

Move Over SpongeBob — Meet Captain Copepod

by Carolyn White

Gather the kids and get your crayons ready. Captain Copepod's Coloring Book is a great way to introduce people of all ages to plankton and the problems that can arise when ballast water is transported from one port to the next.

Whenever a cargo ship fills its ballast tanks with seawater, it also takes on millions of tiny planktonic hitchhikers. Later, when the ship discharges the water, these hitchhikers — single-celled plants, larval fish and invertebrates and microbes — are released into a new locale. These introduced species may compete with native species for food and habitat, or they may feed directly on native plankton species.

Author and illustrator Nissa Ferm really knows her plankton. She has been studying and drawing these organisms since 1999 and is now part of the University of Washington's Ballast Water Research Team, spearheaded by Washington Sea Grant's Russ Herwig.

Produced by Washington Sea Grant, the coloring book features the charismatic Captain Copepod, who introduces the topic of ballast water as well as the types of plankton that dwell in it. Each page is devoted to a specific creature — a stout-looking barnacle hatchling, for example, or a smiling, rotund larval polychaete.

The coloring book was a huge hit at the University of Washington's annual Washington Weekend open house in April. "After all, who doesn't like to color?" Ferm asks. "In order to engage children in science, learning needs to be fun."



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Sea Grant
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SUMMER 2006

