

AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

WITH

STEPHEN SWINBURNE



What inspired you to write poems about tide pools?

One August almost ten years ago, our Vermont family piled into our beat-up Toyota Previa van and drove the six hours to the coast of Maine. We landed in a tiny coastal harbor in a village called Blue Hill. The rental cottage overlooked a narrow tidal inlet. We would be there for the week.

A half-mile section of tide pools spanned our front yard, less than one hundred feet from the deck of the rental house. At low tide, mid-tide, and high tide, I would go exploring. I'm a Vermonter. We have no ocean. So this was like Disneyland for a naturalist.

I'd often take my two daughters to investigate the pools. We'd creep over the rocks and peer into the still water. The life in the quiet salty pools fired my imagination. It was like looking into someone's living room. Everyone was home: anemones, barnacles, starfish (now called sea stars), crabs, sculpins, sea urchins. For five days I watched their comings and goings, prying into their private lives. I scribbled notes. I took photographs. I stayed long after the girls got bored. I'd studied tide pool ecology in a Field Biology course in college a million years ago, so this felt like meeting up with old friends.

Why did you decide to use poetry rather than prose when writing *Ocean Soup*?

I don't know exactly how and when *Ocean Soup* became poems rather than straight nonfiction text, but the writing emerged as poems right from the start. And I knew that they had to be funny. I wanted the creatures to speak for themselves. A starfish with attitude. A sea urchin proud of its spines. A blue mussel tired of being pushed around. I envisioned the sculpin as Fagin in *Oliver*, and I just knew that Hairy Doris, a sea slug, was Mrs. Doubtfire.

I wanted *Ocean Soup* to work on two levels: poems that were entertaining and educational, and solid factual information that would enlighten and expand awareness about a beautiful and threatened habitat. Besides a glossary and further resources to explore, I wrote brief factoids about each critter.



How did you choose which sea creatures you wanted to write about?

In a way, the creatures chose me. As we searched the tide pools, certain critters showed up. I wrote about the animals I found and observed. Of course, I had to include the five rock stars of the tide pool: sea stars, urchins, barnacles, anemones, and crabs.



Which was your favorite poem to write? Why?

It's hard to choose just one. "Move Over Mussell," "Bully of the Tide," and "Barnacle Rap" are my three favorites. I love the line in "Barnacle Rap" that goes "Don't want no crab. Don't want no prawn. All I wanna eat is fresh plankton." It makes me smile every time I say it.

What was your writing process like for *Ocean Soup*?

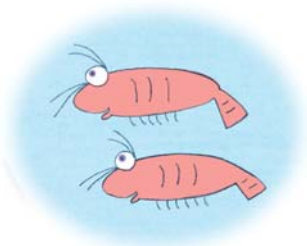
As a writer, you have to be ready for inspiration when it shows its face. We returned to Vermont, shook the sand out of our sneakers and stored our beach gear in the barn. And then every morning for the next two weeks I woke at 5:00 and went to my desk and wrote poems about tide pool creatures. I browsed field guides. I stared at the shells we'd collected. Sniffed the salty carcass of a sea fan. And with the promise to myself that I would keep B.I.C. (Butt In Chair) until I had something written, I began to hear the voices of the tide pool inhabitants.

How do you think Mary Peterson's illustrations complement your poems?

I feel like this book and these poems have taken on a life almost all their own with the help of Mary Peterson's colorful and playful illustrations. They complement my text perfectly. The poems are fun and Mary's art is fun and light. I love all the eyes on the creatures.

What would you like readers to take away from *Ocean Soup*?

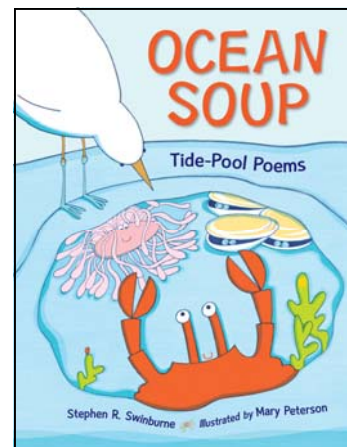
As I mention in the author's note, "North America is home to countless tide pools. This land-sea habitat is sustained and nourished by clean air and pure ocean waters. If we are willing to solve the threats of coastal development and ocean pollution that endanger tide-pool communities, this narrow ribbon of wilderness might remain undisturbed for generations to come." For children and students to become champions of the environment and advocates for ocean tide pools, they first have to become aware of the habitat. I hope this book introduces readers to this very cool world along the rocky shore. I would be thrilled if it sparked their interest to learn more about it and perhaps even visit a tide pool someday.



By Stephen Swinburne

OCEAN SOUP

Tide pools are home to a wondrous and diverse collection of creatures. In funny poems and lyrics—including a rapping barnacle—author Stephen R. Swinburne introduces young readers to the many different creatures who cling to the rocks, bury themselves in the sand, and crawl or swim around in the shallows and the little pools left when the ocean's tide rolls out. Share a meal of plants and small animals with Doris, the lovely sea slug who finds food with her prickly tongue. Cozy up to a little shrimp with Old, Cold Fish. Be careful of the snapping crabs, because you cannot regenerate your arms like the starfish can. Meet many other inhabitants of the mysterious world of the tide pool in these charming—and repeatable—poems.



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