

## **Caitlyn Modde**

### **Sea Monkeys**

Last Thursday the unthinkable happened. Our Sea Monkeys died. Unthinkable because seven days earlier I had just told forty-two excited children how our newly hatched Sea Monkeys could live up to two years. I don't know why I was so confident that our Sea Monkeys would provide months of delight, considering I bought them on a whim with no idea of what they really were. What exactly are Sea Monkeys? Looking at the packaging they looked like mini sea horses wearing crowns and holding scepters. A friend told me that Sea Monkeys are brine shrimp. I acted like I knew what she was talking about but I really had no idea. Shrimp? Like the kind you eat with cocktail sauce? Now I had eighty-four eyes looking at me with a million questions. What seemed like a good idea at the time was now coming back to bite me in the butt. In addition to comforting the sad little faces in front of me, I now had a Sea Monkey funeral to plan.

The kids were excited when I brought the Sea Monkeys kit to daycare. The kit came with three steps, a water purifier, Sea Monkey eggs, and Sea Monkey food. We read the instructions and set up the water in the little plastic tank they would live in. We first put in the water purifier and waited a day for the water to drop to room temperature. The anticipation of the Sea Monkey arrival was agonizing to the children, so to kill time they began naming all of our Sea Monkeys. Bob, Smelly, Kitty, Justin Bieber, etc. were all names chosen for our Sea Monkeys. They even named a Sea Monkey after me, Caitlyn.

The day after our water was ready we put the packet of Sea Monkey eggs in. The eggs looked a lot like rock salt and the kids and I all sat around the tank to watch them sink to the bottom. It amazed me how interested kids could be in tiny specks of white floating at the bottom of a plastic tank. Two days later the eggs hatched and we had about twenty-five tiny Sea Monkeys, including Caitlyn. They looked like little specks of dust floating in the tank. The kids would stand on a chair to see the Sea Monkeys sitting on a shelf in the classroom. I purposely put it up high because I knew that some kids would be too tempted to touch. I had to do everything in my power to protect

the Sea Monkeys. The kids were mesmerized. With magnifying glasses in hand we watched, as the little specks would surely develop into some swimming monkey type shape. The anticipation had the children checking the Monkeys constantly. Some of them were concerned with how big they would get. A couple of the three-year-olds from another class were worried the Sea Monkeys would grow legs and take over the daycare. I never did get the idea across to most of the kids that the Sea Monkeys were not actual monkeys.

Five days after the Sea Monkeys were put in the water we got to feed them for the first time. Again, the kids and I all sat around the table and put a tiny spoonful of food in the tank. It was a powdery looking substance that was pea green and smelled funny. The kids were excited and we even set up a food chart for every two days so each of the kids could get a turn to feed them.

The very next day, last Thursday, we came into the class and the Sea Monkeys were sunk at the bottom of the tank. We shook the tank. Nothing. The best reason I can come up with as to why they died is that the room became too cool overnight and the water got too cold for the Sea Monkeys. The weather had been pretty cold lately but I never considered it would do anything. Should I have put them under a night-light? I guess I'll never know. Remembering the story I once heard about chefs that sometimes put lobsters into the freezer because the cold makes them go to sleep and then they kill them, I told the kids that our room had gotten so cold the night before that it put all of the Sea Monkeys to sleep and they just never woke up. I assured them it was a peaceful death. Brine shrimp are similar to lobster, no?

Once the kids found out the Sea Monkeys died they insisted on a funeral. Some of my co-workers looked at me like I was nuts but what could I do? Most of the kids really cared about the Sea Monkeys, including Tristan, a second-grader, who drew a picture for the Sea Monkeys. He drew their tank, some flowers, a tombstone, and himself crying. Once the funeral would be over I decided we would flush the Sea Monkeys down the toilet and send them on their way. I informed the kids of this so they could prepare themselves for the flush. I set up all of our classroom chairs in a semicircle and brought the Sea Monkeys to the front of the room on a table. I imagined the table with the tank as being like a casket and each of the kids could view the Sea Monkeys for one final time. While doing this I noticed the kids had out several rolls of toilet paper. Monique, a fourth-grader, suggested that all of the kids write mes-

sages on a piece of toilet paper. The loving messages could be flushed down the toilet with the Sea Monkeys so they would know how much we cared for them.

We started the funeral with a moment of silence and then we went around the room and each of the kids said something nice about the Sea Monkeys. Mia, a first-grader said that she thought the Sea Monkeys were cute. Lilly, a second-grader said she would miss them and James, a second-grader said he enjoyed the week we had with them and he would never forget it. Who knew Sea Monkeys could make such an impact. We then all huddled into the bathroom and put the pieces of toilet paper and the Sea Monkeys in the toilet. The kids had one final goodbye at the toilet. Respectfully each of them honored our short-lived classroom pets as they passed the solemn toilet. Some with words of love and wisdom and others with a quiet goodbye nod. Then flush. That was the end of our beloved Sea Monkeys. Gone from our classroom, but not from our hearts.