

Wharton Whale's Long Journey

(Find Letter W,w 79 times. Find the word Wharton 15 times).

Wharton glides through the **warm waters** of the Baja California *peninsula* of Mexico. Not far **away**, his mother keeps a **watchful** eye on her curious 2,000 pound *newborn calf*. The 16-foot long little gray **whale** **would** be a tasty treat for a killer **whale** or 'always hungry' shark. His mother has *migrated* 5,000 miles South from the icy waters of Alaska to give birth to **Wharton** in the shallow tropical **waters** of St. Ignacio *lagoon*.

Wharton explores his **whale** nursery, **swimming** along **with** his little flippers.

Wharton **will** drink fifty gallons a day of his mother's rich milk. He **will** play with other **whales**, friendly dolphins, and sea lions. **Wharton** will **grow** fast and soon be strong enough to make the 'long journey' back to the cold feeding grounds of the Arctic North.

One morning, **Wharton's** mother sees the older **whales** leaving the lagoon.

She **knows** it is time to **follow**. **Wharton** **now** **weighs** over 5,000 pounds. His mother **swims** North out of the lagoon, hugging the coastline **shallows**.

Wharton follows.

The 'long journey' has begun.

Slowly, they swim past the southern Gulf of California. At five miles an hour, making about 75 miles a day, their journey will take two to three months.

His mother gray whale is a bottom-feeder. She dives and scoops up the *crustaceans* in the sand. Long comb-like *baleen* plates from her jaws suck in water and filter it out leaving captive the crabs, fish, or cuttlefish for food. But Wharton will nurse on his mother's fat-filled milk on the journey.

The warm waters are slipping away behind them as they move further up North. The waters grow cold, but Wharton is fat with blubber and a strong swimmer.

Along the shore, movements of people reach out to touch them. Wharton does not mind. His mother *breaches* out from the water to the delight of the whale watchers.

Suddenly, a dark shape swims near. Wharton's mother is furious and attacks with the fury of every gray whale mother. The shark swims off quickly. But predators will try to get her calf along the way, and many calves do not finish the migration.

2,000 miles – 3,000 miles – 4,000 miles- out of Mexico, past the United States, into Canada. The waters are now frigid with floating chunks of ice.

Wharton is growing weary and lays on his mother's broad back to rest.

A Killer whale attacks the pod, looking for stragglers or the weak or young.

The ferocity of the mothers again drives off the predator.

Now, at 5,000 miles, the 'long journey' of migration has brought the pod back to the Beaufort Sea off Alaska.

Home.

Home, to feed in the cold, nutrient-rich waters of the Arctic Ocean. Home to grow stronger and wiser to prepare for the next great migration back to the birthing grounds.

But Wharton will know the age old way of the gray whale. In time, he will be migrating to find himself a mate in those warm waters. Full grown, Wharton will be 40 tons (80,000 pounds) a dominant male. He will continue the 'long journey' of the migration cycle of the great Pacific gray whale, the longest migrating mammal in the world.

THE END

Did You Know?

- Adult gray whales are up to 49 feet long (width of a basketball court) and are 'splotched' with white because of parasites that harden on their skin
- Eastern grays were almost extinct in the 1900s, but have recovered to 20,000 population
- Western grays are critically endangered
- Atlantic and Asian grays are extinct
- Gray whales are: 'Baleen' filter feeders - baleen is a tough fiber made of keratin (that is also the substance of *hair, teeth, horns, hooves, shells, and beaks*)
- A female is called a 'cow'. A male is a 'bull'
- They have two blowholes top of head
- Each eye is the size of a baseball
- They swim at five miles per hour (75 miles a day)
- They can dive to 395 feet
- A lifetime migration of the adults (60 years old) is more miles than going to the moon and back twice

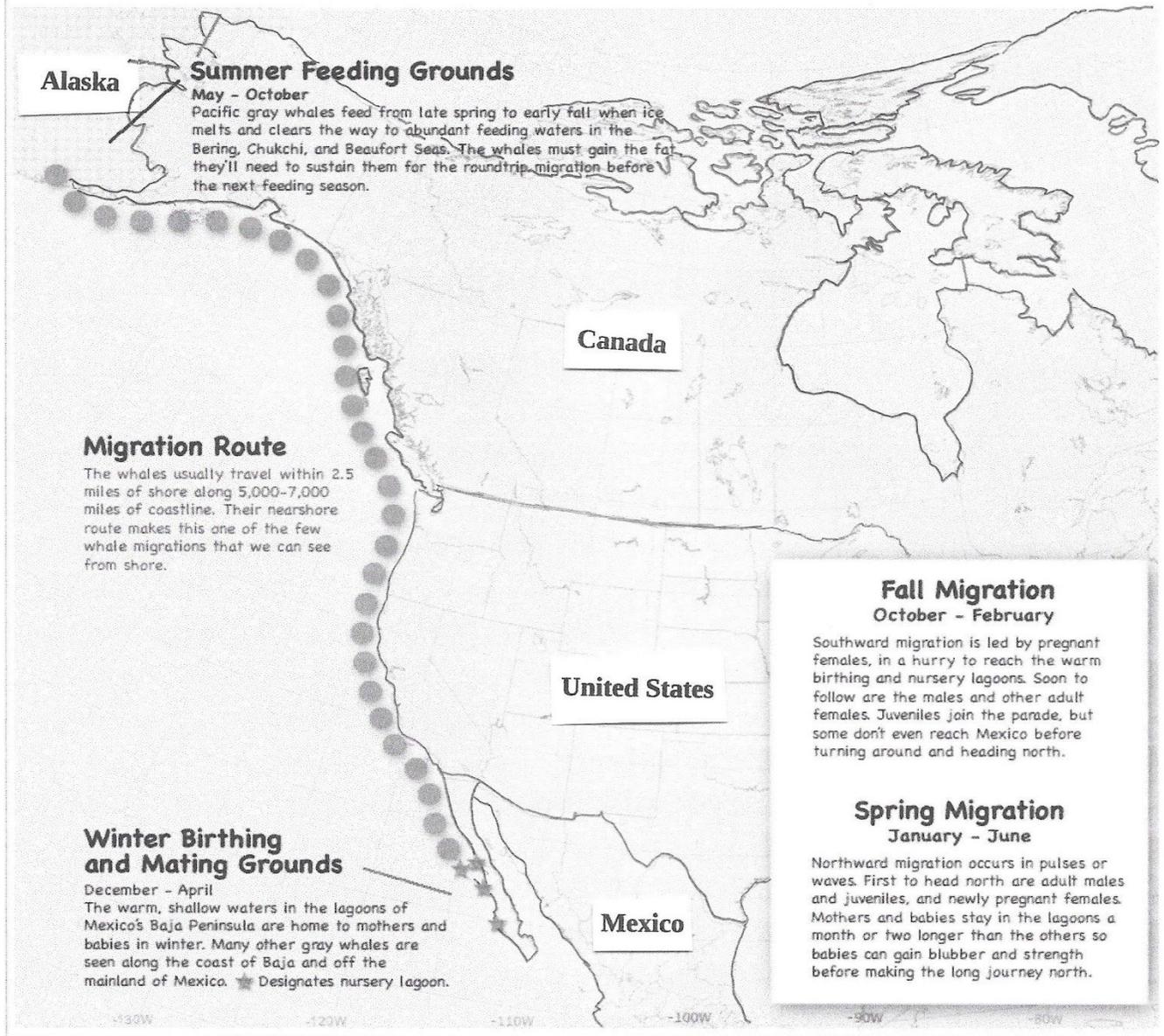
True/False Quiz

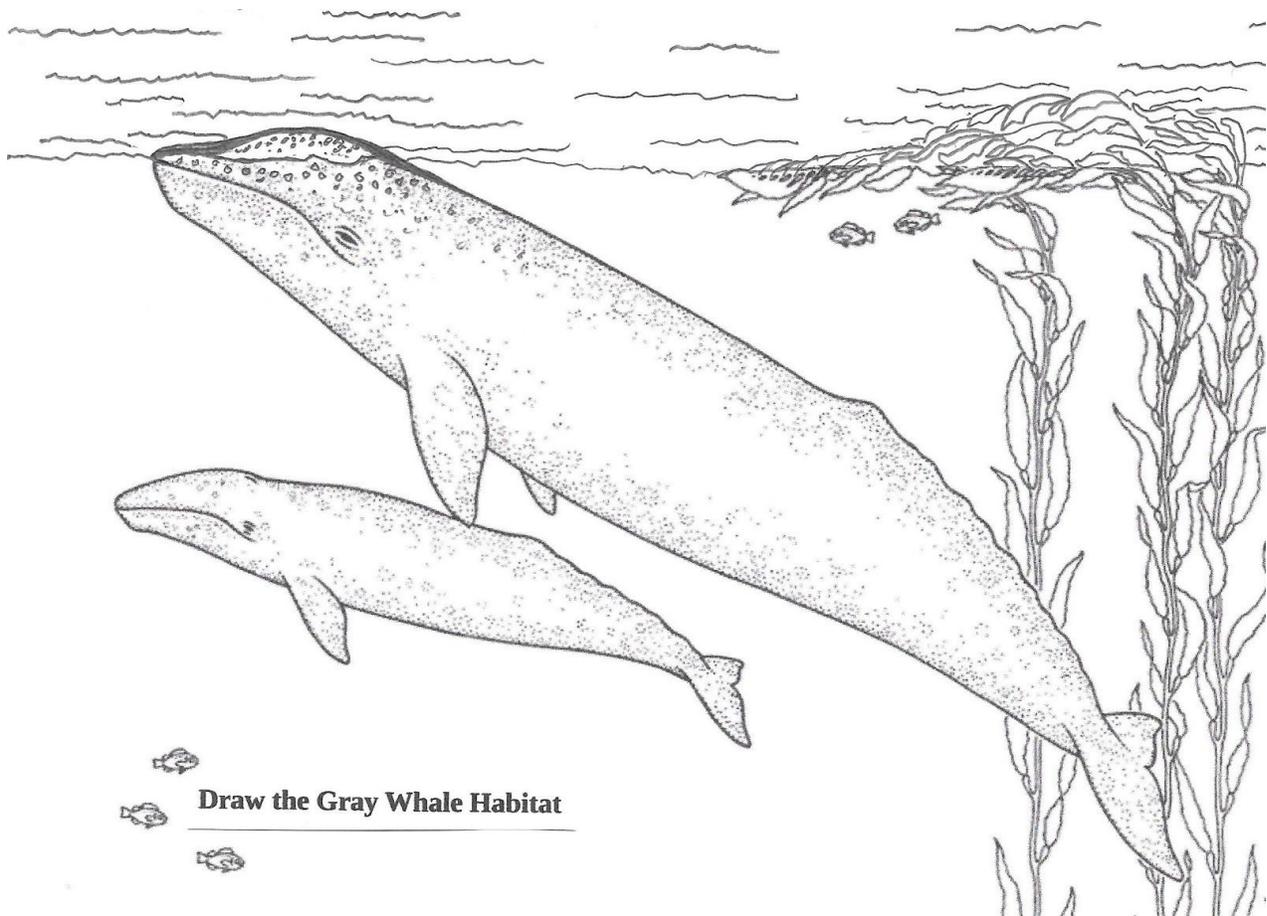
(Find the answers in the Story and Did You Know)

1. Wharton was born in warm waters.
2. Wharton weighed 2,000 pounds when he was born.
3. Wharton 'nursed' when he drank his mother's milk.
4. 'to migrate' means: to travel to another habitat in groups.
5. The 'long journey' was the migration of the whales.
6. A whale 'breaches' when they jump out of the water.
7. Gray whales have only one blowhole in the top of their head.
8. Eastern gray whales are *baleen filter feeders*.
9. The eye of a whale is very small.
10. Gray whales can swim only 10 miles a day.

Gray Whale Migration

Gray whales make one of the longest migrations of any mammal on earth. Every year of their lives they swim more than 10,000 miles roundtrip, between nursery lagoons in Mexico to feeding grounds in the Arctic.





Draw the Gray Whale Habitat
