



# Gray Whales

## 4-8 Classroom Activities

### On the Road Again

#### OBJECTIVE

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

#### 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 3 (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 re-attached once a week with tape or tacks. Begin with your adult gray whale in the arctic feeding grounds. (Choose the Bering or Chukchi sea.)
4. Explain to your students that the gray whale is going on a long trip (migration) all the way to the lagoons of Baja California, Mexico. Have the class choose which lagoon will be their destination (Scammon's Lagoon or San Ignacio Lagoon). A gray whale takes two to three months to reach its destination—try this activity for ten weeks. (If you trace the migration route, measure it, 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 to your map when you are near the correct area.
6. Mother whales give birth to calves on their southward migration. Surprise students by placing a gray whale calf next to the adult as the adult nears the lagoons. Celebrate with a baby whale birthday party!

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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 warm-water lagoons of Baja California, Mexico—their birthing grounds. The trip takes two or three months each way. The migrating whales can be seen from shore or whale-watching boats.

## MATERIALS

### For each student group:

- wide-mouth pint jar
- fresh egg
- large serving spoon
- water

### For teacher:

- one wide-mouth pint jar filled with water
- gallon milk jug full of water
- empty gallon milk jug
- measuring cup
- pencil
- crayon
- plastic paper clip
- eraser



Whale watchers approach a California gray whale (*Eschirichtius robustus*) in San Ignacio Lagoon. Ecotourism in the lagoon is strictly regulated.

## ON THE ROAD AGAIN

### CUT-OUTS



adult gray whale



gray whale calf



amphipod: food for gray whales, feeding grounds in Alaska



Alaska sea otter



walrus: Alaska



salmon: northwestern U.S. waters



Steller sea lion: northwestern coast of U.S.



harbor seal: from Alaska to Baja California



Douglas fir tree: northwestern coast of U.S.



bottlenose dolphin: Southern California



fishing boat: anywhere along the coast



killer whale: anywhere along the coast



California sea otter: central California



California sea lion: California coast



surfer: Southern California



cactus: Baja California, Mexico



coyote: Baja California, Mexico

# MAP OF NORTH AMERICA COASTLINE

