EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Littlest Cove

Ages 3–6

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CHARLESTON GAILLARD CENTER
gaillardcenter.org
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ABOUT THE SHOW

"The Littlest Cove," GEODESIC Management, accessed June 1, 2026, http://www.geodesicmanagement.com/the-littlest-cove/.

The Littlest Cove is an immersive discovery play for the very young (ages 3-6). Written by Mara McEwin, choreographed by Emily Bunning, and devised by the Treehouse Shakers' company members, *The Littlest Cove* is full of wonder, visuals, and tactile interactive experiences. The play follows the lives of three unusual creatures who reside on the edge of a small coastal inlet, off of an island, that no one has ever discovered before. Audiences soon discover that they, too, are a part of this enchanting world and are immersed in the storytelling through play, exploration, and community interactions with the set, props, and performers.[1]

Creative Team
Conceived, Written & Directed by Mara McEwin
Costumes & Props Patti Gilstrap
Original Composition Anthony Rizzo
Scenic Design Jung Griffin

Told Through Music, Dance, and Story

Conceived, written and directed by Mara McEwin, and choreographed by Emily Bunning, *The Littlest Cove* has audiences, alongside the creatures, explore the everyday activities set up in different areas of the theater.

"The Littlest Cove," Treehouse Shakers, accessed June 1, 2026, https://treehouseshakers.com/productions/the-littlest-cove.

At the fishing hole, there is a place to engage with the puppetry fish. The audience also gathers the "wood" for the "fire" – soft pillows. There is a garden area made up of soft felt vegetables, and another area where audiences can "make food" from the garden vegetables, "fish," and "cook" over the newly-made "fire." In one area the audience weaves tiny baskets, and in another they make up a song and dance. All the while, the creatures and sea captain mingle in and out of the play space, with songs, dance, and interactions. Full of wonder, visuals, tactile and interactive experiences, and oftentimes funny, The Littlest Cove strives to create a culture of inclusiveness, kindness, and adventure.[2]

TREEHOUSE SHAKERS®

Treehouse Shakers, Inc., a non-profit dance and theater company, was co-founded in 1997. Treehouse Shakers' mission is to create original dance-plays, workshops and artistic experiences that encourage multi-generational audiences to create a greater connection to their community. Treehouse Shakers has created and performed 21 original dance-plays for young audiences and adults in many established performance venues, including theaters, festivals, and schools across the nation. They were the first U.S. company to tour a dance-play specifically for babies, *Hatched*, in 2012. Treehouse Shakers created and performed the dance programming for the Emmy Award-winning television show *Alex & The Kaleidoscope*. In partnership with UOutlook and Star America Preschools, they began leading drama camps in Shanghai and Beijing, China and surrounding provinces in 2019.[3]

1. "History and Past Productions," Seattle Children's Theatre, accessed December 16, 2025, https://www.sct.org/about-us/history-past-productions/.
2. "The Littlest Cove study guide," Treehouse Shakers, accessed June 1, 2026, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/68baf4ffe8c8a5758b106aab/t/690dd6fea8e3c043ed8b36b4/1762514686463/The-Littlest-Cove-Study-Guide-Final.pdf.
3. "The Littlest Cove study guide," Treehouse Shakers, accessed June 1, 2026, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/68baf4ffe8c8a5758b106aab/t/690dd6fea8e3c043ed8b36b4/1762514686463/The-Littlest-Cove-Study-Guide-Final.pdf.

EXPLORE

CLASSROOM WORKSHOPS

Listening to Nature—Coastal Soundscapes
Ages 3–6
Students explore how coastal sounds in nature can inspire imagination by listening to audio clips and responding through movement or art. Through a read-aloud and guided listening, students connect sound to setting, emotion, and storytelling.
Click here for workshop

Paper Plate Crabs
Ages 3–6
Students engage in a hands-on craft activity by making paper plate crabs. Students express their own creativity, while exploring how crabs live and move in coastal environments.
Click here for workshop

"Paper Plate Crab Craft for Kids," Hunny I'm Home, accessed June 1, 2026, https://www.hunnyimhomediy.com/paper-plate-crab-craft/?utm_source=Pinterest&utm_medium=organic.

Coastal Charades
Ages 3–6
Students explore storytelling through movement by acting as coastal animals and ocean elements using pantomime and imagination. Through charades, students practice using their bodies and expressions to communicate ideas without words.
Click here for workshop

Ocean Groove
Ages 3–6
Students will explore ocean life through interactive art and movement, helping them observe characteristics of living things and develop self-expression. The session begins with discussing concepts like tides (ebb and flow) and habitats, followed by reading *Hello, World! Ocean Life* to identify sea creatures. Children then engage in creative dramatic play by embodying moving water and different ocean animals, culminating in learning a short, choreographed "Ocean Groove" dance that prepares them for the themes of *The Littlest Cove* performance.
Click here for workshop

CONNECT

ABOUT MARA MCEWIN

Mara McEwin is an artist, writer, director, and producer who is the co-founder and artistic director of Treehouse Shakers, a women-led arts organization she started over 27 years ago with Emily Bunning.

Treehouse Shakers is renowned for pioneering a unique style of melding dance and theater in original works. Although their first production was for adults, the company pivoted in 1999 to focus on creating sophisticated, high-quality work for young audiences, spanning all age levels from babies to teens.

The organization focuses on using universal themes and making performances accessible to low-income and underserved communities through subsidized tickets and Relaxed Performance (RP) options. A Relaxed Performance is a live theatre production modified to be more inclusive for individuals with autism, sensory disorders, or learning disabilities by creating a more welcoming and less formal environment. Key changes include adjusting the sound and lighting, allowing audience members to move or vocalize, and providing a quiet space.

McEwin serves as the primary writer/director/producer for Treehouse Shakers' repertoire of 20 original works. With *Sail Away*, other notable pieces include *Flutter* (for ages 6-18 months) and *The Deepest Breath* (for ages 9-13).

Read more about Mara McEwin here

CONNECT

WHAT IS AN IMMERSIVE DISCOVERY PLAY?

"The Littlest Cove," Treehouse Shakers, accessed June 1, 2026, https://treehouseshakers.com/productions/the-littlest-cove.

The Littlest Cove is an immersive discovery play, which is a performance meant to be *experienced*. This experience deeply engages and captivates the viewer's senses, emotions, and attention, creating a sense of being fully surrounded and absorbed in a particular environment or activity.[4]

Key characteristics of an immersive discovery play:

- **Audience participation**
  In immersive discovery experiences, children are not just watching, they are actively involved. They may move, respond, or interact with performers and the environment. *In Littlest Cove*, this invitation to engage through gentle participation will help children feel like they are part of the ocean world being created.
- **Sensory exploration**
  These performances engage sight, sound, and touch to deepen understanding and connection.
- **Imaginative play & open-ended discovery**
  Immersive discovery encourages children to explore freely, make choices, and use imagination, rather than follow a strict storyline.

WATCH

The Littlest Cove promo
Hatched promo
Sail Away promo
Flutter promo

4. "What is immersive learning?", Discovery Education, accessed June 1, 2026, https://immersive.discoveryeducation.com/what-is-immersive-learning.

EXPLORE

OUR COASTAL WORLD

Kevin V., "Jobson's Cove Beach," Tripadvisor, November 2015, https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g147258-d148432-Reviews-Jobson_s_Cove_Beach-Warwick_Parish_Bermuda.html.

Have you ever stood where the land meets the ocean? This special place is called the coast. Coasts can be sandy beaches, rocky shores, or grassy marshes. They are always changing because the water is moving and shaping the land over time.

A coastal inlet is a small area where ocean water flows into the land, creating a calm and protected space. These inlets are like little coves or safe harbors where animals live and boats can rest.

In *The Littlest Cove*, the setting is inspired by these peaceful coastal spaces where water, land, and life come together.

Frederick Millet, "Island," Shutterstock.com, found at "Island," Britannica Kids, accessed June 1, 2026, https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/island/275100.

An island is a piece of land completely surrounded by water. Some islands are big and some are very small!

A cove is a small, sheltered bay area along the coast where the water is often calmer. Coves are important because they protect the inner waters from turbulent sea waves.[5]

Think about:

- How would it feel to be in a quiet cove?
- What sounds might you hear?
- What might you see?

5. "Cove," *National Geographic Society*, updated October 19, 2023, https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/cove/.

EXPLORE

ANIMALS OF THE COVE

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, WCBD News 2, updated May 17, 2023, https://www.counton2.com/news/local-news/lowcountry-crabbers-dnr-officials-push-for-crabbing-regulations/.

Coastal areas and inlets are home to many amazing creatures! Each animal has special ways to survive in this environment.

- Crabs scurry sideways along the shore and hide in the sand.
- Fish swim through calm inlet waters.
- Seabirds glide above the water and search for food.
- Sea turtles visit beaches to lay their eggs.
- Shellfish, such as oysters and clams, help keep the water clean.

EXPLORE

ISLANDS IN CHARLESTON

"Charleston Lifestyle Guide," Southern Bell Living, updated May 11, 2026, https://www.southernbellliving.com/lifestyles/island-living/.

The Charleston area is surrounded by beautiful barrier islands, coastal waterways, and marshy inlets like Charleston Harbor where the water is calmer and full of life.

Some nearby islands include:

- **Sullivan's Island:** historic and residential island known for its sandy beaches and gentle waves
- **Isle of Palms:** a place where families swim and explore nature
- **Folly Beach:** known for its laid-back, surf culture
- **Kiawah Island:** known for its world-class golf courses
- **James Island:** closest to downtown Charleston, offering a mix of residential, natural, and historical sites
- **Johns Island:** The largest island, offering a more rural, agricultural landscape with immense live oaks, and home to the ancient Angel Oak tree

5. "Cove," *National Geographic Society*, updated October 19, 2023, https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/cove/.

EXPLORE

WAVES, CURRENTS, & TIDES

The water along the coast is always moving!

- **Waves:** The wind pushes the water surface, causing waves to crash and splash onto the shore.
- **Currents:** Underneath the waves, giant "water rivers" called currents move warm water and cold water from one place to another. This helps control the temperature of the whole world.
- **Tides:** Twice a day, the water level goes up and then down along the shore. These are called tides, and they happen because the moon's gravity gently pulls the ocean water. Sometimes the water comes closer to land (high tide), and sometimes it moves away (low tide).

"Charleston Lifestyle Guide," Southern Bell Living, updated May 11, 2026, https://www.southernbellliving.com/lifestyles/island-living/.

High & Low Tide in Charleston

Along the Charleston coast, the ocean moves in a daily pattern called tides.

- High tide is when the water rises and comes closer to the land. Beaches may look smaller, and some marsh areas fill with water.
- Low tide is when the water moves away from the land. More sand, shells, and even small sea creatures may be visible.

In Charleston, tides happen twice a day, and the change can be very noticeable, especially in marshes and inlets.

At low tide, you might see:

- Crabs scurrying in the pluff mud
- Birds searching for food
- Boats resting on the ground in shallow areas

At high tide, you might notice:

- Water covering marsh grass
- Waves reaching farther up the shore
- Kayakers or boaters

"Exploring Charleston's Barrier Islands,"American Sky, accessed June 1, 2026, https://www.americansky.co.uk/south-carolina-holidays/charleston/exploring-charlestons-barrier-islands.

WATCH

What causes tides?

EXPLORE

SALT MARSHES

Near coastal inlets, you may find salt marshes, or grassy areas where land and water mix.

"Dynamics of the Salt Marsh," Sea Science, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, accessed June 1, 2026, https://www.dnr.sc.gov/marine/pub/seascience/dynamic.html.

What is a salt marsh?
A salt marsh is a grassy, coastal habitat where ocean water and land meet. They are drained by salt water brought in by the tides. The Lowcountry is famous for its wide, golden-green marshes filled with tall grasses like spartina.

Why marshes are important:
Salt marshes are one of the most important ecosystems in Charleston because they:

- Protect the coast by slowing down waves and storm surges
- Clean the water by filtering out pollution
- Provide habitats for fish, crabs, birds, and other wildlife
- Support food chains, helping many animals survive[7]

Marshes are sometimes called "nature's nursery" because so many young animals grow and develop there.[8]

EXPLORE

COASTAL CONSERVATION

Charleston's coastal environments, including beaches, islands, and marshes, are beautiful but fragile.

They can be affected by:

- Pollution and trash
- Rising sea levels
- Stronger storms
- Habitat loss

How can we protect these spaces?
Protecting these spaces helps keep animals safe and ecosystems healthy.

What can we do?

- Pick up trash and recycle
- Use less plastic
- Respect wildlife and their habitats
- Stay on marked paths in marsh areas
- Learn about local ecosystems and share what you know

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, accessed June 1, 2026, https://bunnelle.org/nonprofit-directory/625/sc-dnr-marine-resources-division/.

EXPLORE

COASTAL CONSERVATION

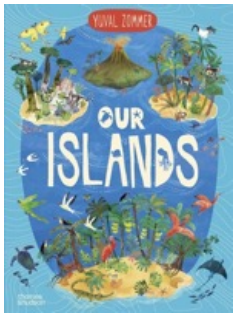
LEARN MORE

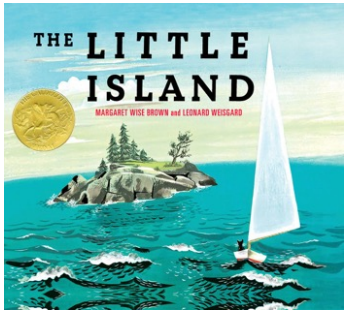
Visit the South Carolina Aquarium
South Carolina DNR education programs
South Carolina DNR conservation education

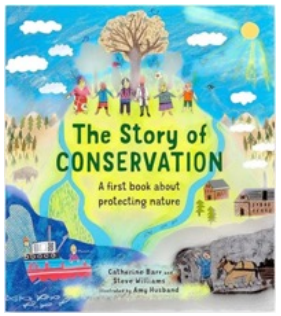
WATCH

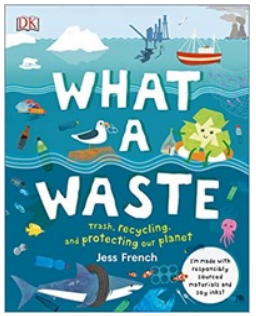
The importance of the ocean
How to care for the ocean
The ocean and climate change

RECOMMENDED READING









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NOAA SciJinks. “What causes tides?” April 5, 2021. YouTube. 3 minutes, 33 seconds. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcGEjzt_4is&t=20s.

Southern Bell Living. “Charleston Lifestyle Guide.” Updated May 11, 2026. https://www.southernbellliving.com/lifestyles/island-living/.

Treehouse Shakers. “Flutter promo.” June 28, 2023. YouTube. 57 seconds. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVRJXnRD3QI.

Treehouse Shakers. “Hatched promo.” July 5, 2016. Vimeo. 56 seconds. https://vimeo.com/173552530.

Treehouse Shakers. “Sail Away promo.” July 29, 2024. Vimeo. 2 minutes, 15 seconds. https://vimeo.com/991650023.

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