



# WATCH IT!

# UNRAVELING THE WEB

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Watch *Coral Reefs: Unraveling the Web* YouTube video (<https://youtu.be/kuEe4376il8>) and answer the following questions.

1. What kinds of animals live in a coral reef ecosystem? Provide three examples.

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2. What is the role of a sea cucumber living in a coral reef?

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3. What is a food chain?

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4. What is a food web?

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5. What is the role of a parrotfish and sea urchins living in a coral reef?

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6. What happens when sea cucumbers and parrotfish populations decline?

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7. What does it mean to have a balanced food web?

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8. Throughout the video there are examples of humans disrupting the coral reef food web. Provide three examples of how humans disrupt the coral reef food web either from the video and/or from independent research.

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**VIDEO SCRIPT:**

A coral reef, when healthy, it's one of nature's miracles.

An ecosystem that supports millions of different creatures.

From major predators like sharks to grazers like parrot fish, from sea urchins to octopus, to sea cucumbers.

This creature feeds on bacteria and other microorganisms that could become problems.

It breaks them down and then poops out clean sand, redistributing nutrients for other creatures.

Bacteria is at the bottom of a food chain, a diagram of "what eats what" in the reef.

But a coral reef is such a complex ecosystem, that it's better to think of it as a food web, a network of food chains that tells a story about the interdependence of all the animals and plants that live in the reef.

Take the parrotfish.

Named for its sharp, beak-like teeth, parrotfish feed on algae that grows on the reef.

Together with sea urchins, they act as lawnmowers, keeping the algae in check.

But in some places, like Jamaica, fishermen are now catching too many parrotfish.

The sea urchins nearby have also undergone a population crash.

The loss of these two grazers is reflected in Jamaican reefs. Many of them are now overgrown with algae.

So, the food web is all about balance.

If one link is threatened, or another one grows too dominant, it sends shock waves through the web.

Each link of the food web impacts every other part.

Follow the connecting lines and you'll see that animals can eat more than one animal and can be prey to many others.

They all need each other, even the large predators.

And many types of predators, like sharks, are now endangered by another predator far more dangerous – humans.

We disrupt the reef's food web in dozens of ways, large and small.

For example, too much fertilizer in farming or sewage in coastal areas, introduces too many nutrients into the sea.

This can trigger those booms and busts that upset the coral reef's food web.



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They threaten the reef's ability to support the millions of organisms that rely on it for food and shelter.

But a coral reef can recover.

It's up to us.

We are an important part of this food web.

We must change our actions and rethink what we do to help preserve reefs.

Only then can we restore their natural balance.

