



MOUNTAINFILM
FOR STUDENTS

WHALES WITHOUT WALLS

DIRECTORS Charles Vinick
Dr. Lori Marino
DURATION 6 mins

A film about the damage captivity does to whales and dolphins, and a proposed solution for this captivity crisis. —*Henry Martin, age 17*



Standards

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR READING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1 / Key Ideas and Details

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2 / Key Ideas and Details

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 / Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8 / Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR WRITING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1 / Text Types and Purposes

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

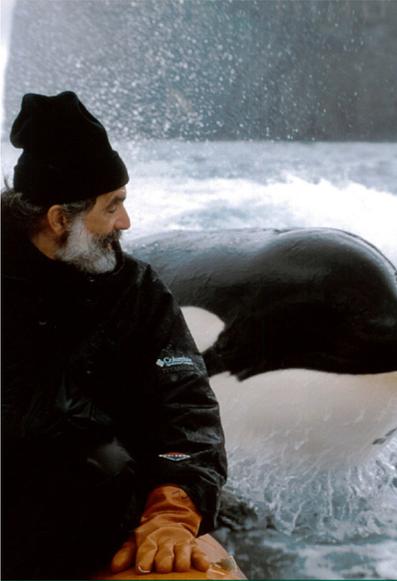
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7 / Research to Build and Present Knowledge

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Themes conservation, ocean, animals, ending captivity of whales and dolphins

Key Vocabulary Orca, beluga whale, conservation, sanctuary, captivity

Filmmaker Interview



CHARLES VINICK

How did you become involved with the Whale Sanctuary Project?

A number of scientists, researchers and members of the NGO cetacean community gathered at a few meetings and conferences in 2015. I was at one of those meetings and subsequently joined the Whale Sanctuary Project's Board of Directors shortly after the organization was founded in 2016. The general counsel and initial lead donor asked me to join because of my management and financial experience in large, long-term projects as well as my field experience. I was the Director of the Keiko Project in the late 1990's, and helped return Keiko, the orca from the *Free Willy* films, to his natal waters in Iceland.

When the film was complete, was there anything you wished you could have included in the final cut?

We knew that we wanted more beluga footage in order to show our two primary species of interest. What we have found is that acquiring good, clear underwater footage of belugas is difficult because of

the arctic waters they frequent. We also knew that the film would better serve our purpose when we could show the plans and site for our selected sanctuary location. For both of these reasons, in

rich social and emotional lives, we hope that people will learn that these animals deserve to live a natural environment free from having to entertain.

“We hope that people will learn that these animals deserve to live a natural environment free from having to entertain.”

June we produced a slightly revised version of the film that includes more beluga footage, an animation of our actual sanctuary site plan and a closing image of our selected sanctuary site.

When you made the film, did you have a specific audience in mind?

Initially, our objective was to make a trailer to interest production and distribution companies in joining with us to make a feature film about the creation of the first whale sanctuary in North America. We learned two things almost immediately: (1) our short film had a life of its own as the best five minute introduction to the Whale Sanctuary Project and it has subsequently won a number of awards and been seen in numerous film festivals; (2) we have received a number of offers from production companies who want to produce the sanctuary story have not seen our short film, and who, of course have their ideas for the story they want to tell about the paradigm shift in public thinking about captive whales and movement to create sanctuary for them.

Is there an action you hope people are inspired to take after seeing this film?

We hope people learn about the way whales suffer in captivity and are inspired to join with us in creating the whale sanctuary by sharing the film on social media, talking about it online and with friends, and donating to help complete the sanctuary. Concurrently, we hope that our film invites reflection on WHO these animals are. By recognizing that they have families, social bonds, culture,

What are some of the challenges you encountered while making this film?

We had exceptional help from the Oceanic Preservation Society filmmakers and the producers of the documentary film *Long Gone Wild*, so we did not have many challenges, other than crafting our story in the best possible way, completing it in a timely way, and the usual concerns about staying within a tight budget.

What's the next big adventure or film project on the horizon for you?

Our next film is the larger film on the creation of the first whale sanctuary in North America. The challenge is whether we should take on making this film in partnership with a production company or provide exclusive rights to our story to a production company that would work independently of us. There are benefits and challenges to both approaches.

What is one piece of advice you can give students that you wish someone had shared with you?

Go for it!

Pre-Screening Activity

Grades 3–6/Middle School

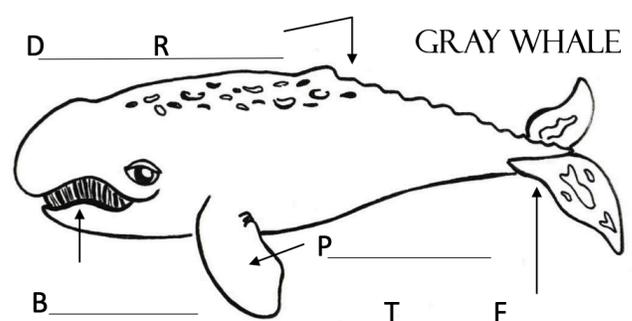
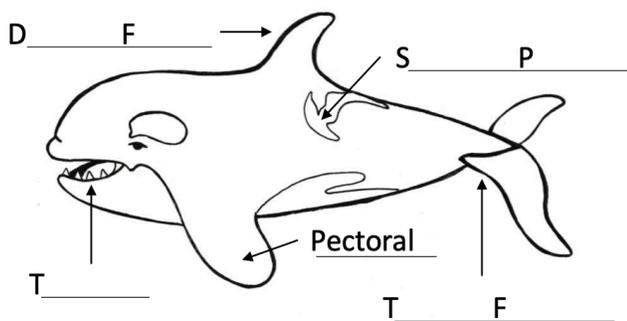
Prior to watching the film *Whales Without Walls*, it would be helpful to learn more about orcas and their habitat, diet, behavior, life history and conservation. This article from [National Wildlife Federation's page on Orca Whales](#) (divided into the aforementioned subheaders) will help students gain more information about the importance of protecting and releasing orcas in captivity.

National Geographic Kids also has an [informational page on Orcas](#). The video included in the article is worth a watch, as it shows orcas using kelp beds and the gravelly seafloor to scratch their backs!

In addition to reading these articles (either as a class, in pairs, or jigsaw), the Orca-Salmon Alliance has created a [Week's Worth of Wonderful Salish Sea Whales](#) to support June as Orca Action Month. The packet is dense with a lot of information (including information on other whales of the Salish Sea), but the activity for Tuesday, titled "Meet your Whale Neighbors: Identify Their Body Parts by Name" has a diagram students can fill out with the use of a word bank to identify the parts of an orca whale. Thursday's and Friday's activities also feature how to identify and tell the difference between the differing orca ecotypes that reside in and use the Salish Sea as their habitat.

LEARN THE PARTS OF A WHALE

ORCA "KILLER WHALE"



WORD BANK

Pectoral Dorsal Ridge Tail Flukes Saddle Patch
Tail Flukes Pectoral Baleen Dorsal Fin Teeth

One of the many things that is so fascinating (and devastating for captive orcas) is that they are incredibly social mammals with complex social norms. For example, they are a matriarchal society and most will travel with the grand matriarch for their entire lifetime. This short film (3:50ish), titled [Family Time](#) from [Orca Lab](#) and Wild Sky Productions, documents an "incredibly intimate encounter with the A23 and A25 families. In particular an especially lovely moment between A85, her baby A121 and her uncle A61." Prior to watching *Whales Without Walls* it might help students to observe how social and family-oriented orca whales are, as it will help to bring more understanding and compassion to learning about the mission of the Whale Sanctuary Project.

Discussion Guide

GENERAL/OPEN PROMPTS

1. For whales raised in captivity do you feel it is ethical to provide a sanctuary to live in a more natural habitat? What do you think is the more ethical and feasible approach to wildlife preservation; change human behavior to limit human impact, or create sanctuaries to preserve some of the captive animals' population?

EXPLORING SELF

1. In the film, Charles Vinick, executive director of the Whale Sanctuary Project, states that seeing whales in captivity at places like SeaWorld is anti-educational because it teaches kids that we as humans should dominate animals. Think about images or experiences you may have had observing a wild animal. Where was it? Was it a captive animal? What do you think is being communicated to you when you see an animal in captivity?
2. Charles Vinick argues that we have to put our hope in children, for our children to stand up for wild animals with care and understanding to keep them in the wild. Do you agree with that statement? What other stakeholders are important in changing laws to protect wild animals? Can it be the sole responsibility of children?

EXPLORING THE WORLD

1. Protection for orcas varies by state and country. Do you think there should be laws passed to prevent them from being captured, bred, exported and exhibited in marine parks?

EXPLORING FILMMAKING

1. The filmmakers chose to introduce the film by showing whales in the wild. About two minutes into the film, these images are contrasted with images of orcas and belugas in captivity. Do you think that this choice strengthened the filmmaker's argument? What may have been the effect of showing captive orcas first, and then wild orcas?
2. The Whale Sanctuary Project commissioned the film *Whales Without Walls*, which includes interviews with Dr. Lori Marino (world-renowned neuroscientist and Whale Sanctuary founder and president) and Charles Vinick executive director of the Whale Sanctuary Project). Do you think the film should have included the interviews of other people? Do you think that including their two perspectives enhanced or diminished their argument for the development of the sanctuary project?

EXPLORING SOCIAL ISSUES

1. In the film, Dr. Lori Marino states that an orca's neocortex, the thinking part of the brain, is more convoluted than that of the human brain. What does she mean by this statement?
2. Charles Vinick states that with the proposed Whale Sanctuary, formerly-captive whales will have 100x the space to move around than they would in a tank. Do you think that this is enough space for these whales?

SENSE OF WONDER

1. In the film, Lori Marino and Charles Vinick discuss the negative effects of orcas living in captivity due to sensory-deprivation and lack of stimulation. Do you think people who have limited exposure to nature experience similar feelings? Can you draw parallels between captive animals and nature-deprived people?

Activities

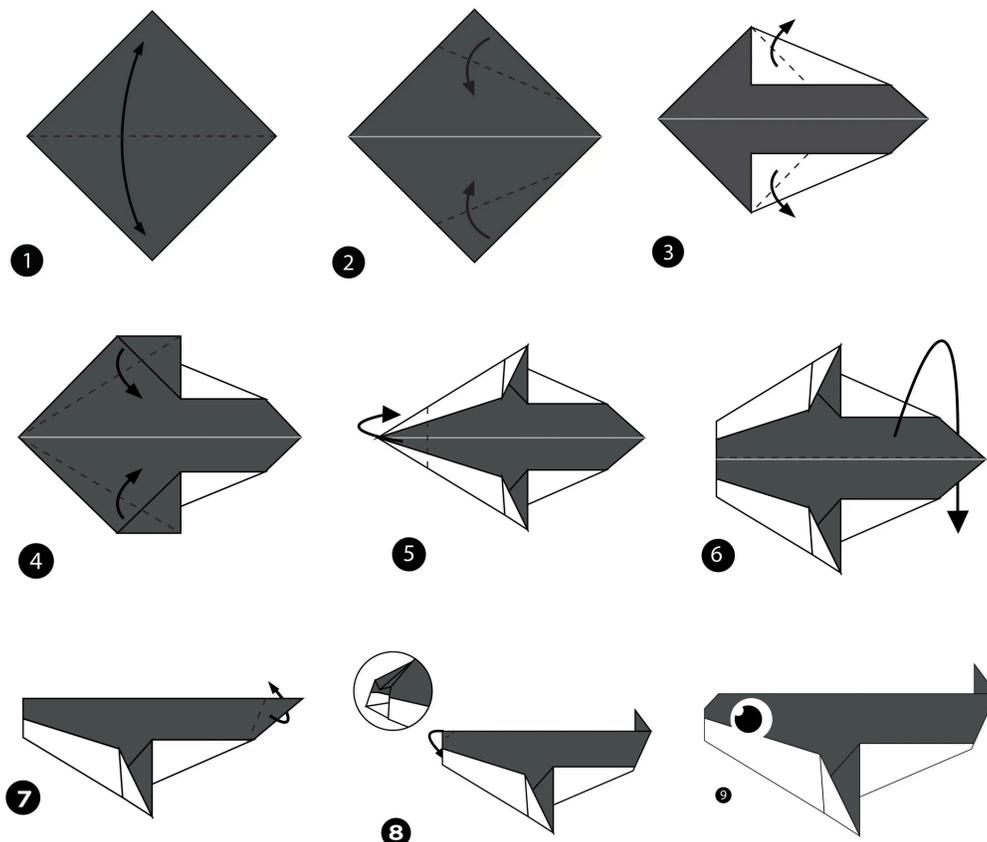
Grades 3–6/Middle School

According to the [Whale and Dolphin Conservation \(WDC\)](#), “at least 166 orcas have been taken into captivity from the wild since 1961.” As of March 15, 2021, at least 59 orcas remain held in captivity. Twenty seven of those orcas were captured in the wild and 32 were born into captivity. It is unclear which is the longest surviving orca in captivity (different sources disagree). However, according to [Orca Lab](#) and the WDC, the longest surviving orca in captivity is Corky, who was captured in 1969 off of the waters around Vancouver Island, Canada. Corky remains at San Diego’s SeaWorld, yet her family, known as the A5 pod, continue to thrive in the wild. According to The Whale Sanctuary, there are over 3,000 whales and dolphins that live in captivity around the world (not just orcas). These numbers are hard to fathom, and can be abstract, especially dependent upon the age of your classroom.

There are a couple of options for this activity, but the idea is to create a tangible quantity to represent the 166 orcas that have been taken into captivity since 1961. The students could either create [origami orca whales](#) or they could create [construction-paper orcas](#) to represent the 166 orcas. Approximately 200 sheets of origami paper is \$7 (don’t worry about finding the specific black-and-white paper, as the more colorful the better!), or if you are using construction paper and need to cut it first, the dimensions of origami paper are 7.5 cm x 7.5 cm.

Once you have decided what craft you would like your class to complete, you could divide the quantity between students or groups of students, or divide the work to be completed over days and weeks.

Origami Orca Sample



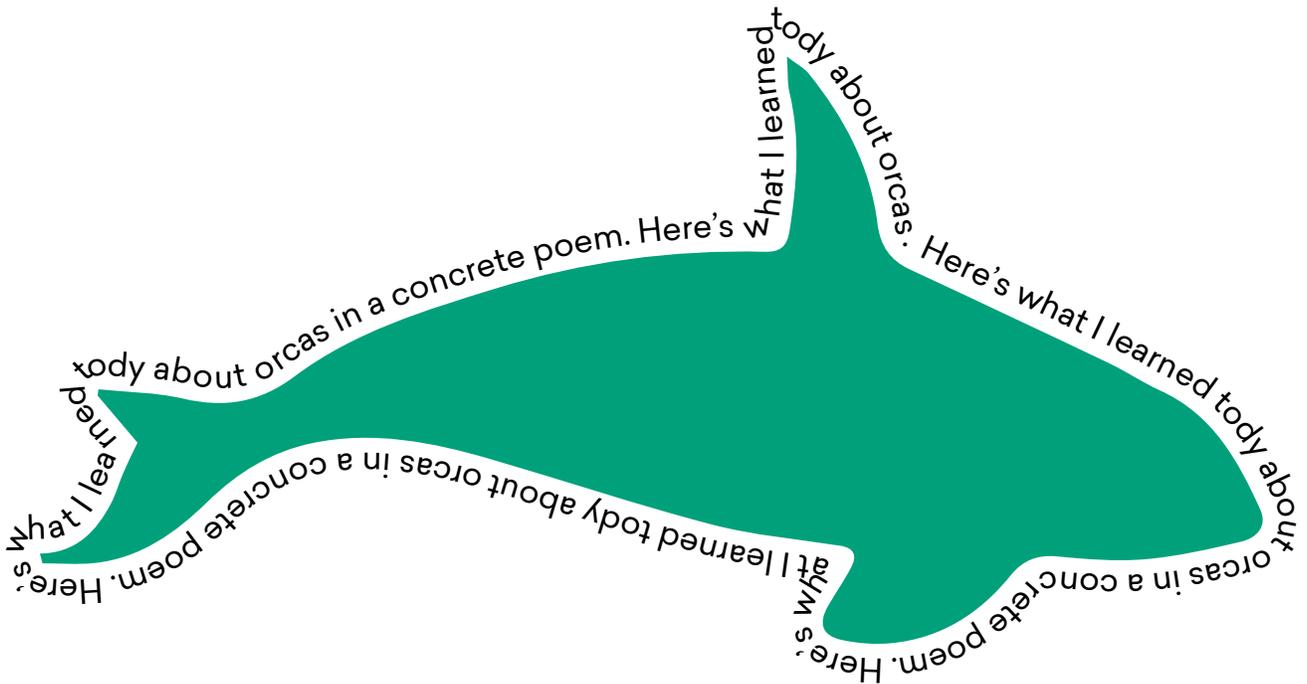
Activities

Grades 3–6/Middle School

There is a lot of information regarding the negative effects of captivity on orcas, and it can be somewhat technical and challenging to understand depending upon your class's interest/ability level, as the information is written for science journals. This article, from National Geographic's Natasha Daly, titled "[Orcas don't do well in captivity. Here's why](#)" outlines some of the harmful effects of captivity on orcas' teeth and their social structures.

The whole article is lengthy, and not all information is pertinent to understanding the harmful effects of captivity on orcas, but paragraphs 6-17 are the causation paragraphs of the essay and will be the most helpful. You may choose to read this article as a whole class, stopping along the way to ask questions, write questions, summarize or lead a discussion, or you could have each student read a paragraph and report back to the class to summarize what the author is telling us.

Since the topic of captive orcas can be distressing, you could have students process this information either through a discussion with a partner, the writing of a haiku (5-7-5 syllables), an acrostic poem (using ORCA for the start of each line), or a concrete poem (a poem around the shape of an orca). Encourage students to process the information learned to bring awareness to the negative effects felt by orcas held in captivity. This could be paired with the 166 orcas constructed, or a separate activity.



RECOMMENDED EXTENTIONS

The Whale Sanctuary Project's website is a wealth of resources and information. Their tab, titled "**The Whales**" includes biographies of some of the 3,000 whales and dolphins that live in captivity around the world. The biographies are beautiful, but also heart-wrenching. Students are more than welcome to peruse these tabs as a letter-writing campaign or to bring awareness to the whales' captivity, but use your teacher discretion prior to having students explore this material.

Washington's Center for Whale Research's Education and Outreach Manager, Katie Jones, is available via Zoom to talk with your class about the Southern Resident Orcas who reside in the Salish Sea. Contact katie@whalesearch.com for more information or [visit their website](#) for more information on their research studying the Southern Resident Orcas since 1976.

The Vancouver Aquarium and NOAA teamed together for the first study using drones to monitor orcas. [Their short video and pictures](#) are mesmerizing and the accompanying article can tell you more about the project.

Dr. Lori Marino, the founder and president of The Whale Sanctuary Project, is a neuroscientist and expert in animal behavior and intelligence. Lori, along with several co-authors, wrote a research paper published in Journal of Veterinary Behavior titled, "**The Harmful Effects of Captivity and Chronic Stress on the Well-being of Orcas (Orinus orca)**". Here is a link to Psychology Today's Marc Bekoff Ph.D.'s interview with Lori, titled "**The Harmful Effects of Captivity on Orcas.**"

Tacoma Washington's [Orcas Love Raingardens](#) is a collaborative partnership between local government, public services and NGOs with the vision of developing educational and interactive rain gardens in all of Tacoma Public Schools. Rain gardens mitigate the impacts of polluted stormwater runoff, which is a leading contributor to the degradation of salmon habitat (specifically Chinook in the Tacoma area), which are the main source of food for the Salish Sea's Southern Resident Orca population. The population of the Southern Resident Orcas has severely declined. They are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, as only 74 remain in 2021. Plus they are some of the most polluted whales in the world. Their website is a wealth of information on how to build a rain garden, paired with a [high quality curriculum](#) and at-home tips to help save orcas (and make runoff less polluted, no matter where you reside).

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