

Cecil Child

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FREE

Holey Moley

By Lyn Sirota

Imagine it's a summer afternoon at the beach. Your friends bury you in wet sand right up to your neck. The sand sticks to sunscreen lotion on your skin like peanut butter to bread. The foamy ocean water dances right up to the tips of your toes. Just as your friends finish patting the last bit of sand, you feel something. It's itchy. Yikes, it's tickling your rear end... No, it's crawling up your bathing suit and clawing you!

You scream! You can't stand up because the wet sand is heavy. So you wiggle your way out, and grab this thing out of your bathing suit with lightning speed. What is it? It looks like a cockroach or a gray beetle. It seems to be walking backwards in your hand. It has ten legs ... HOLEY MOLEY... it's a Crab! It's a Mole Crab.

Don't worry, the creature from your suit isn't so big. The Mole Crab is one of the smallest crabs around. Female Crabs grow to about one inch, while males grow to only about half an inch.¹ This species, or type of crab has a Latin name called *Emerita talpoida*. Their eyes are on slender, hair-like

stalks and they don't have pincers, like most crabs.²

It isn't easy to know which end of a Mole Crab is the front. Here's a hint: watch the direction in which the crab moves. Mole Crabs actually move backwards. The strongest, largest pair of legs is at the front end.

Don't be concerned about Mole Crabs snacking on your toes. They eat only organic, or natural, things and small creatures from the ocean like plankton and bacteria. Mole Crabs have feathery antennae or eyes that trap tiny particles of food. They are called filter feeders because they sift through the particles.³ Then they use their antennae to remove the food particles from the water and brush them into their mouth.⁴

Mole Crabs lay batches of eggs. Each batch can have thousands of tiny eggs.⁵ To protect themselves and their eggs, they dig underneath the sand as the seawater washes over them. Hiding protects them from being eaten by shorebirds, larger crabs, or fish. Sometimes fishermen gather Mole Crabs using meshed wire nets attached to poles. They use the crabs as fishing bait.

Holey Moley

You can gather Mole Crabs too! Instead of waiting for one to climb into your bathing suit, grab the biggest sand bucket you can find. A yellow or white bucket is best because dark colors get hotter faster than lighter colors. The last thing you want to do is heat up these wonderful creatures.

Have you ever seen holes in the sand where the seawater meets the beach? Find a spot close to the water in the wet sand below the holes. Use your hands to dig down as wide and as deep as you can. Most of the time, you'll dig a Mole Crab right into your hands. Feel their silky shells and their prickly legs.

Don't get frustrated when seawater pools into your sand hole. Every so often, you might find a 10-legged swimmer! Be on the look out, though. The Mole Crab's gray shell camouflages, or disguises, it in the sand. When you find one, you'll probably

find a few relatives as well.

It's fun to race them or just hold them gently. Then put them back on wet sand to dig their way home. If you collect Mole Crabs in a bucket, don't forget to put

them back in the wet sand.

And next time you're at the beach looking for something to do, see if you can find some Mole Crabs before they find you!

“Mole crabs live in the swash zone - the area of the beach where the sand inclines - of tropical and temperate sandy beaches all around the world. They can leave the sand and ride the swash up the beach on a rising tide, and re-burrow in the sand very quickly. When the tide is falling they leave the sand again and ride the swash back down the beach. Because of this, some people call them ‘swash riders.’”

Judy Grassle is a professor of marine biology at Rutgers University, where she teaches and does research on surfclams and marine worms.

Credits:

¹ The Assateague Naturalist

www.assateague.com

² “ “ “ “

³ “The Secret World of Crabs,” Theresa Greenaway, p. 22

⁴ “Invertebrates,” Richard and Gary Brusca, p. 638

⁵ “The Secret World of Crabs,” Theresa Greenaway, p. 29

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Contributor Biographies

Dawnelle Breum is a former first-grade teacher. She currently writes for children from her home in Ontario, Canada.

Jennifer Cummings is currently a grade four elementary teacher in Massachusetts, having also taught grades one and five. While teaching in Massachusetts public schools, Jennifer also received a Masters degree in education, with a specialization in special education. In addition to her teaching duties, Jennifer is also a contributing educational writer for *Cecil Child* [www.cecilchild.com] and the author of the monthly column *A Note from the Teacher*, an online column dedicated to bridging the divide between parents and schools [www.familiesonlinemagazine.com]. She has covered many timely topics in education, from skill development to social concerns. Her column "Ending the Reign of Bullies in School" was noted as a standout article by USA Today's Web Guide (10/14/04). She can be contacted at the above address with questions you may have.

Alyce Edrich is a freelance writer specializing in helping families save money on their cell phone bills. Visit her website at www.edrichcommunications.com or drop by her blog, www.dmwrites.com, to read more about the life of a BUSY parent.

Annette Gulati is a freelance writer and mother of three, living in Round Rock, TX. Her work has been published, or is forthcoming, in numerous children's and parenting magazines.

Karin Kandur is a SCBWI member with a background in public relations and journalism. Her work has also been accepted by Highlights and Hopscotch.

Rebecca Maguire is a freelance writer currently working on multiple non-fiction projects for both print and online media. She enjoys writing on a variety of topics, including current events, parenting, and literary reviews. She holds a bachelor's degree in Communication/ Journalism, and lives in Northern Virginia with her husband, daughter, and their two dogs. Her (precious little) free time is spent reading, writing, and inventing new activities to keep her curious toddler entertained. Rebecca can be contacted via email, rmaguire19@hotmail.com.

Jeanette Marchand is the mother of four children, ages 7 through 13. Twice a week she can be found helping out in the Kindergarten class at her children's school. She is also a volunteer in the school's Strong Start: Letters, Sounds and Words program which is designed to help prepare children aged 5-6 to read. She has been previously published in *Wee Ones* (July 2004 and November 2004), *Cecil Child* (Winter 2005) and *Holiday Crafts 4 Kids* (December 2005).

Lyn Sirota is an active member of her local and national Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). She writes content for their website and coordinate the New Jersey critique groups. Her publishing credits include articles and poetry in Highlights, Wee Ones, Saplings, Boy's Quest, Hopscotch, Ladybug, Spider, Dragonfly Spirit, Moo Cow Fan Club, Holiday Crafts 4 Kids and Fandangle magazines. As a graduate of the Institute of Children's Literature, she has also been accepted into their advanced writing program.