

Fun and Education for Younger Sailors

Think Like a Sailor!

If you were a sailor on a voyage across the sea and you needed to get rid of some stinky trash, what would you do? Throw it over the side of the ship? We hope not! Today, when we think about taking care of the environment, we think about the “Three Rs:” reduce, reuse and recycle: **reduce** the amount of trash we discard, **reuse** or repair instead of throwing away, and **recycle** as much as possible.

More than 100 years ago people who sailed on deepwater ships like *Balclutha* were already masters of reducing, reusing and recycling.

Their record wasn’t so good though when it came to littering. Consider Fred Duncan and his four brothers and sisters who sailed with their mother and captain father aboard the *Florence*, a full-rigged cargo ship similar to our *Balclutha*.

One year at Christmas, Fred remembers that his father used the family’s tall laundry basket for a Christmas tree, decorating it with red and green ribbons – a good way to save a tree! But then once the presents were opened and the cabin was overflowing with wrapping paper, the family gathered it all up and tossed it over the side.

The family and the sailors on that ship used toilets that were really nothing more than chutes into the ocean. If the cook had some moldy meat, he just tossed it over the side. Fred remembers “Sharks often followed us for days, scavenging garbage thrown overboard from the galley.”

But at least they weren’t tossing plastic into the water. The food they ate didn’t have any packaging other than the barrels or bags in which it was stored. They drank from mugs or tin cups, not Styrofoam. For the most part, they were good stewards of the environment. They reused the materials they had on board out of necessity. Sails were patched and repatched until they couldn’t be used any more. Lines that had become worn in spots were spliced (rewoven) to be reused. And of course, the ship ran on wind power, a renewable energy!

Toys for the children were also improvised: Fred Duncan remembers making animals to play with by cutting out pictures on canned food labels – salmon and chickens and tuna and turkeys - and sticking them on cardboard or pieces of wood supplied by the ship’s carpenter. The sailors made dolls for Fred’s sisters, carving the bodies out of wood scraps and using oakum (unwound pieces of rope) for hair.

Once Fred made an aquarium for himself out of an old washtub and filled it with the strange and wonderful animals the sailors pulled out of the sea. Another time, the Duncan children were given a crate of toy ships that had been too damaged to be used for sale. Fred remembers how thrilled he was, and how it only took a little work by the carpenter to make the little ships right again.

Today we try our best to keep our world clean of litter, but we aren’t always so good at reusing or recycling. So, the next time you’re wondering how you could be a better friend to the environment, you might try thinking like a sailor!

Source: *Deepwater Family*, by Fred B. Duncan, Pantheon Books, 1969.

Find the words in the puzzle below.

DOLLS **ROPE**
SAILS **RECYCLE**
REDUCE **REUSE**
SHARK

E	D	O	L	L	S	I	S
C	E	P	O	R	Y	K	F
U	S	L	I	A	R	F	Y
D	U	A	C	A	A	H	P
E	E	M	H	Y	M	G	X
R	R	S	O	Q	C	E	P
S	L	I	A	S	I	E	M
S	P	I	H	S	G	A	R