Wildness reminds us what it means to be human, what we are connected to rather than what we are separate from.
—Terry Tempest Williams

Writing About the Sea

POEM
Starfish
Lorna Dee Cervantes

POEM
Sea Stars
Barbara Hurd

BLOG
Emma Marris: In Defense of Everglades Pythons
Andrew C. Revkin

SHORT STORY
The Seventh Man
Haruki Murakami, translated by Jay Rubin
Background  The following two selections are examples of writing about the sea—in particular, the creatures known as sea stars, or starfish. The word starfish is misleading. Starfish are not actually fish but echinoderms, animals with spiny skeletons. Although starfish come in a wide range of sizes, most species are between eight and twelve inches in diameter and have five arms. Their colors range from brown to various shades of yellow, orange, and pink. Starfish are flexible and move by using the tube feet on the undersides of their arms.

Writing About the Sea

Starfish  Poem by Lorna Dee Cervantes

Sea Stars  Essay by Barbara Hurd

Lorna Dee Cervantes  Growing up in San Jose, California, Lorna Dee Cervantes discovered literature by reading the books in the houses that her mother cleaned for a living. Cervantes completed her first collection of poetry when she was fifteen. Writing gave Cervantes, who is of Mexican and American Indian ancestry, a sense of freedom: “When you grow up as I did, a Chican-India in a barrio in a Mexican neighborhood in California...you’re ignored...And you’re not expected to speak, much less write.”

Barbara Hurd  is a writer who specializes in creative nonfiction nature writing. She explains, “I’m interested in landscapes, both the physical—swamps and caves—and the psychological, that are marked by multiplicities and contradictions, pocked with secrets, laced with what can’t be immediately seen, but, which properly pressed by imagination and language, have the power to transform experience into something sculpted and meaningful. ...I’m after form, in other words, which leaves the reader and me at least knee-deep in this world, aware of and almost weaker than the wish to resist.”
1. **READ** As you read lines 1–15 of “Starfish,” begin to cite text evidence.
   - Underline examples of figurative language.
   - Circle text used to describe the starfish’s body.
   - In the margin, explain the actions of the speaker.

**Starfish**

**Lorna Dee Cervantes**

They were lovely in the quartz and jasper sand
As if they had created terrariums with their bodies
On purpose; adding sprigs of seaweed, seashells,
White feathers, eel bones, miniature

Mussels, a fish jaw. Hundreds; no—
Thousands of baby stars. We touched them,
Surprised to find them soft, pliant, almost
Living in their attitudes. We would dry them, arrange them,
Form seascapes, geodesics. . . . We gathered what we could

In the approaching darkness. Then we left hundreds of
Thousands of flawless five-fingered specimens sprawled
Along the beach as far as we could see, all massed
Together: little martyrs, soldiers, artless suicides
In lifelong liberation from the sea. So many

Splayed hands, the tide shoveled in.

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1. **terrarium:** small enclosure or container that houses plants or animals.
2. **geodesic:** interlocking, repeating pattern.

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2. **REREAD** Reread lines 1–15. How does the description of the “approaching darkness” change the tone of the poem? What happens to the starfish the speaker leaves behind? Support your answer with explicit text evidence.

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SHORT RESPONSE

How does the poet's use of figurative language contribute to her central idea? Cite text evidence to support your response.
1. **READ** As you read lines 1–12 of “Sea Stars,” begin to cite text evidence.
   - Underline words and phrases used to describe the sky, the moon, and the stars.
   - Circle text that gives the sea stars human qualities.
   - In the margin, explain the comparison the author makes.

   **Sea Stars**
   Barbara Hurd

   The sky is pink this morning and on the shore a whole host\(^1\) of sea stars has been stranded.

   I know from the charts the moon was full last night, the midnight tide higher than usual. Were the skies clear? Were the stars out? I’d like to have seen these creatures then: stars in the dark overhead and here a spiny constellation draped over the rocks.

   One of the largest, a northern sea star, now lies upside down in the palm of my hand. Almost a foot across, its orangy body glistens wet in the dawn light. Hundreds of slender tubes wriggle like antennae, only these aren’t sense organs; they’re feet, and what they’re searching for isn’t food or enemy or mate, but something to cling to, any firm surface that can anchor them and end this futile flailing at the air.

   Of its five arms, three remain, five or six inches long. I’ve read that most sea stars lose their limbs to other sea stars’ hunger. Traveling in slow-motion swarms, the lead contingent feasts on oysters and clams, depleting the supply for those in the rear, who resort to the nearest neighbor’s arm.

\(^1\) _host:_ an army, group or formation.

2. **REREAD** Reread lines 1–12. In your own words, explain the central idea of these lines.


3. **READ** As you read lines 13–26, continue to cite text evidence.
   - Underline facts about the life cycle of the sea star.
   - Circle emotions that humans are “burdened” with.
   - In the margin, explain the physical feeling that both amputees and people born without a limb may have in common.
The sea star, of course, can regenerate\(^2\) when the food supply increases, grow back the missing limb, and continue unburdened by notions of heroism or sacrifice, even consciousness.

We, in contrast, have to live with those burdens, made heavier by loss and the sensation that often emanates from what’s missing. Amputees\(^3\) call it phantom pain, those sensations—tingling or sharp stabs—by which something absent makes its presence known. Even those born without a limb sometimes feel what was never there and experience, physically, what others of us know psychologically—a need to confirm what we feel but can’t see.

When its third arm begins to wriggle, I turn the sea star over and carry it back to the water. Oblivious to patience or my unreliable intentions, it knows only the dangers of drying out set against the dangers of being washed out to sea. I try to imagine that twice-daily rhythm, sun on its baking back, tube feet squishing as it inches along among drying seaweed and barnacles. And then the fierce holding on as the tide comes in and wave after wave crashes on top of delicate tissues.

Were the stars out last night? Silly question, really. They’re always out. In the daytime too. Where do we think they’d go? I try to remember this: the obscuring effect of clouds and of sunlight, how things that seem to disappear often have not. Up in the daytime sky, the whirling constellations—Cassiopeia, Orion, Big Dipper—may be invisible to us, but stage a noontime solar eclipse and there they are, as always, reminders of other worlds we’ll probably never see. And here, underfoot, half a dozen sea

\(^2\) regenerate: to replace a lost or damaged part by forming new tissue.

\(^3\) amputee: a person who has had one or more limbs removed.
stars, about to disappear underwater where they'll go on too, misshapen maybe and less visible, doing what they've always done: making their slow way through a galaxy spread out at our feet.

Foaming and inching its lunar way up the beach, the sea polishes small stones, sloshes into and out of the tiny whorled and bivalved shells somersaulting in the undercurl of its waves. I take it as a given we can't escape the way the world grinds the living into debris. But before it does, there's a chance for the lucky encounter with someone or something—a painting or poem, a place—that can beckon to what lies broken and hungry inside us all. I believe it's what most of us long for.

Oh Ahab, I often think, if you could have hunted with less vengeance and fewer absolutes, might the whale have someday returned to you what it took so long ago, so violently? Not literally, no leg, of course. Not even in a story would anyone believe a human could do what a sea star can. But something else, something elusive that retreats in the onslaught of high drama and fierce truths, that survives between the layers of the said and the felt, and makes itself known to us only by the ghostly presence of its wanting.

4 bivalve: a class of mollusks characterized by a hinged shell.
5 Ahab: the main character from Herman Melville's Moby Dick, whose main purpose in life is to seek out and destroy the giant whale that bit off his leg.

6. REREAD Reread lines 27–58. In the margin, explain what the author wants to say to Ahab in lines 51–58.

SHORT RESPONSE

Cite Text Evidence In what ways does the author's use of figurative language contribute to her central idea? Cite text evidence to support your response.