

Big as a Baby Whale



Objective

Students will create life size chalk drawings of J.J. the gray whale to discover the size and growth rate of juvenile gray whales.

Materials

- Sidewalk chalk (one piece for each student or three for the class)
- Measuring tape or yardstick
- Large flat area to draw image
- Various pictures of whales from books or magazines
- Enlarged image of gray whale illustration below
- 4 orange traffic cones (optional)

Background

J.J., the orphaned California gray whale, arrived at SeaWorld on January 10, 1997. She was alone, very weak and lethargic. Through the excellent care of SeaWorld animal experts, J.J. survived. J.J. remained in the care of SeaWorld experts for 14 months. She grew to a massive 31 feet (9.4 meters), and tipped the scales at 19,200 pounds (8,709 kg). On March 31, 1998, J.J. was released with a radio transmitter to track her progress. Researchers were able to track J.J. for just two days before the transmitter was dislodged and J.J.'s location lost.

Action

1. Before the activity, prepare the drawing area by marking off its boundaries with chalk marks or orange traffic cones. For young students, teachers may want to lightly outline the image or do a "connect-the-dots" number line. Use this information for lengths: Baby J.J. length from nose to tail 14 feet, 8 inches (4.5 m); fluke width 3 feet, 1 inch (1 m), flipper length 2 feet, 9 inches (83cm). For grown J.J. length from nose to tail 30 feet (9.1 m); fluke width 6 feet, 3 inches (1.9 m), flipper length 5 feet, 4 inches (1.6m).
2. In the classroom, show students pictures of whales. Where do they live? What do they eat? How big do they get? (Do not be concerned with wrong answers, this discussion is for focusing attention.) Show students the different body parts of a whale by showing the illustration on the next page.
3. Tell students you will be drawing a lifesize image of a gray whale that lived at SeaWorld for a year. The whale, an orphan (lost its mom), grew up at SeaWorld.
4. Take students out to the area where you will draw the whale. Show the students the outlined image of a gray whale used in the classroom and explain how it will fit in the area. Position students at the head, tail, and along the sides of the whale. If using numbers, have a student stand by a number.
5. With students in place, start at the head of the whale having each student along the way draw a part of the whale. The teacher can follow the line with the paper images so student can see what part they are drawing.
6. After "Baby J.J." is finished, have students step back to draw J.J. at one year. Repeat the same sequence, drawing the larger, older J.J. 7. When the drawing is complete, have all students walk from the head to the tail, counting steps along the way. Was J.J. a big baby? Did she grow a lot in a year?

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