

Dancing Walrus and Singing Dolphins
NewsDepth December 18, 2008
Classroom Activities



Overview:

It's amazing what animals can be trained to do. You've probably seen every kind of animal performing every imaginable trick either at the zoo, at the circus, and yes, even at restaurants in Japan. But, have you ever seen a dancing and saxophone playing walrus or singing dolphins? These performing sea mammals are the main attraction at the new Dolphinarium in Istanbul, Turkey, which opened its doors this week. Visitors to the Dolphinarium can also touch and swim with the dolphins. Students in these activities will discover mammal training methods as well as communication habits.

(Photo credit: http://www.foxnews.com/photoessay/0,4644,5869,00.html#1_0_)

Grade Level: 3-4

Subject: Science

Standards: Students will demonstrate an understanding of how living systems function and how they interact with the physical environment.
Students will describe how organisms, specifically mammals, interact with one another in various ways.

Classroom Activities:

1. Activity #1 Dancing With the Walruses

- Short Discussion
 - Who has a pet? What kind of pet do you have? Have you ever taught it to do tricks? What kind of tricks does it perform, and how did you train it?
 - What is the most amazing thing you have seen an animal trained to do? (besides the walrus, the monkey waiters, and the dolphins) Tell me what you observe about the trainers. What do you always see them do after the animals have performed a trick? Why do you think they always give the animals a treat? What do you think that has to do with the training?
 - Go back and watch the walrus video segment from this week's NewsDepth. How do you think they trained that walrus?
 - Visit http://www.foxnews.com/photoessay/0,4644,5869,00.html#5_0 for a gallery of Sara photos.

- Dancing Walruses

- For more media clips of walruses dancing and playing the saxophone, go to these sites: (have students observe the trainers as well)



(Photo credit) http://www.foxnews.com/photoessay/0,4644,5869,00.html#5_0

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uq1xWuBIXDg>
Sara playing the saxophone
- <http://www.groovygrooves.com/dancing-videos/dancing-walrus/>
Walrus dancing to Michael Jackson
- <http://video.aol.com/video-detail/ny-aquarium-walrus-talks-chuckles-and-whistles/1795858988> Walrus talks, chuckles, and whistles
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltVS1HWE7WU&feature=related>
walrus working out with trainer
- http://www.blinkx.com/video/sara-the-sax-playing-walrus/hl_D04WiGX5KZZhzTG61Mq Short interview with Sara's trainer
- What observations can you make about the trainers in each of the videos?
- Teaching walruses to dance and work out is just one kind of training that is being done with animals. The following website entitled "Fish School" provides some insight as to how animals are trained: <http://www.fish-school.com/background.htm>
- Additional Walrus information. These two websites provide you and your students with additional information about walruses
<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/walrus.html>
Walruses
<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/walrus.html> An extensive article about how walruses emit sounds
<http://www.bsu.edu/web/jmkocher/interactive/walruses.htm> A simply designed informational site about walruses geared to younger students

2. Activity #2 Dolphinarium Idol or So You Think You Can Sing!

- When you want your mom or dad, how do you call them? Do you say, "Hey Mom," or "Hey Dad?" How about, "Mother-r-r-r!" What do you think your mom or dad would do if you just whistled for them? Did you know that from the moment of birth, baby dolphins communicate with their mothers with whistling signals that can be seen as a stream of bubbles from their blowholes? From that moment on, every individual dolphin has its own "signature whistle."
- When you watched the video, you saw two dolphins singing to their trainer. Do you think they knew they were singing? How do you think they were trained to sing or make those pitched sounds?
- The following is a much referenced website that will provide some insight for you and your students: It is entitled "Dolphins Sing Batman Theme."
<http://www.abc.net.au/science/news/stories/s1473208.htm> (picture source)



An excerpt from the article “Scientists have taught dolphins to combine both rhythm and vocalizations to produce music, resulting in an extremely high-pitched, short version of the *Batman* theme song. The findings, outlined in two studies, are the first time that nonhuman mammals have demonstrated they can recognize rhythms and reproduce them vocally.”

Additional references for this topic:

<http://www.camlawblog.com/ethical-issues-556-dolphins-sing-the-blues.html>

“Dolphins Sing the Blues”

<http://www.abc.net.au/science/news/stories/s901670.htm> “Dolphins Better at Networking than the Web”

- Dolphins are also extensively trained to do tricks. The tricks performed by trained dolphins include leaps, dives, walking on top of their flukes on the surface of the water and playing with balls. Each trick is really the dolphin's execution of a chain of behaviors that it learned by repeatedly being rewarded for success. Can you draw any comparison to the way you learn a new “trick” like how to walk for the first time, how to swim, or how to ride a bicycle? How are you rewarded when you learn how to do something?

Additional references for dolphins training to perform tricks:

http://www.ehow.com/about_4613023_kinds-tricks-can-dolphins-do.html

“What Kind of Tricks Can Dolphins Do?”

- How many of you have ever been to “Sea World” or any other aquarium to see dolphins perform? They are very entertaining aren't they? Do you know of any other reasons why dolphins are trained to perform? Dolphins are actually very valuable and have been helping our own Navy perform some very valuable services. Check out this article entitled “Dolphins in the Navy.”

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/animal-science/news/article.cfm?c_id=332&objectid=10349160

3. Activity #3 Are Dolphins Happy? Discovering the Pros and Cons of Dolphins in Captivity

- Short Discussion
 - How many of you have ever been to “Sea World” or any other aquarium to see dolphins perform? Do you enjoy watching them? Do they seem happy to you? Do you ever wonder if they might be happier if they were in the ocean swimming and playing with their friends and family? Actually there is quite a lot of debate that has been going on for quite a while weighing the pros and cons of keeping dolphins and whales in captivity.
 - Before reading any further information, what do you see as the pros of having dolphins performing, doing tricks, and singing for people at Sea World or any other aquarium?
 - What about the cons?
- Assign students a partner. Also assign them a side of the issue –either pro or con. Go to the following websites with them (or you could visit them first and pick out the most important arguments, the ones they will most easily comprehend). Before they prepare their “case”, have them go home and ask

their parents or siblings for their opinions about keeping dolphins in captivity. You might even copy for them the addresses of a couple of the websites and have them explore the sites more thoroughly at home. Students are then to work for one period with their partners and make up a list of 3 to 4 good arguments to support their side of the issue. Then have the students break into groups of four for “mini panels” to present their sides of the issue to each other. Give them each a chance to talk one at a time. Then have a 5 – 10 minute period that they can have a constructive interactive discussion.

- Resources for pros and cons of dolphin captivity
 - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/whales/debate/> PBS’s Website on the “Debate Over Captive Whales and Dolphins:
 - <http://www.travelandleisure.com/articles/should-you-or-shouldnt-you-swim-with-the-dolphins/sidebar/1> The Dolphin Debate Continues
 - <http://www.caycompass.com/cgi-bin/CFPnews.cgi?ID=1012436> “Captive Dolphins Found Frolicking” This is a very good resource that you could use even if you decided not to actually debate the issue, but to demonstrate the positives of captivity.
 - <http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/dolphins/87951> Kids Want to Know – Dolphins in Captivity