



Name: _____

Date: _____

Oil Spill

It was 8:40 in the morning. The day was bright and clear. A small French fishing boat rocked in the waves off the coast of England, but the fishermen weren't fishing. They were watching something. They saw a big ship coming, but they could not believe their eyes. The ship was going straight for the rocks! The ship was the Torrey Canyon, a tanker. It was filled with oil. It was as wide as a ten-lane highway. It was longer than three football fields.

The fishermen watched in horror. The huge ship crashed into the rocks at full speed. Oil began to pour into the sea. At first, there wasn't much of it, but it kept coming. People tried to refloat the ship, but they failed. More oil poured into the sea. Oil floats on top of water. Soon the surface of the sea was black with oil. Winds began to carry this oil towards land. The Torrey Canyon had gone aground near Land's End. That's on the coast of Cornwall, England. Soon the beaches there were covered with oil.

Seabirds had to swim through the oil. It stuck to their feathers. They could not fly. People picked up some of the birds and they cleaned off the oil. Some were saved this way, but many died. Still the oil poured out of the Torrey Canyon. It floated in large patches called oil slicks. Some of the oil was carried by tides to France. More birds died there. Some people say that 75,000 seabirds died in the oil.

People worked to get rid of the oil. They used chemicals to break up the oil slicks, but the chemicals were as deadly as the oil. They killed more birds, fish, lobsters, crabs and other sea life. At last the oil was cleaned from the beaches, but it was too late for the animals. Most of the sea life was dead. The beaches were empty and nothing moved. The loss of the ship was bad, but the loss of living things was much worse.

People use tons and tons of oil every day, and the need for oil keeps getting greater. The oil must travel by ship, so today there are even bigger tankers than the Torrey Canyon. They hold even more oil than it did. These newer ships have many inventions to make them safer, but the sea always has its dangers. There are still accidents. Today's oil slicks can be bigger than ever. The danger to sea life is even greater, so people keep trying to find ways to protect sea life from oil spills. As oil spills keep happening, the fish, birds and other life must somehow be saved.