



Discussion Questions for Chapter 1: Introducing the World Ocean, in *Exploring the World Ocean*, by Sean Chamberlin and Tommy Dickey, 2008

These questions work well for online course discussion boards or a class activity. Feel free to copy and paste into your discussion board or notes.

### **1. Save the Whales!**

The goal of this assignment is to get you to start to think about how humans impact the world ocean. This assignment asks you to weigh in on an age-old debate: how should we protect marine mammals?

"Save the Whales" has long been a battle-cry of environmental groups concerned with the plight of marine mammals. Many species of whales neared extinction in the late 1800s and it has only been in recent decades that serious efforts to protect whales and dolphins have begun. Nonetheless, humans continue to kill whales and dolphins as a result of fishing for other species (thousands of dolphins still die in tuna nets), through direct killing for meat and (supposedly) science (i.e., the Japanese), through collisions with ships, through "capture" for marine aquaria (species not deemed aquarium quality are killed), and simply through marine pollution (the Chinese River dolphin is extinct or near extinct because of pollution).

At the same time, there are many people who scoff at the "Save the Whales" campaign, and, indeed, you can find satirical statements and bumper-stickers that reflect a disdain for the blubbery antics of tree-huggers and whale lovers. "Nuke the Whales" was a campaign started decades ago and it has now morphed into parody. While many people may be drawn to the shock value of wearing a Nuke the Whales t-shirt, there are some who believe in earnest that the campaign to save the whales is a waste of time, interferes with people's liberties, and deprives people of food and a source of income.

The whales versus people debate raises moral issues as much as scientific ones. Marine mammals are, of course, a vital part of the proper functioning of ocean ecosystems, yet would it really matter if they were all extinct? In the geologic sense, no. The world ocean flourished for billions of years prior to the evolution of whales some 55 million years ago. Would the extinction of whales and dolphins matter to humans? In a survival sense, no. Few humans eat whales and dolphins and, in fact, whales and dolphins compete with us for fish. So does it matter at all if we save marine mammals?

Your job this week is to find a recent (within the last six months) news article on the issue of whales versus humans, summarize it, and offer a no-less-than 150-word opinion on the importance of saving whales or not. Use the article as a starting point for discussion. Include the link with your article in your post. Post a no-less-than 50 word response to at

least two of your classmates, commenting in a critical, kind, and respectful way on their analysis of the issue. Please respect each other's opinions. One of the goals here is to expose the range of opinions and to zero in on the moral compass that guides our use of ocean resources.

## **2. Resources from the Sea**

By way of familiarizing ourselves with the rich bounty that the ocean provides to us, this week's assignment asks you to do some detective work in the kitchen and the internet to find resources from the ocean that you use in your daily life.

For this assignment, use your book (Table 1.1 is a good place to start) and the internet to find and discuss one ocean-related chemical, one physical, and one biological resource that you use in your daily life. Make sure you know the difference between chemical (materials), physical (energy), and biological (living) resources that come from (directly or indirectly) or are provided by the world ocean.

Complete the following:

- 1) Identify a chemical, physical, and biological resource that you use frequently.
- 2) Describe how you use each one of the resources.
- 3) Where do each of your resources come from in the world ocean, both descriptively (i.e., the continental shelf) and geographically (the coast of South Africa)
- 4) How is this resource manufactured/mined/harvested?
- 5) How is this resource useful to you?
- 6) What negative human impacts are associated with the use or exploitation of this resource?
- 7) Discuss any other interesting aspects about the resources that you discover or find interesting.
- 8) Be sure to review and discuss the resources posted by at least two of your classmates.

Enjoy learning!