

# Springboard

into  
Comprehension

6

Main Idea      Number 15 Orchard Street  
Piracy in the Modern Age

Compare and Contrast      Back from the Brink  
Two Dying Seas

Fact and Opinion      What's the Real Story?  
On the Ball

Cause and Effect      Inventions by Women  
Use It, Wear It

**Bias and Prejudice      Whaling**

My Way or the Highway?

Figurative Language      The Book of Banjo Paterson  
Gold in the Hills

**RA 11.5–12.5**



**Argument**

# WHALING



WRITTEN BY ANDREW EINSRUCH

# Whaling

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Written by Andrew Einspruch





# Introduction

Some people see whales as royalty. Others see them as a resource to be exploited. Some people point out that they are highly intelligent animals with complex means of communication. Others argue that it is fine to hunt common species of whale. Many people think that all whales should be protected. Others believe it is OK to serve them up as a delicacy in expensive restaurants.

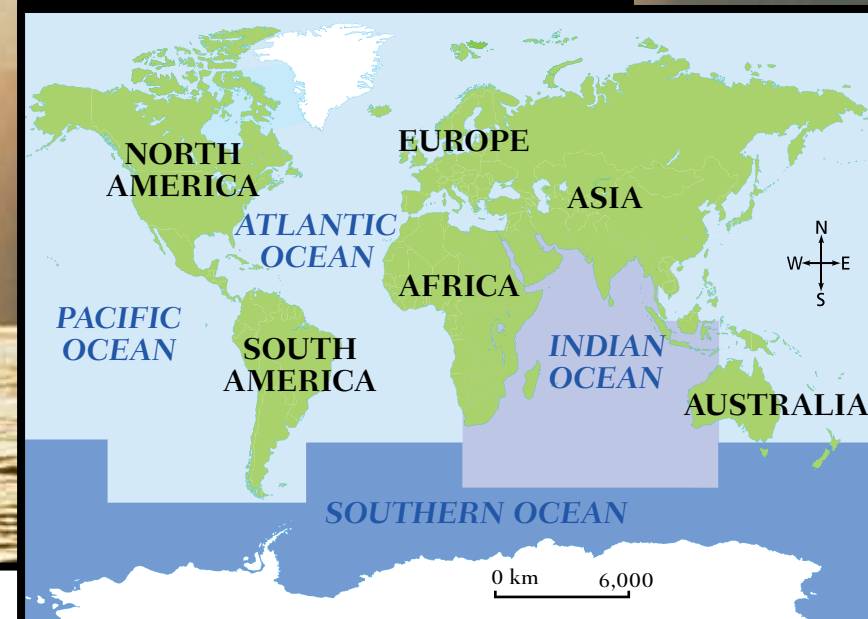
The fight over whaling – the hunting of whales for human gain – is a very emotional one. People have hunted whales for thousands of years. In the distant past, whalers were limited by what they could catch in coastal waters with hand-powered boats and weapons. However, from the nineteenth century onwards, modern technology has spelled disaster for many whale species.

Once, the sea teemed with millions of these beautiful creatures. Now, seven out of the 13 great whale species are listed as endangered or vulnerable. In recent decades, many people, including those who take direct action to promote their causes, or **activists**, have pushed for an end to whaling.

In 1946, 15 nations formed the **International Whaling Commission (IWC)**. The IWC started as a way for nations to work together to research **whale stocks** and promote “the orderly development of the whaling industry.” Over time, the IWC has taken a stronger anti-whaling stance, particularly as the decline of many whale species became clear. It set up **protected** areas, or **sanctuaries**, for whales. Since 1986, it has placed a temporary ban, or **moratorium**, on whaling for profit. However, several nations continue to hunt whales. Norway and Iceland lodged objections to the moratorium, so they are not bound by its rules. Japan continues to catch whales using a special scientific permit.

A humpback whale breaking the surface of the water, or breaching, in Alaska

## Whale Sanctuaries



### Key

- Indian Ocean Sanctuary
- Southern Ocean Sanctuary



# Whaling, Then and Now

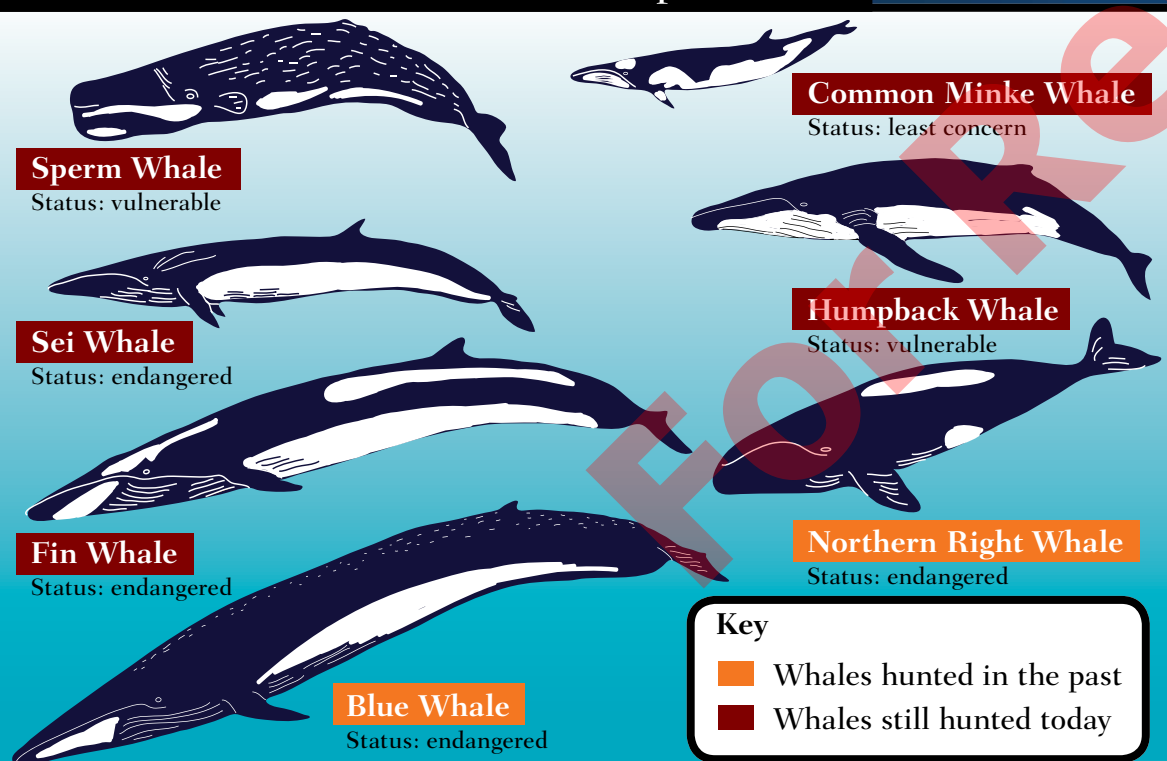
In the past, whales were a source of food and materials for some indigenous peoples. They used the whole animal. They ate the meat. The fat and oil provided fuel. The bones were used for building and tools. Even the intestines went into ropemaking. Indigenous whaling was a fair contest between hunters and the whale, with far less impact than modern whaling. The small numbers of whales taken did not affect whale populations. Some indigenous peoples still catch a few dozen whales each year under an IWC quota system.

From the 1600s, however, Europeans, and then Americans, began to hunt whales on a much grander scale. The animals were killed, parts of their bodies were taken, and the rest of the carcass was thrown away. When some whale populations began to drop, the whalers moved on to other areas.

Like other large marine mammals, whales have a thick layer of fat under their skin to keep them warm, called **blubber**. In the past, the oil and wax extracted from blubber went into many different products. These ranged from soaps, **candles**, cosmetics, perfumes, margarine, and cooking oil, to engine **grease** and fuel for lighting.

Some whale species have comb-like plates on their upper jaw that they use to catch food, called **baleen**. When feeding, these whales open their mouths **wide**, taking in vast amounts of water. Bristles on the baleen trap tiny plants and animals that drift in great masses through the sea, called **plankton**. Baleen was highly valued because it could be moulded by heat to any shape. Before the invention of plastic, baleen was used in products such as springs, umbrella spokes, corsets, brushes, and knife handles.

## Some Hunted Whale Species



Indigenous people in Greenland haul in a captured whale.

Among the first whales to be targeted by the whaling industry were the species that came to be called right whales. A number of crucial factors made them the “right” whales to hunt. They were gentle, swam slowly and often close to shore, slept on the surface, and floated when killed. Most importantly, they yielded great quantities of baleen. They were hunted with spear-like weapons attached to ropes or cables, or **harpoons**, that the whalers threw through the air.

From the second half of the nineteenth century, advances in technology transformed whaling. These included steam-powered ships, cannon harpoons, and a way of pumping air into whale carcasses to float them. Factory ships that could process large numbers of whales at sea were introduced in the 1920s. Now, far more species could be caught in far greater numbers. In the 1960s, whalers began using electric harpoons. In 1962, 66,000 whales were caught worldwide, the highest yearly total recorded.

In the days before steam-powered ships, whaling was dangerous for whalers as well as whales.



Today, ships from Japan continue to kill whales. In Japanese culture, whales are killed for their meat, rather than for blubber or baleen. Japanese ships travel thousands of kilometres into the remote Southern Ocean to hunt whales. They do this partly to avoid protesters. Japan claims it hunts whales for scientific research. However, some of the whale meat from these ships ends up in restaurants and supermarkets.

Some people insist there is no reason the meat should not be sold after scientists have taken what they need for research purposes. Others believe that no genuine research is being done and that whale meat is sold for profit. They claim Japan wants to make a political point by not bending to the orders or opinions of people in other countries.

In the next pages, you will read a variety of different viewpoints on the subject of whaling. The people, ships, and events that appear in these pages are not real. However, they represent actual debates and at-sea confrontations over whaling. Note how the different texts veer from strongly against, to neutral, to strongly for whaling. Who is right? You can decide after reading all the arguments.

After being winched onboard, whales are cut up and processed on factory ships.

