

Gracie and the Community Garden

Gracie was getting ready for school. She loved her classmates. Her school was different from many other fish schools in that the fish were different types of fish instead of all one variety. Some of them were big like Gus Grouper, who under ordinary circumstances might have eaten the smaller fish, but who now protected all his friends. Some came in pairs like Benji and Belinda Butterflyfish, but most of them were by themselves like Gracie, Efraim Eel, and her best friend, Angie Angelfish.

They all had different gifts, too. Belinda was good at bubbling songs that they all could sing. Her brother Benji always put a smile on their faces with his jokes. Efraim was an excellent builder, and Angie, of course, was good with plants, particularly algae. Gracie remembered the many times that they had used their gifts to help each other and other creatures who lived on the reef within the Red Sea. She thought about the time a big storm had destroyed Efraim's home, and all her friends banded together to rebuild and strengthen Efraim's cave. They really cared about each other!

Gracie was especially anxious to get to school today, because their teacher, Old Codfish, had hinted that they might be working on a new project that would be important for their reef. Gracie wondered what it could be. Would

they be working with the coral colonies to help them grow healthy and strong? Would they be playing with the baby fish and other sea creatures in the nursery at the base of the mangrove trees? She hurried to tidy up her branch coral home before she headed off to meet her classmates.

When she got to school, she could see that her friends were also excited and waited patiently for Old Codfish to begin the day's teaching. He cleared his throat to get their attention and then began. "Dear students, we have been asked to start a community garden for the reef. More fish are moving into our part of the reef, and we want to make sure that everyone has enough to eat. This is an important task that everyone can help with, so we need someone to organize the work so that all can work together well."

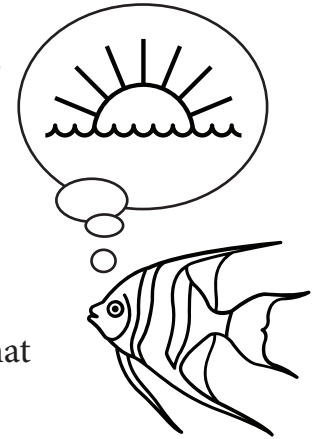
Gracie immediately raised her fin and said, "I nominate Angie Angelfish to be our leader for this project, as she knows more about plants than anyone else in our class."

The other fish agreed, and Angie beamed with pride that they would think she would make a good leader. She gathered them together and began making assignments. "Gus and Efraim, you can find the best place to plant. Benji and Belinda, you can gather the rocks and objects that the algae will need to cling to in order to grow. Gracie and I will gather the seedlings of different types of algae that we want to plant."

All the fish hurried off to do their assigned tasks. Gracie and Angie began to move some green algae, red algae and brown algae back to the school where they all would gather.

When the fish returned, Angie asked each group to report on what they had accomplished. Gus and Efraim said that they had found the best trench that

would protect the plants as they grew. They took the other fish to the proposed location for the community garden. Angie looked at their choice and frowned. “This is a bad choice for a community garden,” she said. “It may protect the plants, but it is too dark. They need sunlight. Everyone should know that.” She swam to a shallow, sandy area near the surface of the sea and said, “This is a much better place. We will put our community garden here.” Gus and Efraim looked ashamed that they hadn’t realized what plants needed to grow and were very quiet. Gracie noticed that they didn’t look happy about the project anymore.



Angie continued asking for reports and turned to Benji and Belinda Butterflyfish. “We found some small pebbles that we moved here,” Belinda said hopefully. “I found an old boot, too, but it was too heavy to bring back,” offered Benji.



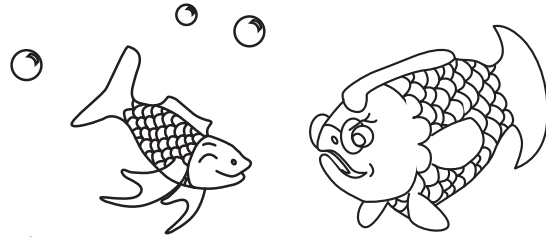
“Rocks are good for algae to cling to, but these are way too small,” said Angie. “You should have found bigger things for the algae and called us to help you carry them back here.”

Belinda and Benji looked embarrassed and ashamed and stopped talking. Benji, especially, was silent, which was so unlike him and for the first time in Gracie’s memory, he didn’t have a smile on his face.

Gracie didn’t know what to do. Her friends did not seem happy, and Angie seemed so bossy that she risked them not being able to complete the garden at all. What could she do? She noticed that Old Codfish was also silent and watching Angie intently. Would he remove her as leader if they couldn’t

complete the garden? Gracie decided she would go over and talk to her teacher, while Angie hunted for more suitable rocks and objects for the algae plants.

“Old Codfish, what should we do? This doesn’t seem to be a community garden anymore. This seems to be Angie’s garden,” she said quietly to her teacher.



Old Codfish took a deep breath and instead of giving advice, asked Gracie a question. “What do you like most about your classmates?”

Gracie thought about it and then said, “I like that we care for each other, but I don’t feel that right now.”

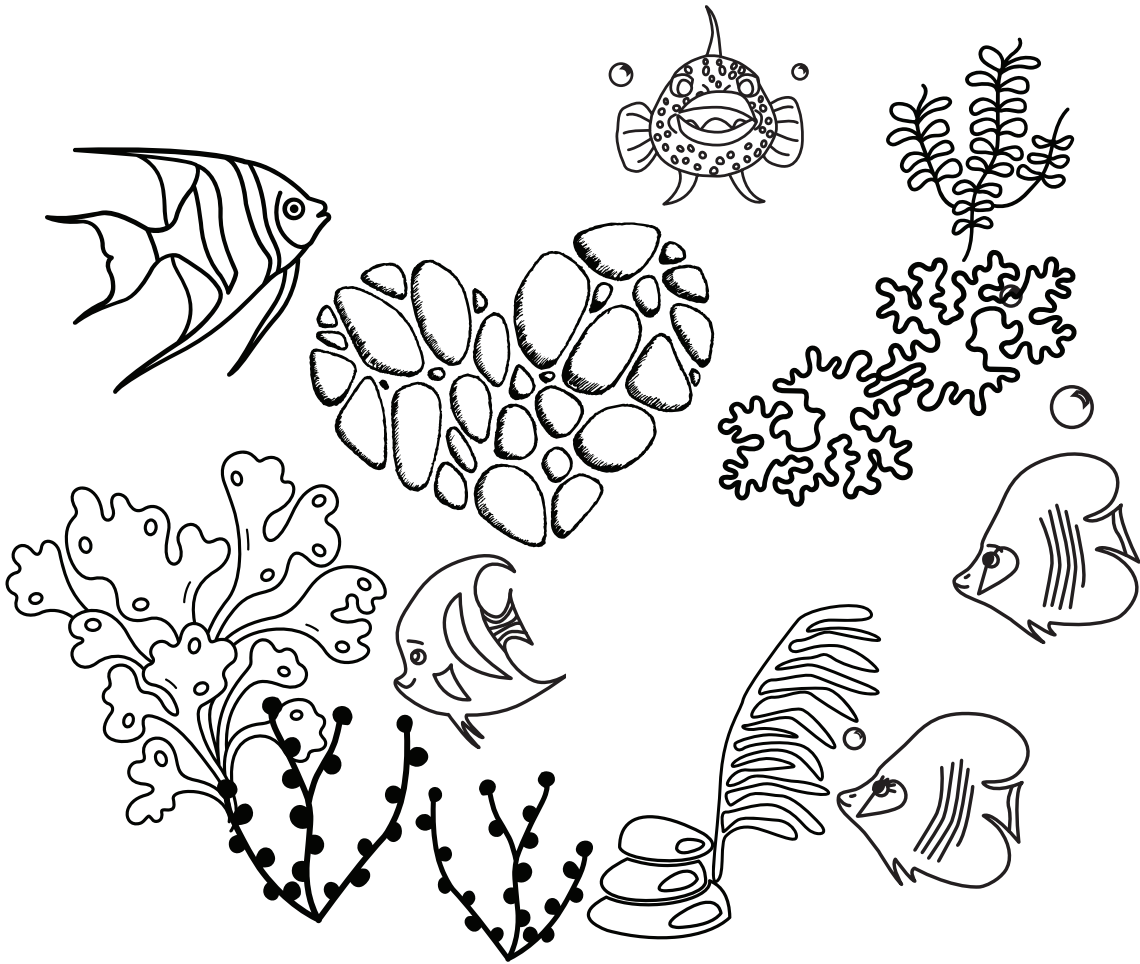
Old Codfish responded, “Do you think perhaps that you could remind your friend Angie of this important thing?”

Gracie said, “I think I could do that. Perhaps she can find ways to teach us about plants without being so bossy.”

Gracie swam back to the group and took Angie aside. She said, “Angie, you know a lot about plants that the rest of us do not. I know that you care for all of our friends. Could you teach us what you know gently? I know that we all want this community garden to be a success.”

Angie now looked concerned and realized that she had not been kind to her friends. “Yes. I can do this, but first I need to apologize to the others because I have been a bossy leader. I know a lot about plants, but I didn’t share my knowledge with my friends.”

Gracie gave a sigh of relief and they both headed back to their classmates. Angie apologized and began slowly teaching the others about the different types of algae and how they grew best. The fish worked together once they understood what was needed and planted the most beautiful community garden that the reef had seen in many years. They celebrated the work and offered a bubble prayer to the God of the Seas that their efforts would feed many new friends who also lived on the reef. All of them felt good about what they had contributed, and Angie had also inspired some of the others to care about plants.



FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN:

- 1.** What do you know how to do well? How would you teach this to your friends?
- 2.** Angie was very bossy when she first became a leader. What would you have done differently?
- 3.** The One Great Hour of Sharing offering often helps people who are hungry or those who have lost their homes in storms and other ways. Make a plan to gather money in your fish bank to help others. Enlist your friends and family to help, remembering to care for them, as they help others.

FOR OLDER CHILDREN:

- 1.** Have you ever planted a garden? Visit a local community garden and help others to grow things that will benefit your neighbors.
- 2.** Have you ever been a leader for a project? How did you balance getting the project completed with caring for your team? Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.” How do you think this relates to Angie’s actions in the story?
- 3.** The One Great Hour of Sharing offering supports three agencies: The Presbyterian Hunger Program, Presbyterian Disaster Relief, and the Self Development of People, where groups can propose projects that benefit their communities. It also allows local congregations to support projects in their area. How do you see these important tasks present in this story? How can you support this offering in your church and enlist others to help collect funds?

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