

On The Road Again



Objective

Students trace the migration route of a gray whale and discover a gray whale's natural history.

Materials

- copies of the **On the Road Again** cut-outs on page 2
- map of western North America, big enough for a classroom bulletin board
- markers, crayons, tempera paint, and/or various other art materials
- illustrations, photos, videos, and other resource materials on gray whales as available
- tacks or tape

Background

Gray whales inhabit the eastern North Pacific Ocean. They spend summers in the icy waters of the Bering and Chukchi seas, off Alaska — their feeding grounds. As the ice pack advances in the fall, gray whales embark on one of the longest known migrations of any mammal. Hugging the North America coastline, gray whales swim south more than 9,000 km (5,600 miles) to the warmwater lagoons of Baja California, Mexico. The trip takes two or three months each way. The migrating whales can be seen from shore or whale-watching boats.

Action

1. Enlarge the map of western North America so that it's big enough for a bulletin board display. Have students help color and label the map, then mount it on the wall in your classroom.
2. Photocopy the animal illustrations on page 2 (enlarge if you like) and cut them out.
3. Secure the adult gray whale cut-out to your map so that it can be moved and reattached once each week with tape or tacks. Begin with your adult gray whale in the arctic feeding grounds. (Choose the Bering Sea or the Chukchi Sea.)
4. Explain to your students that the gray whale is going to be making a long trip (migration) all the way to the lagoons of Baja California, Mexico. Have the class choose which lagoon will be their destination. A gray whale takes two to three months to reach its destination—try this activity for ten weeks. (If you measure the migration route and divide this measurement by 10, you'll know how far to move your whale each week.)
5. Each week on the same day, move your whale a little farther down the migration route. Along the way, focus on the geography, animal life, and culture of the area.

Attach the photocopied cut-outs (from page 2) to your map when you're near the appropriate area.
6. Mother whales give birth to calves on their southward migration. Surprise students by placing the gray whale calf next to the adult as the adult nears the lagoons. Celebrate with a baby whale birthday party!

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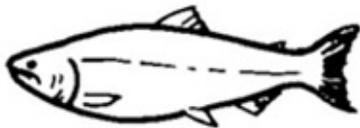
amphipod (food for gray whales)
Alaskan feeding grounds



Alaska sea otter
Alaska



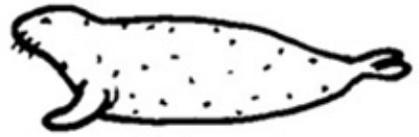
walrus
Alaska



salmon
northwestern United States



Steller's sea lion
northwestern United States



harbor seal
Alaska to Baja California



Douglas fir tree
northwestern United States



bottlenose dolphin
Southern California



fishing boat
(anywhere along the coast)



killer whale
throughout Pacific Ocean



California sea otter
central California coast



California sea lion
California coast to Baja California



surfer
Southern California



cactus
Baja California



coyote
Baja California



gray whale calf



adult gray whale