

The Great Estuary Hunt

by Andrew McCown

Objective: To enhance understanding of estuarine ecosystems.

Materials: World Map or Atlas.

Part I—Begin by reviewing the vocabulary words through a question and answer session focusing on a map of the Chesapeake Bay or other estuary.

Part II—Discuss the importance of the estuarine system from a global perspective.

Question: Who or what besides people could benefit from estuaries?

Answer: The oceans and their inhabitants. Approximately 70% of oceanic animals depend on estuaries—for spawning grounds, for feeding grounds, or as a source of food. Think of estuaries as roots of the oceans.

Part III—Look at a world map or atlas and attempt to locate estuaries. This could be done in small groups, with each group charged with addressing particular coastlines or continents around the world.

a) Assign groups to work toward identifying the most important estuary in their study area.

b) In what ways are those estuaries different? How are they similar?

c) Students could write reports on important estuaries in the world, comparing them in terms of ecological productivity and environmental degradation. How have humans altered these ecosystems?

editor's note: *The Life and Death of the Chesapeake Bay* (see Resources) includes information about some of the world's major estuaries.

