

# Morty and the Floating Rubbish

A Reading A-Z Level T Leveled Book  
Word Count: 1,286

## Connections

### Writing

Research to learn more about trash islands in the oceans. Write a paragraph describing these islands.

### Science

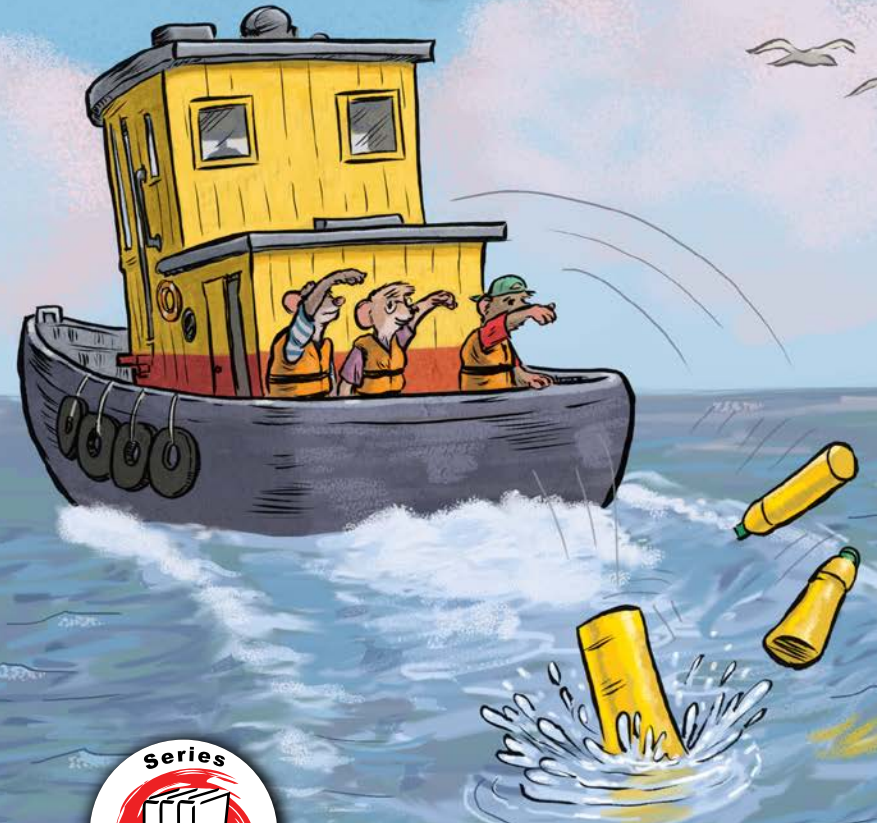
Research to learn more about ocean pollution. Create a trifold brochure that includes the causes of ocean pollution, the effects of the pollution, and what is being done to clean it up and prevent it. Share your work with your class.

Reading A-Z

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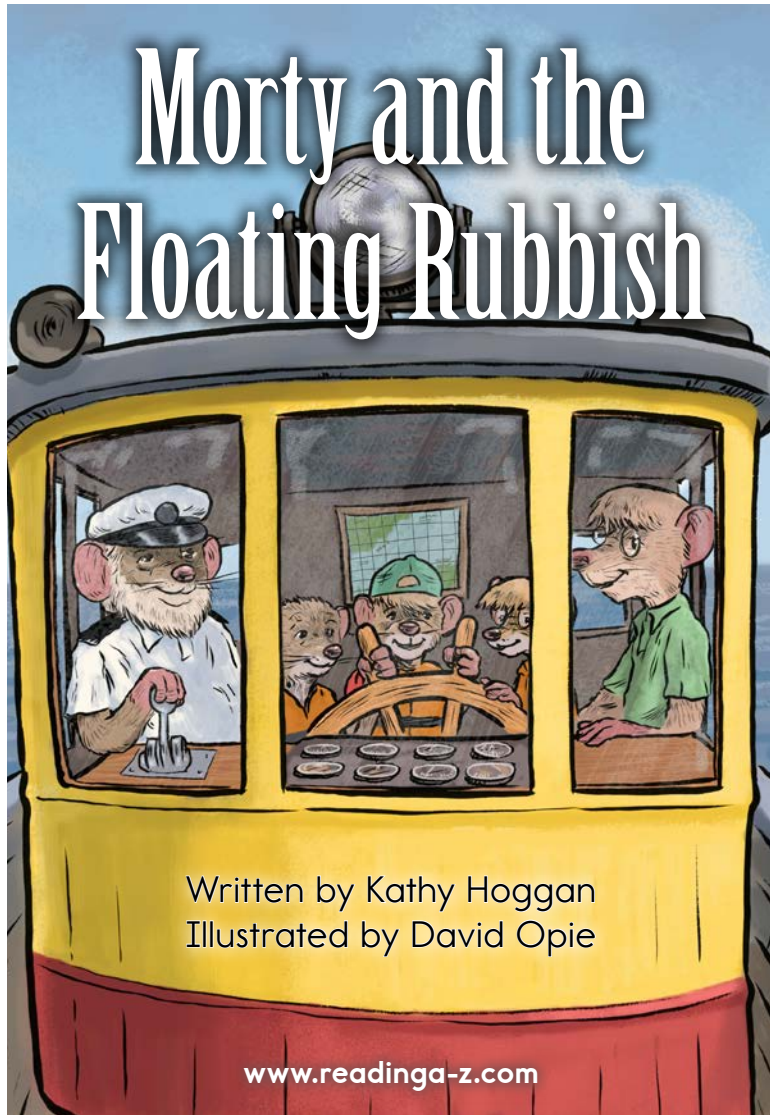
# Morty and the Floating Rubbish



Written by Kathy Hoggan  
Illustrated by David Opie

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## Focus Question

How does Morty change by the end of the story? What motivates this change?

## Words to Know

balmy	helm
debris	marina
galley	navigate
gangplank	refuse
gauges	sound
hammock	unmoor

Morty and the Floating Rubbish  
Level T Leveled Book  
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## Correlation

### LEVEL T

Fountas & Pinnell	P
Reading Recovery	38
DRA	38





One **balmy** Saturday, Fred's dad led the way as Fred, Ben, and Morty walked the **gangplank** to an old wooden tugboat. Fred's dad's friend Cappy had just restored the boat and invited them all to take it out on the **sound**.

"Is this guy's name actually Cappy?" Morty whispered to Fred, eyebrow raised.

"Shh." Fred nudged Morty with his elbow. "Everyone calls him that, even though he's not a captain anymore," he murmured. "He's pretty cool."

"Ahoy, mates!" Cappy bellowed from the bow of the boat, welcoming them aboard.

Fred's dad saluted Cappy. "First mate and three deckhands reporting for duty!" he said with a chuckle.

"Ugh, Dad!" Fred groaned as Morty and Ben snickered.

"First order is life jackets," Cappy instructed, handing out bright orange vests. When everyone was buckled, Cappy pulled up the gangplank. "Okay, crew, first we'll need to cast off the lines at the bow and stern to **unmoor** the ship from the dock. Think you're up to the task?"

Morty, Fred, and Ben nodded as Cappy led the way to the front of the boat, then the back. Soon the tug was bobbing freely alongside the dock.





“Good,” Cappy said. “Now, right this way to the wheelhouse.”

Cappy led the mice to a small cabin with windows on all sides. In the front was a panel of **gauges**, including a compass, and in the center of the room was a large wooden steering wheel. “How about you kids take the **helm** and help **navigate** us out of this harbor?”

Cappy pushed a lever forward that slowly accelerated the tugboat as it pattered away from the dock. Morty, Ben, and Fred piloted the tug out of the **marina** and beyond the harbor as Fred’s dad helped guide them. Once on the sound, the swells were higher and the boat rocked steadily.

“You handle her like experienced skippers,” Cappy said, his eyes twinkling. “I’ll take over from here.”

Down in the **galley**, Morty pulled out three empty yellow plastic juice bottles, markers, and some papers from his backpack. “I had an idea,” he said to Ben and Fred. “I read that messages in bottles can float on the water for years. Sailors sent letters home to loved ones in corked bottles.”



“Those were glass bottles, weirdo—not plastic juice bottles,” Ben scoffed.

“It might work,” Fred interrupted. “Plastic bottles float, too.”

“What would we write?” Ben asked. “And to who?”

“Well,” Morty said, pausing for a moment to think. “Let’s write our names, addresses, and the date. Then we’ll ask whoever finds each bottle to mail a letter to us saying when and where they found it. That way, we’d see if it ended up in Japan or India or somewhere.”



“You think someone would really respond?”  
Fred asked.

“Who knows?” Morty said with a shrug.  
“But it would be a great surprise if they did.”

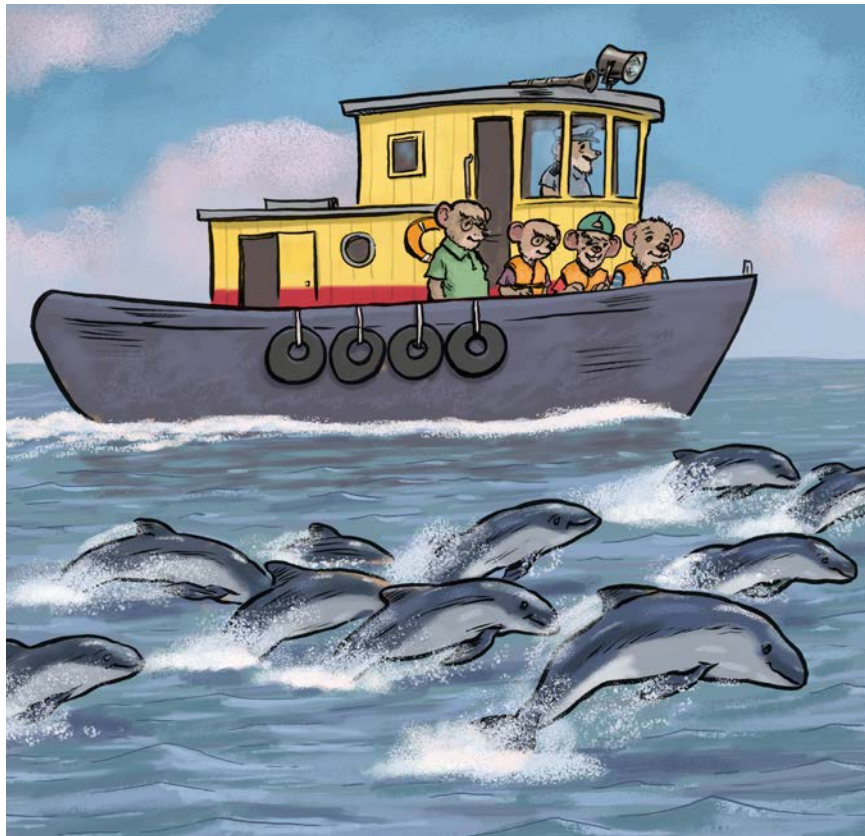
With that, each mouse wrote a message,  
popped it into a bottle, and screwed on the  
lid. They headed on deck and stared out at  
the choppy water churning at the back of the  
boat. On the count of three, they hurled their  
bottles off the stern of the tug.



Moments later, Cappy and Fred’s dad  
brought out poles and bait. “At sea, we fish  
for our lunch,” Cappy said.

The mice baited their lines and cast them  
over the side of the boat. After an hour, each  
of them had caught a good-sized fish. Cappy  
helped them clean their catch and then fried  
the fish on the galley grill. Morty was sure  
he’d never eaten anything so delicious.

In the afternoon, the mice flew kites off the boat and explored some of the rooms below. Cappy had a **hammock**, and the three friends all piled in. Not long after, Cappy called down, demanding all hands on deck. The mice raced up the ladder to find porpoises jumping alongside the boat. Morty tried to count how many were in the pod as they leaped out of the waves and plunged back under the surface.



Later, Morty, Ben, and Fred stood at the bow of the boat, gazing at the sunset as the tug pulled back into the harbor. The sea mist cooled Morty's face and ears, and he breathed in the salty seawater smell. "It's incredible out here," he said. "I'd like to be a captain someday and spend my days on a tugboat just like this."

"Well, if you do, make sure you send us a message in a bottle," Fred joked.







A week later, Morty sprawled on the couch with his tablet, tuning out the sound of the evening news his dad always watched before dinner. Morty glanced up at the TV to see a news reporter standing on the deck of a large ship that was heading toward the open sea.

“Massive heaps of garbage litter our oceans, and these islands of plastic **debris** grow larger daily,” the reporter shouted over the wind. “Researchers estimate that more than five trillion pieces of plastic garbage are invading this home to marine life, causing many species to become sick and killing off others.”

Morty sat up on the couch and leaned forward—he couldn’t peel his eyes away from the TV. The camera panned out to the open ocean and there, floating among what looked like a garbage dump, was a yellow juice bottle.

“Where is that?” Morty asked his dad.

“I’m not sure,” his dad replied. “But it’s awfully sad. How could anyone be so careless with our ocean when it covers 70 percent of Earth?”

“The discarded fishing gear, buoys, and other plastic **refuse** in the world’s oceans today is estimated to weigh as much as thirty-eight thousand African elephants,” the reporter continued.





Morty got up and headed to his room, sick with guilt. He closed his door and called Fred and Ben to tell them what he saw. "It was a mistake to throw those bottles in the ocean," he explained. "It was so much fun being out on the sea, and I feel like we helped ruin something that's really important."

The mice were quiet.

"You know, I could talk to my dad and see if Cappy would take us out one Saturday to help clean up some of the trash," Fred offered. "The tugboat has some nets that we could use."

"I like that idea," Morty said.

"Me, too," Ben answered.

Morty felt hopeful for the first time that evening.



The next Saturday, Morty, Ben, Fred, and Fred's dad walked the gangplank to the tugboat for the second time.

"Ah, my seasoned crew returns," Cappy called.

"Thank you so much for letting us do this," Morty replied. His backpack was heavy with rolls of garbage bags.

"It does me proud to see young mice caring for the sea like this." Cappy reached out a paw to help them onboard. "Life jackets on, then to the wheelhouse," he ordered.

The mice spent hours scooping up trash from the water and guessing the story behind each piece. It was a long, exhausting day that ended at dusk as the team hauled thirty-four bags full of garbage down the gangplank and loaded them into Fred's dad's truck.





“People who litter are really dumb,” Ben said, forgetting that they had been part of the problem not long ago.

“Maybe they’re just thoughtless,” Morty said. “We’d like to do ocean cleanup again, if we can,” Morty said to Cappy as he lifted up two more bags.

“We can make that happen,” Cappy replied.

*That yellow plastic bottle may still be floating somewhere in the ocean, Morty thought as he heaved the bags into the truck, but it will be the last piece of trash I ever toss overboard.*



## Glossary

- balmy** (*adj.*) pleasant, mild, and warm (p. 3)
- debris** (*n.*) scattered garbage (p. 11)
- galley** (*n.*) the kitchen on a ship or an airplane (p. 6)
- gangplank** (*n.*) a walkway that is moved into place to allow passengers to walk onto or off a docked ship or boat (p. 3)
- gauges** (*n.*) instruments that measure things such as volume or thickness (p. 5)
- hammock** (*n.*) a hanging bed made of rope or fabric (p. 9)
- helm** (*n.*) the wheel or handle used to steer a ship (p. 5)
- marina** (*n.*) a dock or harbor for small water vessels that often provides facilities for supplies and repairs (p. 5)
- navigate** (*v.*) to steer a course toward a destination (p. 5)
- refuse** (*n.*) something that is thrown away (p. 12)
- sound** (*n.*) a passageway of water that connects two larger bodies of water or separates a mainland and an island (p. 3)
- unmoor** (*v.*) to loosen or unfasten the ropes or anchors that keep a boat in place (p. 4)