Section 2:
Stump Pass Beach State Park

Most visitors drive on Manasota Key Road to Stump Pass Beach State Park to enjoy the Gulf beach. But Muggy swims with many other small mullet between the two islands east of Manasota Key that are also part of the park. The group of mullet is called a school, and it protects the mullet from predators because there is safety in numbers.

Muggy hears a loud noise. Then he sees a boat pass over the seagrass. The motor has a propeller that looks like the blade of a fan. It moves water instead of air. In places, the propeller cuts the seagrass. Sometimes, grass tangles around the prop and is pulled up by its roots. This kills the grass and leaves a scar, or sandy place, in the meadow of seagrass. Standing in the shallows, a little blue heron watches the school of mullet. When one mullet strays over the bare sand, the heron eats it. Muggy and the school scoot into the seagrass to hide.

The boat's motor stops, and Muggy hears voices coming from the boat.

"We can't get to Sarasota Bay from here," a woman says.

"Sure we can. But not today," a man says.

"How?" the woman asks.

The man points.

"See those red and green signs in the water? They mark the Intracoastal Waterway, a deep channel made for boaters. We can follow it north to Sarasota."

"How long will it take?" the woman asks.

The man says, "I'd say about an hour. First we'll go under the bridge to Englewood Beach, then through Lemon Bay and all along Manasota Key."

"That sounds like fun!" she says.

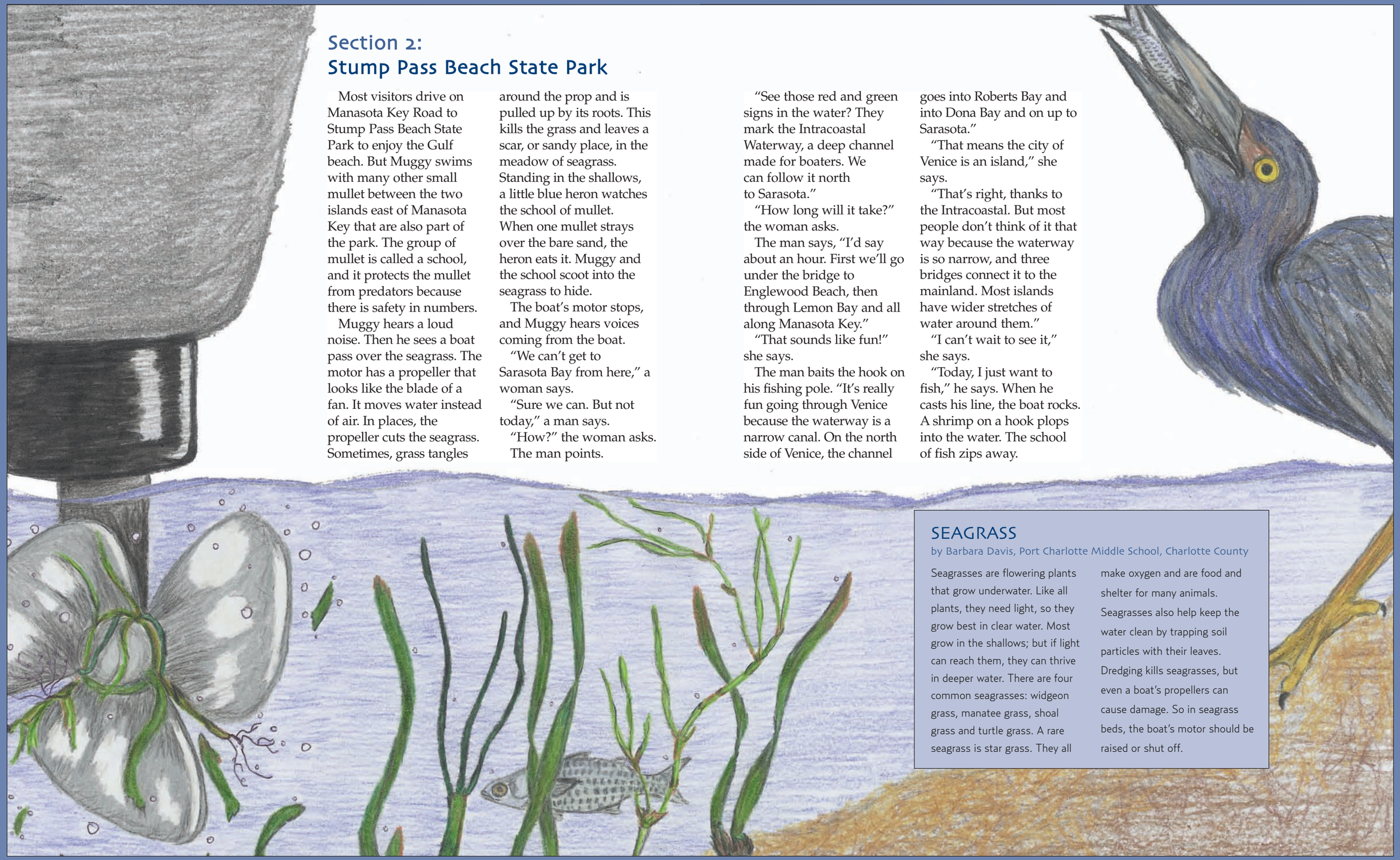
The man baits the hook on his fishing pole. "It's really fun going through Venice because the waterway is a narrow canal. On the north side of Venice, the channel goes into Roberts Bay and into Dona Bay and on up to Sarasota."

"That means the city of Venice is an island," she says.

"That's right, thanks to the Intracoastal. But most people don't think of it that way because the waterway is so narrow, and three bridges connect it to the mainland. Most islands have wider stretches of water around them."

"I can't wait to see it," she says.

"Today, I just want to fish," he says. When he casts his line, the boat rocks. A shrimp on a hook plops into the water. The school of fish zips away.



SEAGRASS

by Barbara Davis, Port Charlotte Middle School, Charlotte County

Seagrasses are flowering plants that grow underwater. Like all plants, they need light, so they grow best in clear water. Most grow in the shallows; but if light can reach them, they can thrive in deeper water. There are four common seagrasses: widgeon grass, manatee grass, shoal grass and turtle grass. A rare seagrass is star grass. They all make oxygen and are food and shelter for many animals. Seagrasses also help keep the water clean by trapping soil particles with their leaves. Dredging kills seagrasses, but even a boat's propellers can cause damage. So in seagrass beds, the boat's motor should be raised or shut off.