

A Whale of a Time

Average Program Length: 45 minutes

Meeting Location: Auditorium

Total material list:

--Pieces of fishing net

--Painted rocks (20)

--Trash items

--Binoculars from Visitor Center (Park Provided)

--Park Map (Park Provided)

--Takepart.com article print out

--Movie Worksheet (Park Provided)

* Note: Whales only migrate from late December to early March, so this is the only time you can see them

Activities by Scout Level

Girl Scout

Daisies and Brownies- pick at least 4 of the steps below

Juniors and Cadettes- pick at least 5 of the steps below

Seniors and Ambassadors-pick at least 6 of the steps below

Boy Scout

Lions, Tigers, Wolves, and Bears- pick at least 4 of the steps below

Webelos, Scout Rank, and Tenderfoot- pick at least 5 of the steps below

Second Class, First Class, Star Scouts, Life Scouts, and Eagle Scouts-

pick at least 6 of the steps below

Background

*Info from National Geographic

Gray whales are often covered with parasites and other organisms that make their snouts and backs look like a crusty ocean rock. They are about 40-50 feet long, and weigh 30 to 40 tons. That's about the size of a bus!

The whale uses its snout to forage by dislodging tiny creatures from the seafloor. It then filters these morsels with its baleen—a comblike strainer of plates in the upper jaw. A piece of gray whale baleen, also called whalebone, is about 18 inches (46 centimeters) long and has a consistency much like a fingernail. Whalebone was once used to make ladies' corsets and umbrella ribs.

The gray whale is one of the animal kingdom's great migrators. Traveling in groups called pods, some of these giants swim 12,430 miles (20,000 kilometers) round-trip from their summer home in Alaskan waters to the warmer waters off the Mexican coast. The whales winter and breed in the shallow southern waters and balmy climate. Other gray whales live in the seas near Korea.

Like all whales, gray whales surface to breathe, so migrating groups are often spotted from North America's west coast. These whales were once the target of extensive hunting and, by the early 20th century, they were in serious danger of extinction.

Today gray whales are protected by international law, and their numbers have grown. In 1994, the gray whale was removed from the United States endangered species list.

Matching Badges



Brownies-Senses



Ambassadors-Water



Juniors-Animal Habitats



BSA-Fish and
Wildlife Management

Correlates to Next Generation
Science Standards for ESS3:
EARTH AND HUMAN
ACTIVITY

Program Activities

1. Watch the documentary on the Gray Whales in our theater. This plays at 12pm and 3pm each day. Follow along with the worksheet, and fill it in.
2. Talk about the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch). Gray whales cannot smell, but they have a strong sense of hearing. Sound travels further and faster-- about 4 times as fast--in water as it does in air!
3. Play the Winston the Whale game. Scouts take turn being Winston the Whale, and sit in the middle of a circle with eyes closed, surrounded by painted "life" rocks. Winston has to rely only on his/her hearing to avoid predators, polluting boatmen, and fishermen with nets. Other scouts have to try to sneak up quietly. Predator scouts need to try to take the painted rocks, boatmen should try and leave garbage, and fisherman should leave pieces of nets. If Winston points to one of the scouts with his/her eyes closed, then they're out, and can no longer eat "life rocks" or pollute. See if Winston can get all of the scouts out while still keeping his/her "life rocks" and not being surrounded by pollution or nets.

4. From late December to early March, take some binoculars from the visitor center (rented without a charge) and go look for whales at the overlook! From here, you can see many different locations on the water, but a spout may only look very small. If you want a closer look, drive down to the tide pools and hike the short coastal trail to see if you can see any here. *Hint: it's easiest to spot the whale watching boats first, and look around it to find the whales!

5. Gray whales are relatively the size of a bus and weigh 30 to 40 tons. Even with their massive size, they are not immune to threats. Pollution from urban, agricultural, and industrial runoff are contaminating our seas. Fishing nets and lines entangle the whales. Climate change is causing more carbon dioxide to enter the ocean and the waters are becoming more acidic. In the 20th century, the whales were hunted almost to extinction. Today, some countries and cultures still hunt whales, because they rely on the animal for food, oil, and spiritual ceremonies. Discuss what we can do to ensure that the whale populations remain stable and healthy.

6. Help do a beach/tide pool cleanup to make sure the gray whales have a safe route to travel.

7. Mark the general spots on a map where you saw any whales (or any other wildlife!) and report findings to the visitors center. This helps us monitor wildlife.

8. At home, create a short report or media on the threats the whales face, both historically and currently. What can people do to help?

9. Read this short article on the viewpoints of the Makah tribe and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration:

<http://www.takepart.com/article/2015/03/12/makah-tribe-hopes-resume-gray-whale-hunt>. The article starts by asking "What is more important: honoring a Native American tribe's 2,000-year-old tradition and its 160-year-old treaty with the United States, or protecting the lives of gray whales?". Can we have both? Do you think ecotourism, instead of whale meat, could sustain their lives? Could tribes have quotas and restrictions to ensure there was no overharvesting? Would this make other native tribes want to rekindle their practices? Are there any alternatives? Are there any compromises?