Settlement & Survival

Exploring Outport Life in Trinity Bay
Ireland's Eye, British Harbour, and New Bonaventure

Overview

This lesson introduces students to the origins, challenges, and transformations of Newfoundland's coastal outports by exploring three communities that together tell a story of continuity and change: Ireland's Eye, British Harbour, and New Bonaventure.

Students will learn how geography and the physical environment shaped where people settled, how they made a living, and why some communities eventually disappeared while others adapted and endured. Through maps, discussions, and visual comparisons, learners will connect Newfoundland's 19th- and 20th-century settlement patterns to broader themes of survival, adaptation, and identity.

Lesson Objective

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1. **Examine** how exploration and settlement have shaped Newfoundland and Labrador.
2. **Analyze** how the physical environment influenced patterns of settlement and economic activity.
3. **Recognize** the relationship between geography, community, and cultural continuity.

Part 1 People, Place & Environment / Time, Continuity & Change

Ireland's Eye
Life Before Resettlement

- **Early Isolation:** Settled in the early 1800s, Ireland's Eye was a small island outport accessible only by boat. Its natural harbour provided shelter but also isolation from trade and government services.
- **Self-Sufficiency:** Families lived by inshore fishing, small gardens, and logging — using local materials for homes, boats, and food preservation.
- **Faith and Community:** A single church and schoolhouse formed the heart of the settlement, where traditions, storytelling, and cooperation were essential to survival.
- **Limited Infrastructure:** No roads, doctors, or modern communications — residents relied entirely on each other and supply boats.

British Harbour
The Turning Point

- **A Thriving Fishery Hub:** By the late 1800s, British Harbour was home to over 200 people and supported inshore and seal fisheries.
- **Economic Decline:** By the mid-20th century, the cod fishery had weakened; lack of access to roads and modern amenities made survival difficult.
- **Resettlement Era (1960s):** Government programs encouraged families to move to centralized communities. British Harbour was officially vacated in 1968, marking the end of one of Newfoundland's last major resettlements.
- **Cultural Memory:** Its final years were captured in the National Film Board documentary The Last Days of British Harbour, preserving voices and images of the community's farewell.

New Bonaventure
Continuity and Adaptation

- **Receiving Community:** When nearby outports were abandoned, families from British Harbour and Ireland's Eye relocated to New Bonaventure.
- **Modern Infrastructure:** A connected road, electricity, and schooling made it a viable settlement post-resettlement.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Today, it houses the Random Passage Site, a heritage reconstruction that keeps 19th-century outport history alive for visitors and students.
- **Symbol of Resilience:** New Bonaventure embodies how communities adapt, honouring the past while embracing new economic realities through tourism and storytelling.

Part 2 The Physical Environment & The Economy

Coastal Dependency
Newfoundland's jagged coastline shaped where people lived — harbours like Ireland's Eye and British Harbour were chosen for natural protection, proximity to fishing grounds, and freshwater sources.

Limited Interior Access
Harsh terrain and thick forest discouraged inland settlement, concentrating life along bays and coves.

The Cod Fishery
The cold Labrador Current brought abundant cod, forming the foundation of all economic activity. Each harbour's economy revolved around curing, drying, and exporting fish.

Seasonal Work
Families followed seasonal rhythms — spring ice clearing, summer fishing, fall storage — balancing fishing with small-scale agriculture and woodcutting.

Isolation
Weather, distance, and lack of infrastructure limited trade and medical access, often making communities vulnerable to storms and scarcity.

Resource Exhaustion
Overfishing and environmental decline gradually made isolated life unsustainable, especially by the 1960s.

Shift to Centralization
Harsh environments and economic inefficiencies led to provincial resettlement initiatives, centralizing services in accessible towns like New Bonaventure.

Sustainable Future
Today, tourism, cultural interpretation, and environmental awareness are new forms of "survival" — connecting young learners to lessons from outport life.

Quiz A

Multiple Choice (Circle the best answer)

1. **Why did families originally settle in outports like Ireland's Eye and British Harbour?**
   a. To access government services
   b. To be close to schools and hospitals
   c. To be near fishing grounds and sheltered harbours
   d. Because the land was easy to farm

2. **What was the main reason many families left British Harbour in the 1960s?**
   a. A new road made travel easier
   b. Government incentives encouraged resettlement
   c. Discovery of new fishing grounds
   d. The population grew too large

3. **Which statement best describes New Bonaventure after the resettlement program?**
   a. It became abandoned like British Harbour.
   b. It grew as a receiving community for relocated families.
   c. It was used only for summer fishing.
   d. It became a mining centre.

4. **Which industry shaped daily life and economic survival in Newfoundland's outports?**
   a. Mining
   b. Forestry
   c. Fishing
   d. Shipbuilding

5. **The National Film Board documentary The Last Days of British Harbour is important because it:**
   a. Showed how fishing gear was made.
   b. Documented the final days before resettlement.
   c. Taught people how to build boats.
   a. Recorded music from Newfoundland outports.

Quiz A ANSWER KEY

Multiple Choice (Choose the best answer)

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Quiz B

1. Describe two ways the physical geography of Trinity Bay made life both possible and difficult for outport settlers.

2. How did the cod fishery influence where communities were located in Newfoundland?

3. Explain why the decline of the inshore fishery caused so many small communities to be abandoned.

4. What role did government policy play in shaping settlement patterns during the 1960s?

5. Compare Ireland's Eye and New Bonaventure in one sentence, focusing on how each reflects a different stage in Newfoundland's settlement story.

Quiz B ANSWER KEY

1. Describe two ways the physical geography of Trinity Bay made life both possible and difficult for outport settlers.

Sample Answer: Harbours provided shelter for boats and fish-rich waters, but steep cliffs and isolation made travel and trade difficult.

2. How did the cod fishery influence where communities were located in Newfoundland?

Sample Answer: Settlements were built near good fishing grounds so fish could be caught, salted, and dried close to shore.

3. Explain why the decline of the inshore fishery caused so many small communities to be abandoned.

Sample Answer: Without a stable fishery, people lost their main source of income and food, forcing them to move to larger centres with jobs and services.

4. What role did government policy play in shaping settlement patterns during the 1960s?

Sample Answer: The resettlement program offered money to families to move from isolated communities to larger ones like New Bonaventure, where schools and hospitals were accessible.

5. Compare Ireland's Eye and New Bonaventure in one sentence, focusing on how each reflects a different stage in Newfoundland's settlement story.

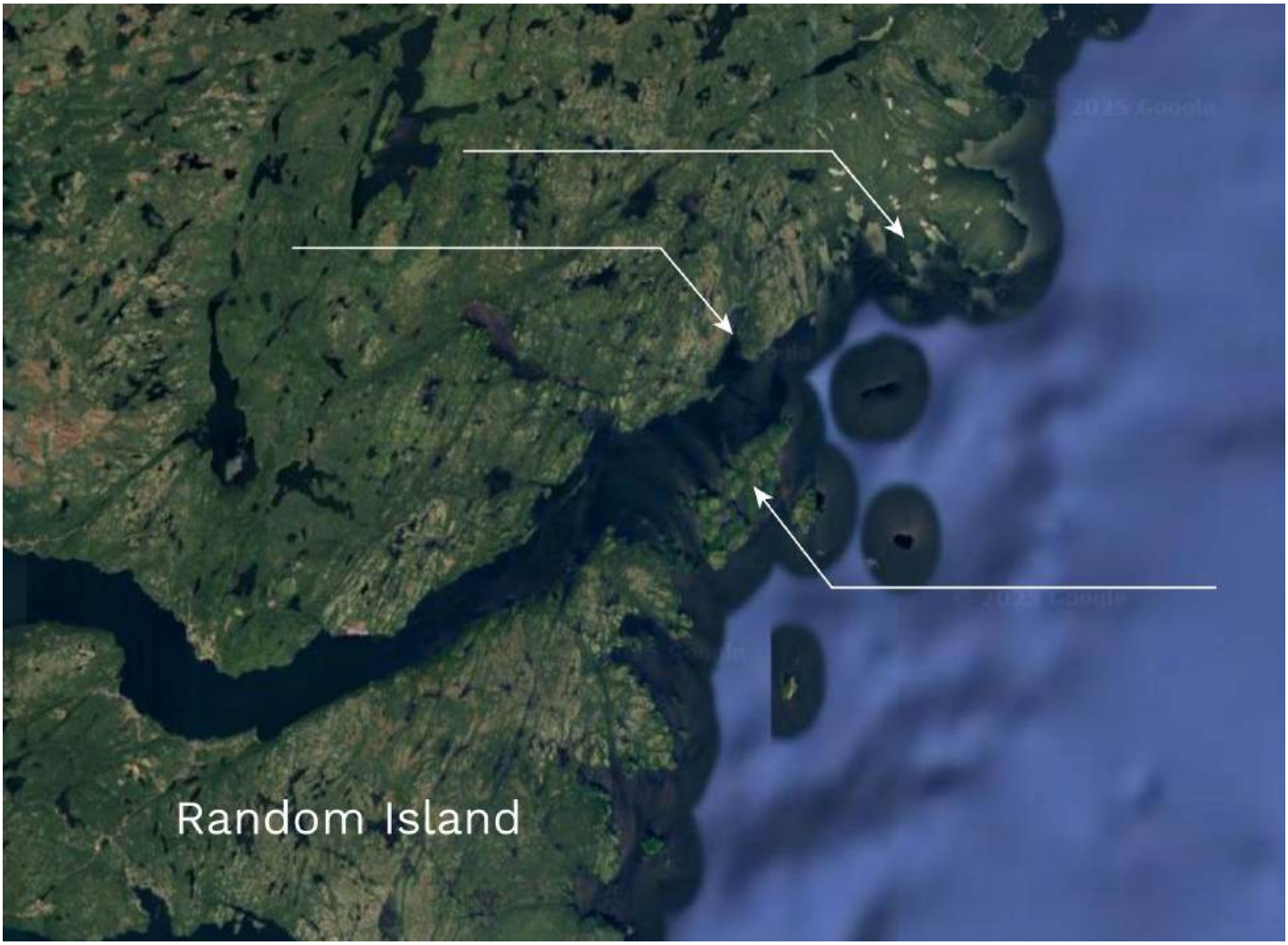
Sample Answer: Ireland's Eye represents the isolation of early settlement, while New Bonaventure shows how communities adapted and survived after resettlement.

Quiz C

1. Journal Entry
Imagine you are a 13-year-old living in Ireland's Eye in 1890. Write a short journal entry describing a typical day: include what your family does for work, what challenges you face, and what makes your home special.

2. Mapping Challenge

On a blank map of Trinity Bay, mark the locations of Ireland's Eye, British Harbour, and New Bonaventure. Add one fact beside each about its geography or history.



3. Compare and Contrast

Fill in a chart with two columns: Then (Ireland's Eye/British Harbour) and Now (New Bonaventure). List 3–4 examples of how life, economy, or environment changed over time.

4. Creative Design

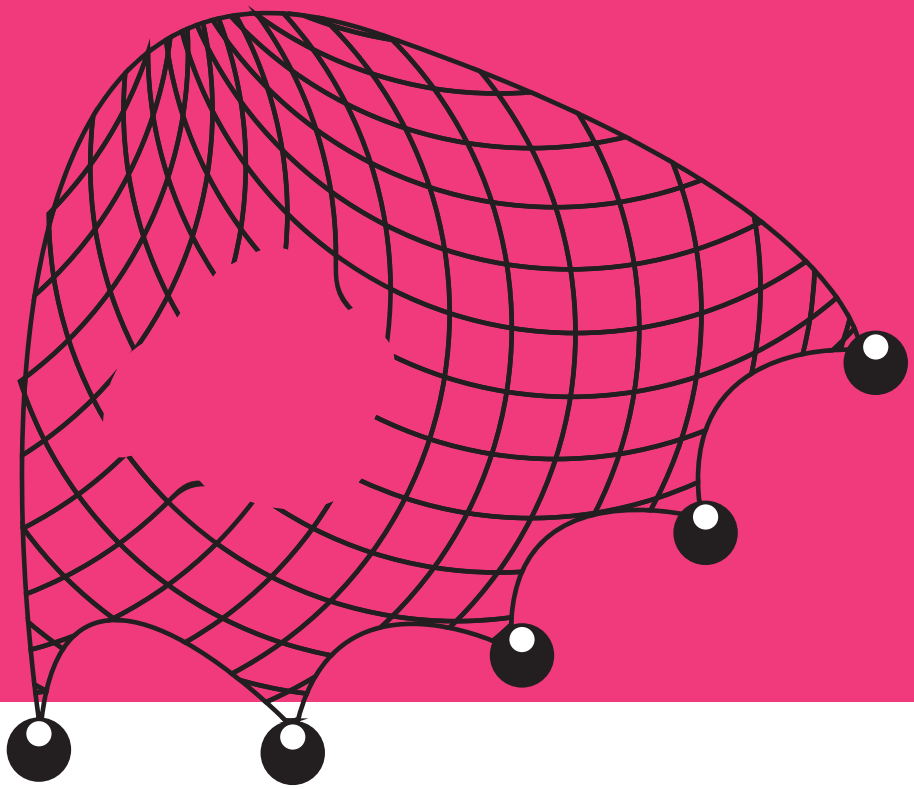
Design a poster in the space below titled "Surviving the Outport Life" showing what people needed (food, tools, shelter, community) to thrive in a place like British Harbour.

OUTPORT SURVIVAL

Can you work through the tough conditions and make it through the year?

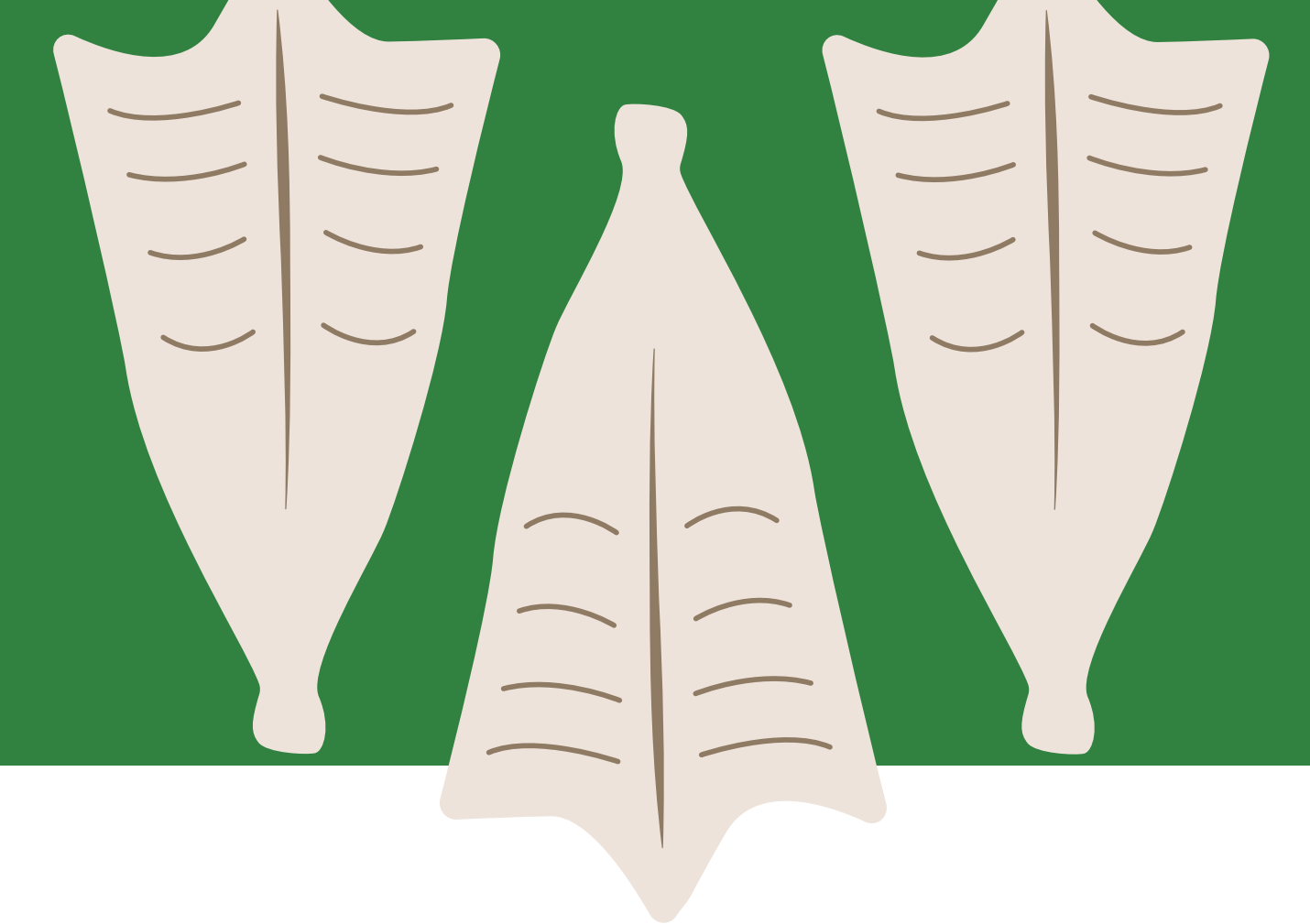
To play:

1. Roll the dice and move the number of spaces
2. If you land on special marked spot, draw a card of the same colour and see what has happened that season
3. Follow the directions on the card
4. The first one to make it through the whole year and make it to the finish wins!



Strong winds damage nets.

Move backward 1 space.



Fish prices drop.

Move backward 1 space.

Trade fair in Trinity.

Move forward 1 space.

COLD SNAP!

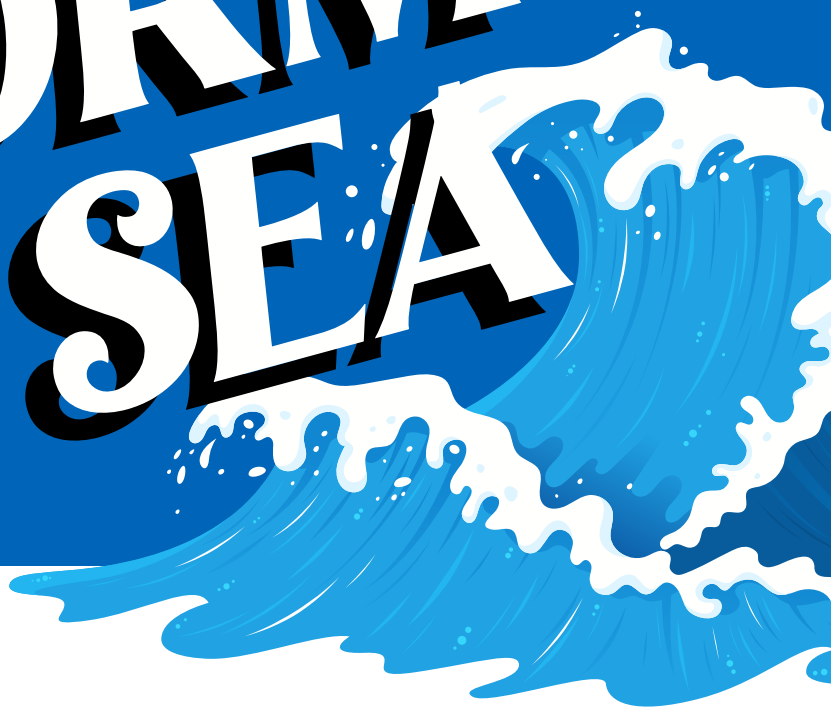
The ice freezes earlier than usual.

Move backward 2 spaces.

Your neighbour shares some firewood with you.

Move forward 2 spaces.

STORM AT SEA

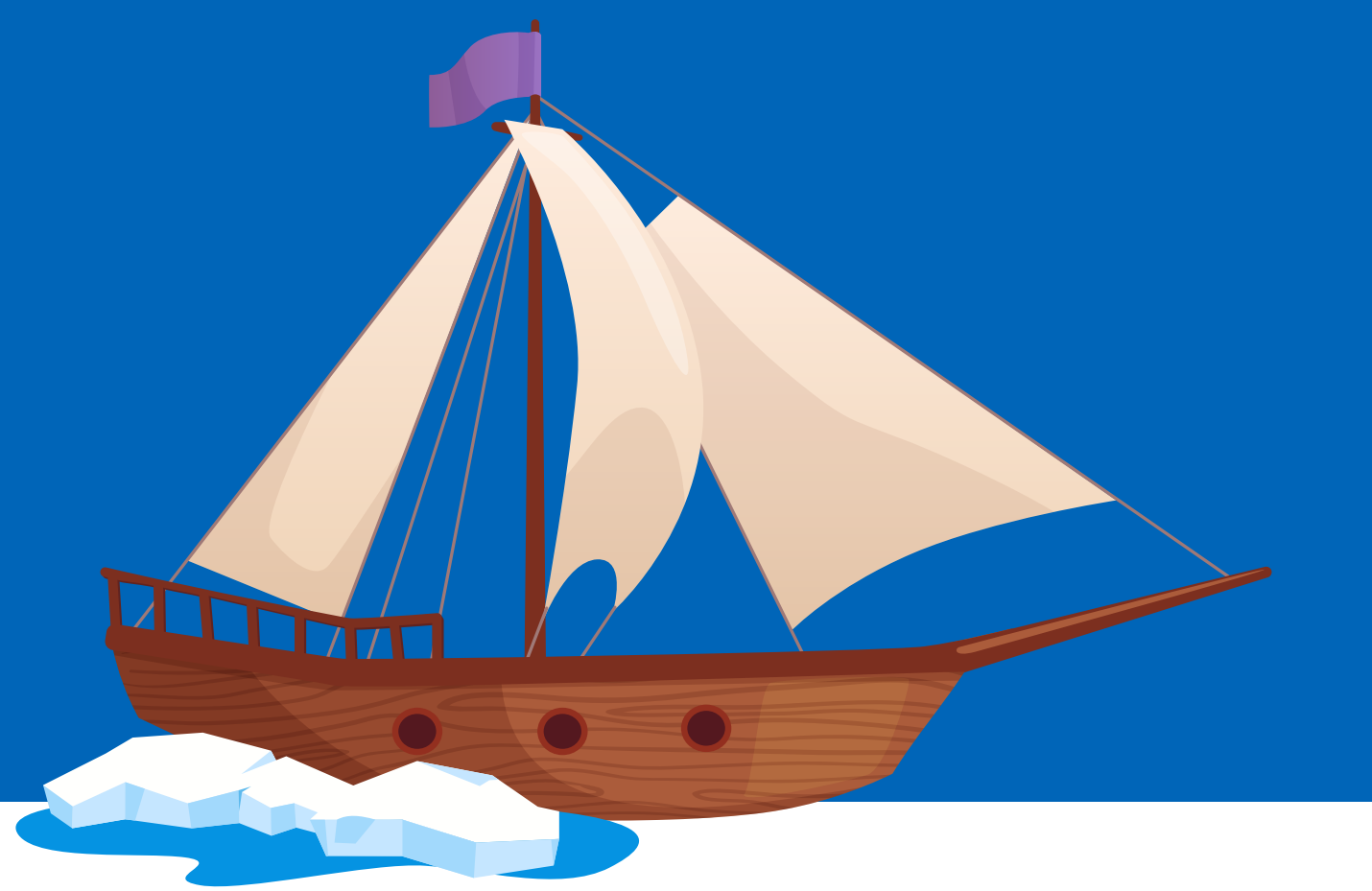


Your stored fish spoils.

Move backward 1 space.

You fix the church roof.

Move forward 1 space.



Help arrives late.
The supply boat
is late.

Lose a turn.

Sickness Strikes.

Lose a turn.

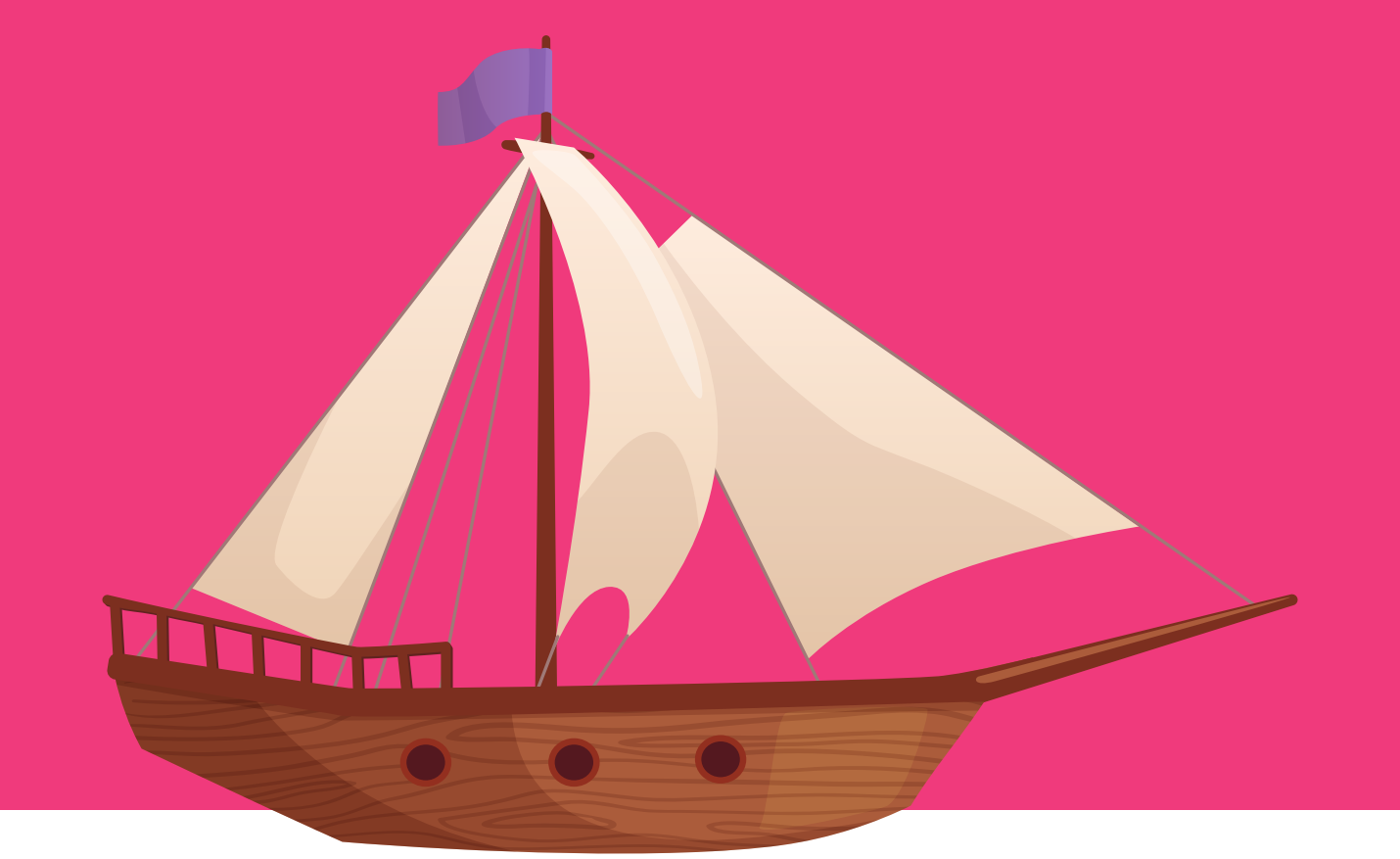
Planting season!
Your garden is
growing well!

**Move forward
1 space.**

BOAT LAUNCH!

Time to celebrate!

Move forward 2 spaces.



The merchant arrives for trade.

Move forward 1 space.

Weather delays fishing.

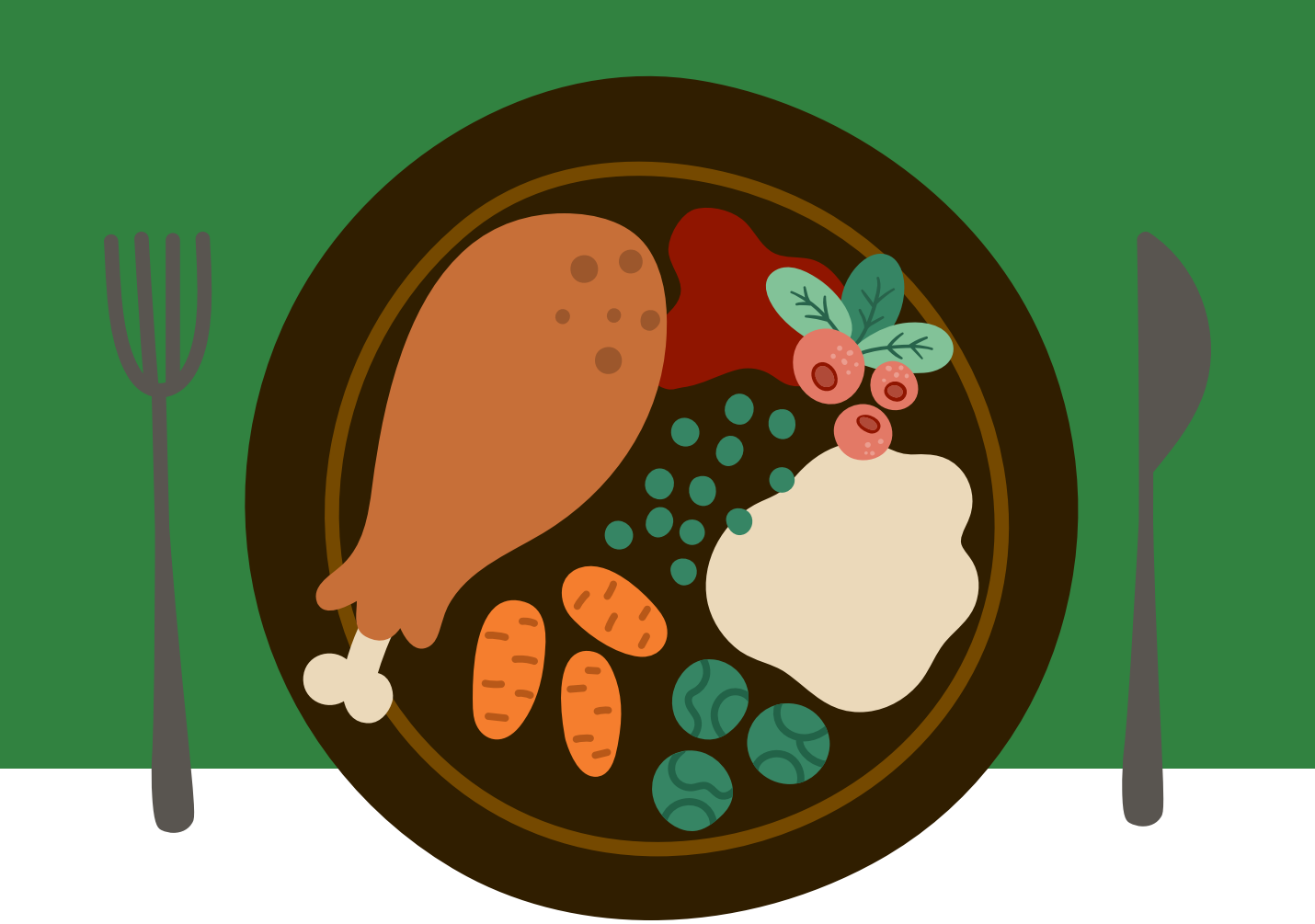
Lose a turn.

Fishing success!
You catch a huge haul!

Move forward
2 spaces.

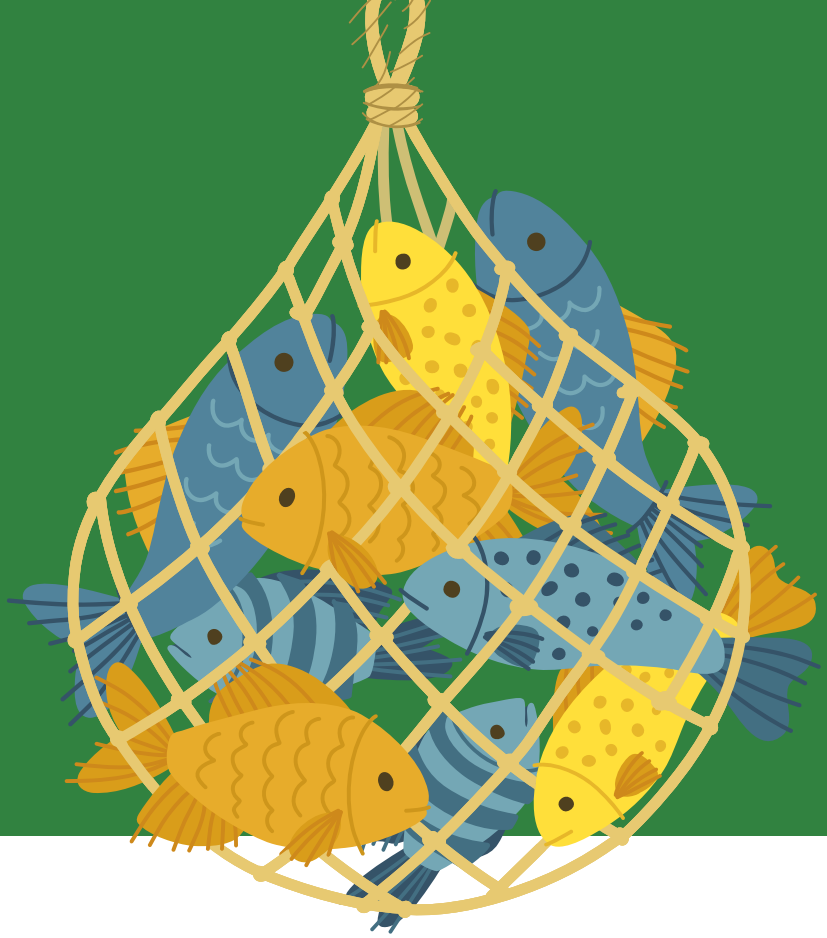
STAGE FIRE!

Move backward 2 spaces.



You host a community dinner.

Move forward 1 space.



Fishing success!
You catch a huge haul!

Move forward
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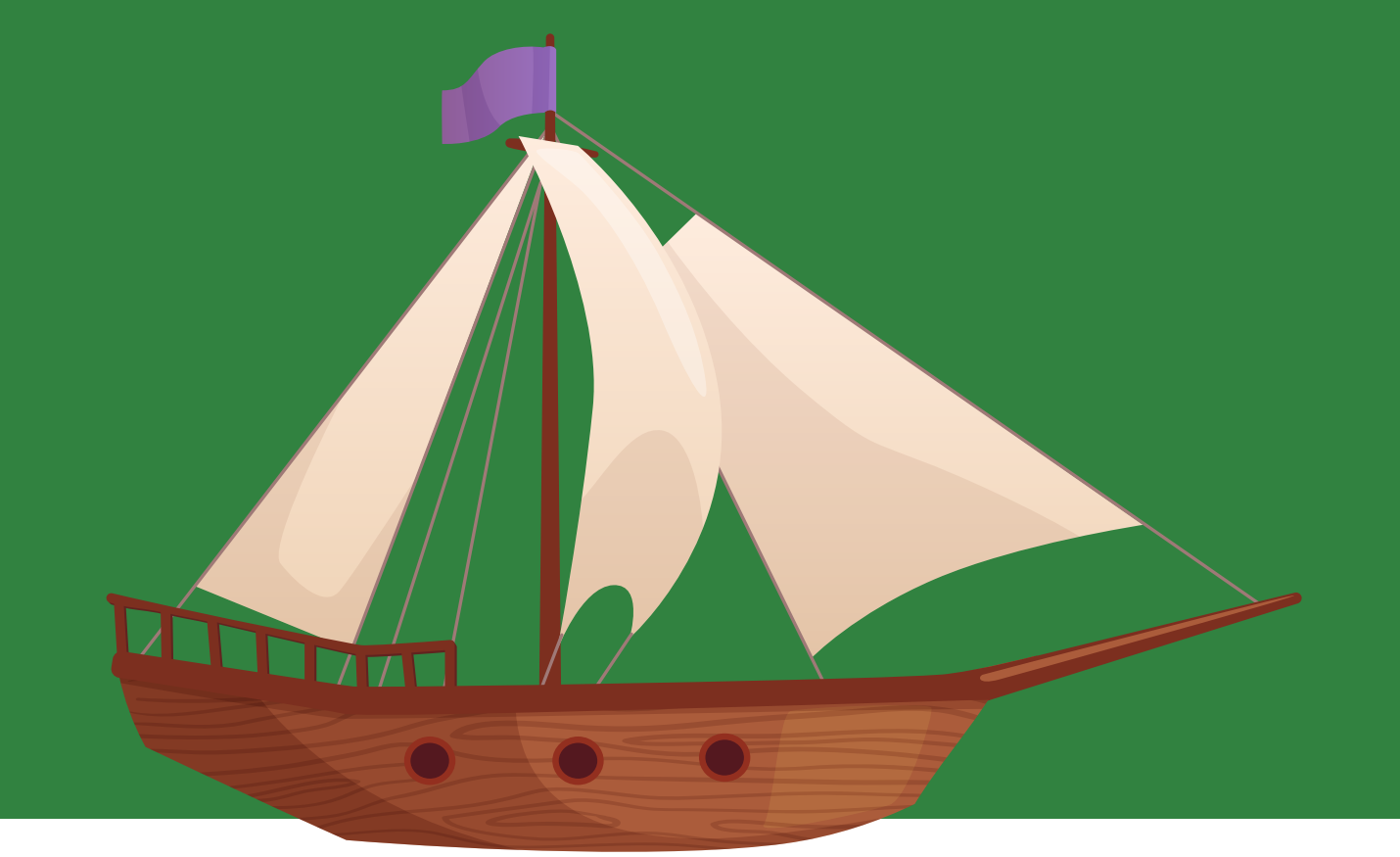


The merchant arrives for trade.

Move forward 1 space.

Weather delays fishing.

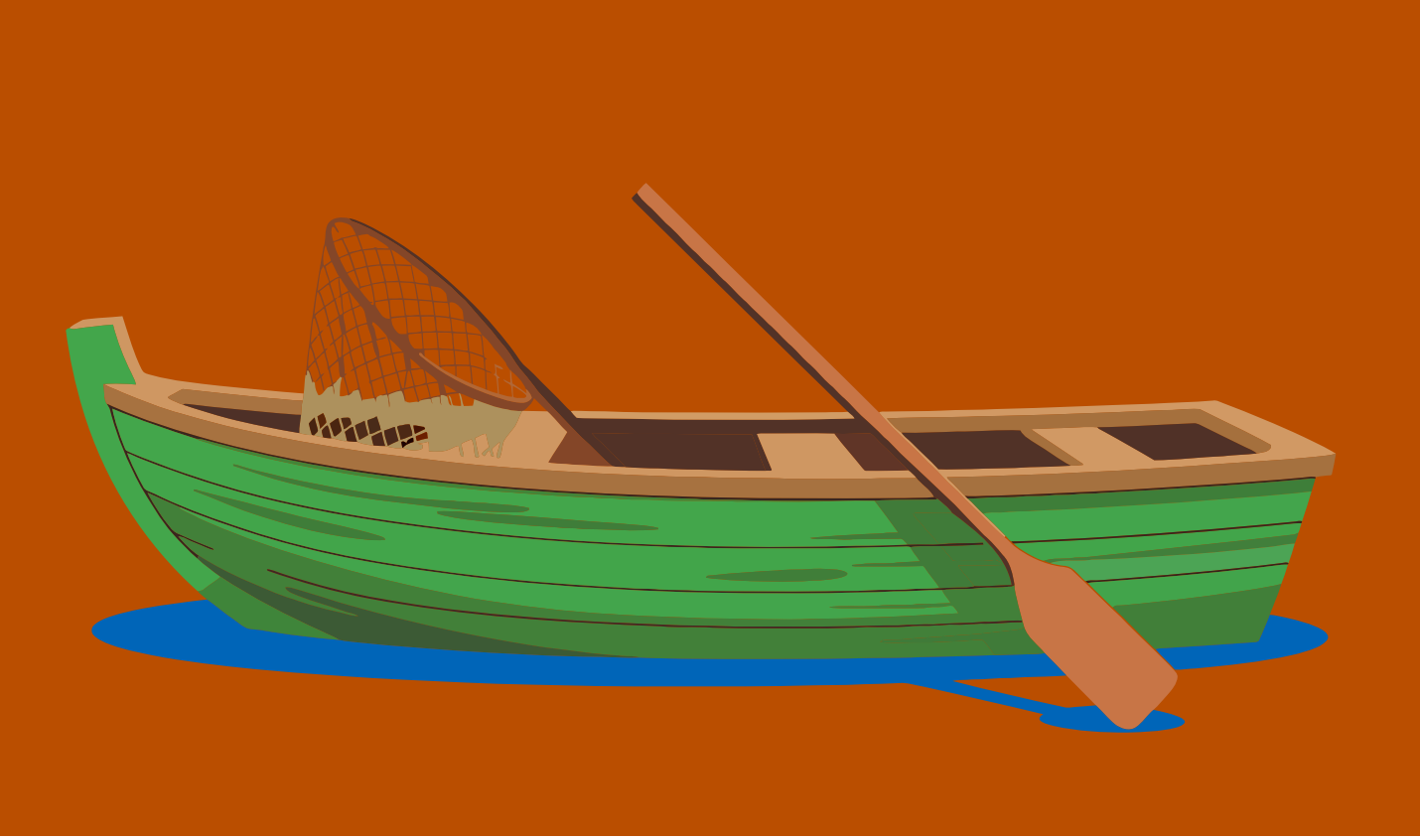
Lose a turn.

Windstorm hits the Cove!

Move backward 1 space.

Harvest Bounty!

Move forward 2 spaces.



Government declares resettlement.

Choose:

Take another turn

OR

Move forward 1 space.

Children leave town to go to school.

Lose a turn.

Repair the wharf.

Move forward 1 space.