the supply shelf, Jhonny had arrived.

He had come from the hub - satisfied with his computer time, or perhaps simply ready for a change of surface - and had landed on the salt bag with the easy practiced grace of a bird who lands on things for a living.

He looked at the salt bag.

He tilted his crest all the way to the left.

He put his beak approximately one millimeter from the surface of the bag and looked at it with one enormous round eye at very close range.

He tilted his crest all the way to the right.

He looked at it with the other eye.

He stepped back one step.

He tilted his crest again.

Below, the lead killifish watched this with great attention.

"He is," said the lead killifish, "not going to eat it."

"He is being sensible," said Madame Molly.

"He is being," said the lead killifish, with a tone that contained the full complexity of a fish who had eaten the salt and now had thoughts about it, "very sensible indeed."

Jhonny looked at the salt bag one more time. He puffed his chest feathers. He made the small internal sound of a bird who has completed an assessment and reached a conclusion.

Twee, he said, quietly, to the salt bag.

He stepped back two more steps, turned around, and looked at the bog instead.

The bog, in the warm mid-morning, went on doing exactly what it was supposed to do.

That evening, on his quiet walk-through, the kind old man paused at the salt shelf.

He looked at the bag.

He looked at the surface of the bog.

He looked, for a long moment, at the water - at the way it moved, at the way the light sat on it, at the very slight settling of the afternoon gravel.

He noted something.

He took the short fat pencil from behind his ear. He wrote three lines in the small wet notebook.

He stood up slowly. The knees did their negotiations.

"To make mistakes," he said, half to himself, half to the bog, half to a young man he had once been who had not

been slow enough - "is legitimate. But you have to catch them, and learn from them." He paused. "- I should have warned them about the salt shelf. That is on me." He looked at the water one more time. "We all make mistakes."

He closed the notebook.

He walked, squelch, squelch, squelch, slowly back along the path.

The bog, in his wake, was exactly as it should be.

End of Sample 2 - Book 5, Interlude 3