

Title

Whale Watch Town Hall

Activity Overview

Description: Host an actual debate and see the stakeholders present their case

Topic Area(s): Marine Biology

Grade Level: 6-10

Duration: 60- 75 minutes

Learning Outcomes:

- Understand two sides to the whale watching issue
- Learn how to present your case to a panel of policy makers

Hook

Can you convince the group of your stance on whale watching?

Background Information

You live on a small island where whale watching is a huge component of your town's income it provides jobs, money and satisfaction to visiting tourists. However due to the decline in whale stocks there is some concern that whale watching should get outlawed. You are holding a town meeting with all stakeholders and presenting your case to the policy makers. Below are the viewpoints of all the stakeholders.

Stakeholder Cards (should be printed for groups):

Whale watch tour operators: pro whale watching - people love the experience it allows people to see the animals in their natural environment and to really care about these majestic creatures. Describe a time when someone in your boat saw a whale for the first time - you're always careful never to go too close

Town Local - con whale watching - all these tourists come to our island every summer and take up all the seats on the ferry so you can't always get across to the mainland they don't respect the animals they just want to see them do cool tricks and are disappointed when they "only see a couple whales just swimming" they crowd the island in the summer and you just want your piece and quiet

Marine Biologist - middle ground - you're working as a marine biologist on the island and you understand both the amazement of seeing these animals up close and being able to collect scientific data from these encounters however you worry for the safety of the populations and know that tour boat operators do not always respect the safety of the massive creatures they can come too close to please their customers and cause the animals a great deal of stress. In these areas there is not only 1 tour boat there are many so these whales are constantly being visited on a daily basis which can cause major behavioural changes and increase risk of vessel strikes

Conservationist: con whale watching - how would you feel if crowds of people often came to your door and window to just watch you watching tv and they were disappointed when you weren't jumping up and down and doing tricks for them. Whale watchers don't care about the animals they just want to see them do cool tricks. Vessel strikes are one of the leading causes of whale mortality and purposefully sending out vessels to the areas where whales frequent is just asking for problems

Minister of finance for the island - pro whale watching - in small community towns like ours the whale watching industry brings in a lot of money each year that this community needs to thrive. A huge part of our economy runs through these whale watching tours and they have safety codes that they follow to protect the whales

Policy makers - it's your job to hear everyone out and make decisions based on what you hear listen to the complaints are they reasonable? Is it easy to fix? Keep your own opinions out of it and really try to listen to those groups whose arguments were the most compelling

Whale watching regulations are not very strict in Canada - more strict in the USA. In Canada Boats cannot be closer than 100 meters from the whales and must approach from the side, rather than from the front or the back of the pod. (Whales are more fun to watch from the side anyway!)

To reduce noise levels (which can negatively affect whales and other marine life), whale watching boats and other vessels should keep a very low speed around marine life or put the engine into neutral or idle. Horns or whistles should not be used either.

Observation time should remain under 30 minutes, especially if the whales are within 100 to 200 meters. It is against the law to touch, feed or swim with the whales. When the whales swim close to shore, the boat must stay on the off-shore side of the whales. Should the whales start swimming towards a vessel, the vessel must move out of the way as carefully as possible.

Dolphins and porpoises will sometimes swim around boats, but boats need to slow down and keep course to avoid collision. The law forbids vessels to drive into a dolphin or porpoise pod in order to encourage bow riding.

Materials

- Stakeholder cheat sheets for each group
- Markers
- A few sheets of paper per group

Safety Considerations

None. Be respectful!

Procedure

Before the activity:

- Prepare and print cheat sheets for each group

For activity:

1. Split up into 6 groups. One group needs to be specifically selected as the policy makers (Ideally this will be older, more mature campers) and give each group their cheat sheet and explain that you are having a town hall meeting regarding the issues surrounding whale watching.

- Remind them that the opinion on their card doesn't have to match their own opinion we will talk about those later.
- Encourage them to get into the role and make up stories to back up their case. They're trying to convince the policy makers to side with them. Give them half an hour to work on their papers that they will use as visual aid to help their case.

2. If possible set up the room to look like a boardroom and have the policy makers officially enter. They are running the show so remind them that they need to keep people quiet and move things along (help out as you see fit) one at a time have the groups go up and present their case. After they finish allow for opposing remarks or questions from the other groups and a small amount of debate back and forth. Keep doing this until all groups have gone.

3. Have the policy makers leave the room and make a decision on whether whale watching should be allowed or not. It does not have to be a firm decision either way, they can make compromises and add in other things to please everyone. Have them come back and officially state their decision.

Wrap-Up/Debrief

Ask what people's actual opinions are on whale watching. Allow for some actual debate between campers if they feel passionate about a certain side

Additional Resources