



CANADIAN WILDLIFE FEDERATION
FÉDÉRATION CANADIENNE DE LA FAUNE

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Student Sheet 1

If I Were a Fish

Jeetesh yawned and blinked as the bright sunlight pushed its way through a crack between the drapes in his bedroom. “I hope I have an adventure today,” he thought. He smiled when his parents said they were planning a picnic with friends in a nearby park by a lake. “That’s great,” he said as he laughed out loud. “I was hoping to have a chance to do something different today.”

Jeetesh ran as fast as he could when he saw his best friends, José and Melvin, who were already at the park with their parents. Mai Ling and her friend Danielle waved and yelled out “hello” as they helped their parents put baskets of goodies for lunch on the picnic table.

“Let’s all take a walk before lunch,” said Jeetesh’s father. “Maybe we’ll see something new.” Mai Ling and Danielle brought binoculars with them in case there were interesting things to see.

They walked until they reached a place that looked like a new trail. “Oh, look,” said Danielle. “I think someone started a new path. Let’s explore it.” On the trail, they slowed down to look around. Mai Ling bent over to touch the soft, tender leaves of the sensitive fern. José stretched his arms upwards to feel the alder tree’s rough catkins. Melvin kept looking around at all the wild things. “Look here,” he said. “I found some moss and I can hear a pounding sound.”

“That’s called reindeer moss,” said Jeetesh’s father. “You can see its tiny patterns. And look, the bright red berries on this bush next to me are called elderberries.”

“Hey, I can see what’s making the pounding sound,” said Danielle as she looked through the binoculars. “It’s a woodpecker. I saw a picture of it in my *WILD* magazine! And it’s on a pine tree. I think it’s looking for grubs to eat.”

“And there’s a spruce tree,” said Melvin. “We learned about their prickly needles at school.”

The trail started to narrow. They began walking in a single file. “Wow, this is just like being an explorer,” said José who was behind Jeetesh. “Maybe we’ll make some great discovery today.” As the group walked, they pushed apart a dense bush of blackberries and then suddenly they were standing along a beach, looking at the lake.

Above them, an osprey was flying high over the lake. Then it swooped down and grabbed a dead lake whitefish that was floating on the water. “Did you see that?” whispered Melvin. “I sure did,” said Danielle as she took a closer look through her binoculars. “Look, look, there’s some bird diving into the water.”

“It’s a loon,” said Mai Ling as quietly as she could. “I’ll bet it is eating minnows. My teacher played a DVD about it and I heard how it sounds.”

A large splash surprised them all and as they quickly turned toward the noise they saw a silvery shape pop into the water. “A fish is an amazing animal,” said Jeetesh. “Wouldn’t it be neat to swim through the lakes and rivers and visit fish neighbourhoods?”

Melvin chuckled, tapped Jeetesh’s shoulder and started singing, “A fish, a fish I’d like to be, swimming in the deep blue sea.” Everyone laughed and they joined Melvin in singing his song as they walked back to the picnic area.

Mai Ling, Danielle, José, Melvin and Jeetesh shared their stories about their walk along the new path in the park. After lunch, Jeetesh stretched back in the sand and began to dream about an adventure in the lake. He took a long breath and closed his eyes. Suddenly, he felt strange. He lifted his hand to his forehead to see if he had a fever. “I’m covered in scales!” he shrieked. “And I’m growing fins.”

Jeetesh gave a strong push with his arms and splashed into the water. His dorsal and pectoral fins brushed against plants growing in the water (they are called aquatic plants) that were in full bloom near the edge of the lake. He swam along the shore, weaving in and out of tall cattails.



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Near the bottom of the cattail stems, Jeetesh saw a large number of snails feeding. Snails were only one kind of mollusc he was familiar with. The snails were eating algae that had collected on the stalks of the larger aquatic plants. Other phytoplankton (tiny aquatic plants) drifted by. He remembered reading about how important small and large aquatic plants were to every living thing in the lake because they change sunlight energy into food energy, which is used by other plants and animals to survive, grow and reproduce. “Now that I see them, it makes much more sense,” he bumbled.

As Jeetesh circled close to a patch of water lilies, bubbles in the water reminded him again of the importance of aquatic plants to the neighbourhood of living things in the lake. “That’s right,” smiled Jeetesh. “Plants give off oxygen when they make food, and animals need oxygen to breathe. Even ‘fish boys’ like me have to depend on plants and oxygen.”

Jeetesh increased his pace along the shoreline, swimming through grassy pondweed and common waterweed. In the distance, he saw a rock bass move rapidly from behind a patch of aquatic plants where it had been hiding. It shot forward and snapped up a couple of minnows from a school that had just passed by. And then suddenly an otter appeared out of nowhere and gobbled up a crayfish. Jeetesh could hear the crunch as the otter’s jaws made short work of the shell.

“Perhaps I’ll swim out and see what I can find in the centre of the lake,” he thought. He pushed his tail fin against the water and moved like a jet through zooplankton that were feeding on phytoplankton. He swam by young lake whitefish scrambling nearby and filling their stomachs with zooplankton. A lake trout appeared and, one by one, the little lake whitefish were quickly swallowed.

Just as he was about to dive into the depths of the lake, he caught a glimpse of another lake trout gulping down a white sucker. Jeetesh wondered if he might be the lake trout’s next meal. “What kind of fish am I anyway?” he wondered.

Jeetesh didn’t have much time to think before he noticed a crayfish eating dead plant and animal matter from the bottom of the lake. “Isn’t that wonderful? The lake community has a better system for recycling garbage than people do on the land. Every living thing has some job here,” he thought. More activity near the bottom caught his attention. White suckers and adult lake whitefish were darting to and fro, snacking on different kinds of aquatic insects and molluscs. Without thinking, he flashed down and swallowed a whitefish. “I must be pretty big,” he thought, moving his jaws.

“Well, I never knew there was this much action in a lake.” Jeetesh noticed that the sun was getting low in the sky. In all the excitement, he had not thought about the time. “Dad will be out searching for me.” He quickly swam upward getting excited about the fish stories he could tell his family and friends.

As he neared the surface, he saw his father and swam toward him. Then he heard José and Melvin call, “Look at that huge northern pike wearing Jeetesh’s cap! Wait until we tell Jeetesh what we saw today.”

As he started to blink and open his eyes, Jeetesh saw Mai Ling and Danielle bending close to his face to see if he were asleep. José and Melvin stretched their necks back for a look. “Wow. Do I have a story to tell,” Jeetesh said. As he shared his adventure, he finished by saying, “I woke up this morning looking for adventure. I just never thought it would be about a fish.”