

# DOLPHIN CAPTIVITY

## Role Play Demonstration

### Set-up

#### Introduction

##### Aim

To highlight some of the main issues that dolphins face in captivity by carrying out an activity where pupils act out typical scenarios.

Conflicts that will be covered by the demonstration: very restricted space; boredom; feeding (and sub-standard food types); breaking up families; grieving; communication difficulties; transportation of live cetaceans; health issues.

##### Location for role play

Captive dolphin: Spain      Wild dolphin family: Japan

#### Setting up

##### Number of students

~12 (others can play the role of spectators)

##### Resources required

a fake food item (e.g. plastic discs) and a packet of edible food (e.g. grapes or raisins).

##### Designate pupils to the following roles

- Solitary dolphin that has been bred in captivity (1 pupil)
- A family of dolphins from a wild population:  
1 calf, 1 young mother, 1 adolescent male, 1 older male (4 pupils)
- Walls of the dolphinarium pool (remaining 8 or so pupils) with 1 person allocated as the trainer

Create a circle with 8 pupils and place the designated 'captive dolphin' inside. Tell these students that they are in a dolphinarium in Spain. Position the wild 'dolphin family' outside the circle, as far away from it as is feasible. This group should be told they are swimming free in the sea off Japan.



Photos: WDCS/Laura Stansfield; Cherylle Millard-Dawe

# Role Play Demonstration ACTIVITY

## 1.

Spain and  
Japan

Life in  
captivity  
and the wild  
compared

The 'captive dolphin' is instructed to walk around in circles, within the confines of the walls of the pool. When doing so, the trainer will call out intermittent instructions to the dolphin to stand up, sit down or walk. Each time the dolphin 'performs' it is given the reward of food, in the form of the fake food item.

At the same time, the wild population are entitled to help themselves to the edible food items (within reason!) as and when they wish and can also walk around the classroom, chatting to each other and picking up interesting objects as they go.

This demonstrates the differences between having to perform for food and being fed dead fish than hunting live prey, whenever suits. It also highlights the stark contrast between a lonely, monotonous existence and a social, varied one.

## 2.

Capture from  
the wild

Next, a drive hunt is about to take place in Japan. As with real drive hunts, females and young dolphins are preferentially taken. The pupil playing the role of the calf is removed from the wild family group and placed in the circle with the captive born dolphin. It will have endured a 6000 - 7000 mile trip to Spain. Its mother is also removed from the wild and transported approx. 6000 miles to Turkey – the student who is playing the role of the young mother should be placed at another part of the room.

At this point, pupils should be made aware of the risks involved with transportation of cetaceans – death rates of BNDs increase by 6 times during and immediately after capture from the wild. Similarly, this is the case when dolphins are switched between facilities. Additionally, attention should be drawn to the remaining wild family members who will continually calling out the others signature whistles, looking for them. It is thought that whales and dolphins grieve the loss of family members.

## 3.

An empty  
pool

Then, the focus is placed back on the dolphinarium pool. The trainer should announce that the water in the pool is about to be chemically treated with chlorine to clean it.

Pupils should be asked if they think that chlorine would be bad for a dolphin's health – it can cause skin lesions, eye problems etc. It can also be pointed out at this point that the pools are bare as the chlorinated water does not allow live fish or plants to live in it. Therefore the dolphins have little mental stimulation.

## 4.

Encourage  
pupil  
participation

The whole way through this activity, pupils should be asked for feedback on how they think the animals would be feeling or why they think a particular action is bad.

This is to be a very interactive exercise and students should be encouraged to voice their own ideas throughout.