

Island of the Blue Dolphins, Chapter 13
All About Elephant Seals

Grade Level

Upper Elementary: Third Grade through Fifth Grade

Subject

Literacy and Language Arts, Social Studies

Common Core Standards

4.SL.1, 4.RI.3, 4.RI.9, 4.RI.10, 4.RL.1

Background Information

In chapter 13, Karana goes to the beach with the intention of shooting a male elephant seal because their tusks make excellent spear points. As she is preparing to shoot a young bull, she sees another, older elephant seal heading to fight the young bull that she is about to shoot.

Karana shoots anyway, but she misses when the young bull moves to the side. Karana chooses not to shoot again because of the arrival of the older bull. Instead, she stays and watches the fight. Most of this chapter is about elephant seals. Karana's describes in detail their behavior, physical appearance, and fighting habits.

Northern elephant seals like those described in this chapter are an example of a conservation success story. By the early 1900s, they had been hunted almost to extinction. Thanks to the efforts of environmentalists, the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 was passed. This protective legislation allowed the northern elephant seal population to recover.

Guided Research Task: This strategy provides students with research questions that can be answered by reading a provided set of sources.

Materials

- Copy of activity sheet for each student (provided)
- Research materials and/or a computer with Internet access for each pair of students
- Some online resources:
 - [Channel Islands National Park](#)
 - [National Geographic](#)
 - Live webcam: [Friends of the Elephant Seal](#)
- Class set of *Island of the Blue Dolphins*

Procedure

1. Give each student a copy of the activity sheet.
2. Allow students to work in pairs to complete the first two steps of the activity sheet.
3. Follow up with a class discussion about what students learned and the connections that they made to *Island of the Blue Dolphins*.
4. To lengthen this activity: Hang a large piece of butcher paper on the wall and ask each group to share an interesting fact that they encountered during their research. You could also ask each group to share an unfamiliar word in the context of a sentence and write its definition below.

Enrichment Activities

1. Writing or discussion prompt: Watch a short clip of elephant seals fighting and ask students to imagine how they might have felt and acted if they had been in Karana's position. For example, would they have stayed to watch the fight? Why or why not?
2. Small group project/presentation: Assign each group a threatened or endangered species (local, if possible) to research and ask the groups to present their learning to the class using a visual aid of their choosing. The presentation should include the following information at minimum:
 - a. The conservation status of their assigned species
 - b. A brief account of how the species became endangered
 - c. A description of any political action groups that are working on behalf of the species
 - d. A brief description of any legislation currently in place to protect the species

Name _____

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All About Elephant Seals

Part One:

Use the space below to write a short list of questions that you have about elephant seals. For example: How did they get their name? Where do they live?

Part Two:

Use the website(s) and/or research materials provided by your teacher to answer the questions below. Did the information you found answer any of the questions you listed above?

1. List the two species of elephant seals and describe where each species typically lives.

2. What is the average size of an adult elephant seal? Be sure to give both weight and length.

SPECIES _____

MALE:
FEMALE:

SPECIES _____

MALE:
FEMALE:

3. Besides size, what is another way that male and female elephant seals are different from each other?

4. What do elephant seals typically eat?

5. How do males fight away other males away during mating season?

6. How long can an elephant seal stay underwater without coming to the surface for air?

7. What is the conservation status of elephant seals? In other words, are they in danger of becoming extinct? How do you know?

8. What is something you learned about elephant seals that was not mentioned in any of your earlier answers?

WORD DISCOVERY

List and define at least three unfamiliar words that you encountered during your reading.