

# Humpback Haven

## Materials

### Objective

Students will gain an understanding of the dangers humpback whales face as they migrate between

- Playing field (about 30' x 60')
- 4 orange traffic cones
- 5 large nametags
- 5 paper lunch bags
- Picture of humpback whale
- Markers
- 5 poker chips per student

### Background

Some humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) in the eastern Pacific Ocean spend winter around the Hawaiian Islands and summer off the coast of Alaska. As they travel between these two areas, they encounter many hazards. Individuals may need to avoid contact with large transport ships, lost or discarded fishing nets, oil spills, curious whale watching boats, and hungry killer whales. Today, the eastern Pacific population of humpback whales is fairly stable but declined greatly from original numbers before whaling began in the late 1800s.

### Action

Before activity, write the following on separate nametags and paper bags: ship, oil spill, fishing net, whale watching boat, killer whale. For non-readers, paste or draw pictures on nametags and bags. Choose a level, safe playing area in your schoolyard.

1. Show the picture of a humpback whale and explain how it travels from summer feeding grounds off Alaska to warm-water wintering grounds off Hawaii. Traveling between the two is a long swim and takes a lot of energy. Tell the students they're going to become whales and travel from Alaska to Hawaii and back again.
2. In the schoolyard, create the playing field with orange cones marking the corners. Ask for volunteers to be a ship, an oil spill, a fishing net, a whale watch boat, and a killer whale. Give these students their appropriate paper lunch bag and nametag. All other students are humpback whales and receive 5 poker chips each. (Poker chips represent the energy level or health of a whale.)
3. Explain the rules of play. All humpback whales start in Alaska. They need to travel the playing field to reach the other side (Hawaii). Along the way they may be tagged by a "danger". If tagged, they must put a chip in the danger's bag. The dangers need to gather as many chips as possible. If a humpback whale gives away all chips (tagged 5 times), he or she is "dead" and needs to stand on the sideline. Alaska and Hawaii areas are safe from dangers.
4. Play a session with students starting in Alaska, traveling to Hawaii and returning to Alaska. Did anyone lose chips? If so how many? Did anyone lose all his or her chips? With all these dangers, why do humpback whales (and other animals) migrate? (greater food sources, warmer temperatures)

### Deeper Depths

To add complexity, repeat the activity with other variation. For example, you might increase or decrease the number of dangers, the number of poker chips each whale holds, or play successive rounds with whales either receiving more chip while "feeding" in Alaska or not receiving any. How do these variations affect the survival rate of humpback whales?