

PRAIRIE WETLAND FRIENDS

Karlyn Atkinson Berg

The Puppet Characters

MICHAEL MUSKRAT (Mike)	(“regular guy”, a worker)
COUNTESS VON GREAT BLUE HERON	(elegant aristocrat character, slight foreign accent, a little vain, but likable)
SYLVESTER SALAMANDER	(like Eyore of Pooh series, shy, a little insecure, low keyed, especially at first)
Human	(Teacher, Naturalist, Older Student)

Teacher Introduction to group... / invites a friend (Mike) to help learn about wetlands

Mike Hi, I’m Michael, my friend *teacher’s name* asked me to come and tell you about where I live. Do you know what kind of animal I am?
(Student’s guess, Teacher answers if students don’t know)

Mike Yes, I’m a Muskrat and I live in a special place...called a wetland.

Human Why is the wetland so special Mike?

Mike Well, wetlands are very beautiful, but they also have very important jobs. For example, wetlands help refill our groundwater supply. Did you know our groundwater is stored in areas under the ground?

Human Why is that important?

Mike People get their drinking water from groundwater and cattle and crops need water too.

Human With all that water wetland must flood everything!

Mike **Oh no!** Wetlands help reduce flooding by storing water...well, like a sponge. Wetlands also clean water when it drips through the plants just like water drips through a strainer filtering out dirt.

Human So wetland areas are important to us for water, even if there are not many animals living there.

Mike Many animals live in or near wetlands all of their lives or use them during migration. Wetlands are home to many animals, birds, and beautiful rare plants.

Human Gee, we are lucky there are still wetlands, but maybe we better learn more about them so we can protect these special areas.

Mike When wetlands are destroyed a lot of animals lose their homes...
(Mike is interrupted; enter Countess Von Great Blue Heron)

Countess Vell, what is going on...a party? And *I* wasn't invited?

Mike No, no, it's not a party, we are just getting together to learn about wetlands.

Countess Vell, I live in the wetlands too...and I am a very fancy, elegant resident as you can see. Certainly **I** should be invited.

Mike You are invited...please...stay ... you can help me show everyone what a great place wetlands are.

Countess Vell then, Mike, first are you going to introduce me to your friends...who-oo are these people??

Mike Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce you to.... Countess Von Great Blue Heron.
(she nods and bows like royalty greeting the crowd)

Countess You may call me "Countess".

Mike Thank you Countess... Now, let's get back to the wetlands...As I was saying, there are many kinds of insects, plants and animals, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and ducks...

Countess ...and b-e-a-u-t-i-f-u-l blue birds with g-o-r-g-e-o-u-s blue feathers and a spectacular beak and long blue legs...

Mike That is true, but many wetlands are in danger and that means a lot of the creatures that depend on this habitat could also be threatened or endangered. It is hard to believe some people still think wetlands are just **w a s t e** lands!

Countess How can this be? The nerve, to call our beautiful home a wasteland! This is most discouraging news! *(To audience)* Oh, I hope you people don't think that!

Mike Maybe if we tell them more about the wetlands and the plants and creatures that live there, they will understand why you are so shocked. I will start with some information about myself. Muskrats help wetlands when they eat the tall plants like cattails and bulrush. This helps make open places so ducks have places to feed and rest. I should tell you about my house too. My house is made up of cattails and other plants, so I can even eat the walls of my house when I need food...

(Countess interrupts)

Countess Please...let me tell about where I live first!! My house is not in the wetland. I have a nest...a condo, if you please, with many other herons, which is called a "rookery", a name, mind you, I do NOT find very glamorous but, I have learned to put up with it.

**Now the Countess is interrupted by the arrival of a very unusual looking animal...
(Wearing a set of rabbit ears)**

Countess What is that? Oh my gracious, who are you?

Sylvester Hello, my name is Sylvester Snowshoe Hare.

Mike (To audience) I have never saw a snowshoe hare like this before.
(To Sylvester) Aren't you a rather unusual snowshoe hare?

Sylvester Oh...well...yes, I'm...a....uh, Wetland Snowshoe Hare.

Countess I've seen most all the residents of the wetland and I'm afraid I've *never* heard of a Wetland hare *or* have seen a **Green and Black** hare!

Sylvester Well, uh...don't you know? Hares change color in different seasons to blend in with their surroundings (for camouflage).

Mike Yes, but the snowshoe hare gets white in the winter and brown in the summer. I don't believe they can turn green and black.
(To audience) Let me get a closer look. There is something familiar about this guy. Maybe you kids can help me figure this out. Any clues to who this is?
(Kids guess while Mike examines Sylvester and gives clues)
He doesn't have fur...wait a minute! This looks more like an amphibian or a
(Someone or Mike guesses Salamander) salamander!

Sylvester Okay. I'm not a snowshoe hare. I'm Sylvester, a Blotched Tiger Salamander.

Mike Why did you ever pretend to be a hare?

Sylvester Well, Mike you are very important, you clear plants and make habitats in wetlands and people think furry creatures like muskrats are cute... (to audience)...and he is so beautiful with his shiny fur.

(Mike shows fur to audience)

Countess *(The Countess describes Mike's fur like he was a fashion model)* The muskrat is seen here with a sleek, waterproof, thick, soft, silky, and glossy fur. Accented by the top coarse "guard hairs", 1 ¼ inches in length with dense kinky under fur. This design is improved with air bubbles in the hairs. The color part of this fashion statement shows the muskrat in rust red to brown, dark brown to almost black....

Sylvester ...and the Countess is so sophisticated and tall with amazing 20 inch wings...WOW!...a total wingspan measuring 6 to 7 feet.
(to the Countess) ...you are very beautiful...

Countess Oh, of course people know I am quite beautiful and just look at the gorgeous black feather here on my head, but...

Sylvester *No one* think salamanders are beautiful or important! They think we are just little and slimy. Even my name sounds *blotchy*! B-l-o-t-c-h-e-d Tiger Salamander. I am not even grand like a tiger, so I thought I'd like to be cute, and *everyone* loves bunnies.

Mike *(to the audience)* Hey kids, looks like we have to help Sylvester see how he is important too!

Countess *(to Sylvester)* Seems like you are having an identity crisis my dear.

Mike Sylvester, take off that outfit and let's talk. *(Human helps Sylvester take off his ears)* You should be proud of who you are. Your black pattern and stripes are very nice! *(Everyone agrees)*

Countess Oh yes and Blue Heron love salamanders they are quite *tasty*.

Mike *(to Countess)* You are *not* really helping with *that* information right now Countess.

Countess Vel, perhaps not, but I'm afraid it is true; of course I also eat delicious fish. You see, I just stand motionless in shallow water waiting for prey. Then if one comes close, within striking distance of my sharp pointed bill, I attack. I use my *lightning fast* beak to hunt and catch frogs, lizards, snakes, shrimps, crayfish, insects, **salamanders**, small mammals and I might even kill small birds.

Mike **Yikes!** Okay, we understand. Now Sylvester, perhaps you could tell the kids here about yourself so we can all learn more about you.

Sylvester Well, I'm a meat eater (carnivore) too, bet you didn't know I have teeth on my upper and lower jaws and even the roof of my mouth! I eat worms, sowbugs, aquatic insects and snails. What do you eat Mike?

Mike Muskrats are mainly plant eaters (herbivore). We eat the roots, shoots, bulbs, and leaves of plants like bulrush, duck potato, wild rice, and pondweeds, but cattail is our favorite and most important food. Muskrats do eat meat like clams, frogs, fish, *(whispers to audience)* *salamanders*, and dead ducks or even other dead muskrats.

Countess Sylvester, I bet you lizards love the desert too!

Sylvester Leaping lizards! I'M NOT A LIZARD! I don't have scales like a lizard and I don't have claws. Salamanders don't have claws. Salamanders are not LIZARDS.

Mike Sorry Sylvester, I guess the Countess and I never knew there was a difference. But, can you live in the desert like a lizard.

Sylvester No, I need water in my habitat. Salamanders need water for breeding. We breed early in the spring, even when the water is still partly frozen from winter. *(pause)* Why come to think of it, I do have an amazing ability! I can locate the same pond every year because I may be able to detect earth's magnetic fields, as well as use vision and scent to find the pond.

Mike Does that mean you can live in any water?

Sylvester No, we are not found in salty water and I'm very sensitive to pollution in the water, like acid rain.

Mike Unfortunately, a lot of people don't remember that pollution hurts us *all*.

Sylvester I wish people would remember because I do not like pollution. Gee, salamanders have been able to survive a long time since the dinosaurs, but now we sure face a lot of dangers like pollution.

Human What are some other problems, Sylvester?

Sylvester Well, salamanders get run over by cars when we try to cross the roads during breeding season. But do you know that some nice people have made tunnels for us so we can cross in safety. Some people really try to help wildlife!

Countess We herons don't get hit my cars, but during migration my friends sometimes have flown and crashed into utility poles. They break wings or get tangled in wires and have died! It was horrible!

Sylvester But, like most animals our biggest threat is having no place to live, that is the loss of habitat.

Human How do you lose your habitat?

Sylvester Our home is gone when ponds are drained or get polluted. Wetlands can't clean our water when we pollute them.

Countess Oh yes, talking about wetland homes, when people come and visit our heronries, especially when we have young in our nests we get so-o-o-o-o nervous. It is a real danger to our young. We do not like to be disturbed. To keep intruders out of our area we do have one trick.

Human What is that?

Countess Vell, we cover the pesky trespassers with whitewash.

Mike Whitewash? What?

Countess We throw up a meal on your head.

Mike OH, GROSS!

Countess *(Roars a loud heron laugh, then gets serious)* Vell, it helps protect our young. Though, young herons might still be caught my vultures, owls and tree climbing animals. *(to Mike)* You muskrats must have to face dangers too?

Mike Oh yes, muskrats face dangers too! Two animal muskrat enemies are the mink and raccoon! But our biggest problem is when our habitat is destroyed. Just like Sylvester, we need water and wetland areas.

Countess Mike, how do you live in the water if you are not a fish?

Mike We don't drown, we have developed ways to live in the water habitat. A healthy adult muskrat can stay under the water from 10-20 minutes. Muskrats live in burrows dug into river banks and in houses made of plants. Both the burrows and houses have entrances under the water and living areas above the water.

Sylvester Salamanders like me, also have developed ways to help us survive. We live and hide in fallen logs and crevices, under logs and boards, rocks, surface litter, and even animal burrows. Salamanders were said to be poisonous. Salamanders give off a milky fluid when we are frightened. Some kinds of salamander's milky fluid are poisonous. But the poison does not kill; it irritates the mouth of a predator, so the predator drops the salamander.

Countess You know Sylvester, you are a **very** interesting creature and I'm glad I got to meet you!

Sylvester Why, I feel much better about myself. And now I know how I'm an important part of wetlands. In fact, I'm so excited about what I have learned. I want to share it with other kids!

Mike That a great idea. *(to audience)* Hope you kids keep learning about wetlands and try to keep them safe for us all!

Countess Let's go find some other kids to visit! We can pass the word that all creatures, *including* the salamander, have important jobs in the wetland. And the wetlands do many important jobs for **people and wildlife!**

The End

Human Presenter—may suggest students learn more about Herons, Muskrats, and Salamanders with the use of the species information.