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WHALE'S STOMACH

Grade: 4 and up

Time: 15-45 minutes

Materials: One plastic garbage bag containing: 1 plastic one-gallon jug and the remnants of another; 1 trawl net float; 35 feet of nylon rope; 1 large garbage bag; 1 large blob of rubber; 10 small plastic items (e.g., plastic cups, plates, utensils, soda bottle, clear plastic bag, any other plastic containers)

Relevant subjects: Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies

Pertinent information: The bag of items represents the stomach contents of a dying, 28-foot female sperm whale found on a beach in North Carolina in December, 1992. Veterinarians concluded that none but the smallest pieces of plastic could have passed through the whale's intestinal tract, and that the garbage was a large contributing factor to, if not the entire reason for, the whale's death. It is assumed that sperm whales either mistake plastic for food, or, perhaps more likely, go after squid that are hiding in and around the garbage and accidentally swallow the plastic as well. Finding plastic in whales is uncommon, but this is not an isolated incident. Most whales who die do so off shore and are not found by people.

1. Stand in front of the class or on your desk and dump the contents of the bag out on the floor of the classroom.
2. Ask students what they think these items all have in common.
3. Reveal to students that a similar collection of items were found in the stomach of a whale who washed up on a North Carolina beach.
4. Have students come up and take an item from the floor back to their desk. If there are not enough items for each student, have the students divide into groups, and have a member of each group retrieve an item.
5. Have students examine their item asking the following questions:
 - Is this item recyclable or reusable so that it could have been kept out of the waste stream?
 - What creative ideas can we come up with to reuse the item?

- How could people have prevented these items from winding up in the ocean?
6. Ask each student (or a member of each group) to report on their item to the whole class.
 7. Lead a discussion on diminishing the trash we produce and how we can dispose of it responsibly.

Activity from *The Power and Promise of Humane Education*