

Whaling in Japan - research the positives and negatives for your class debate

Some key facts to get you started:

- In 2021, Japanese whalers set sail to hunt 171 Minke whales, 187 Bryde's whales and 25 Sei whales.
- Japan's Antarctic whaling programme was declared illegal by the UN Court of Justice on 31st March 2014.
- Figures from Japan's whaling expedition to Antarctica during 2017/18 reveal that 122 out of the 181 female minke whales killed were pregnant.

What is the background to Japan hunting whale?

- Japan has started catching whales for profit again. Until now it has only hunted for 'research purposes'
- The International Whaling Commission (IWC), banned whale hunting, *though it did allow whaling for scientific purposes*.
- Japan has never really stopped whaling - it has been conducting research missions which catch hundreds of whales every year. Since 1987, Japan has killed between 200 and 1,200 whales each year, saying this was to monitor numbers of whales.
- Japan has now left the IWC and sent out its first whaling fleet, this time the whale is also being hunted for its meat which can be sold for profit.

Why is Japan starting to hunt whale again?

- Whaling is a small industry in Japan, employing around 300 people
- According to the Japanese Government, the whaling "will be conducted within Japan's territorial waters". This means Japan will no longer hunt whales in the Antarctic, as it did before.
- The government has set a lower limit of 227 whales compared to 333 whale limit set for the research hunts
- Like other whaling nations, Japan argues hunting and eating whales are part of its culture.
- The Japanese government will allow for the hunting of three species: minke, Bryde's and sei whales.
- According to the UN Red List of Threatened Species, Minke and Bryde's whale are not endangered. Sei whale are classified as endangered but their numbers are increasing.
- Some defenders of whaling argue that whale meat has a smaller carbon footprint than pork or beef.

Why should Japan not start hunting Whales again?

- We don't know how well whales are recovering, because we don't know how many there once were or 'should be'.
- We are still learning about whales. Amazingly, 'new' species like the dwarf pygmy whale, Omura's whale, and species of beaked whale have only been discovered in the last few years.
- We now know that some whales have and teach forms of 'culture' to their calves, including songs and feeding strategies. This will be lost if hunting continues.
- Whales are necessary for healthy oceans, mixing, distributing nutrients and helping deal with the impacts of climate change they are also part of the natural food chain.
- Whales don't understand national boundaries, and most species migrate in and out of different countries' waters. This means that while one nation may not hunt them, another, in different national waters might.
- We don't know what the ongoing impacts of climate change on ocean life, including whales and their prey, will be.
- We simply don't need to. Commercial whaling, there is no demand for whale meat – and even where whale meat is sold to be eaten it's a small and dying industry that makes no economic sense.
- From the late 1940s to the mid-1960s whale was the single biggest source of meat in Japan but has since become a rarer product again.
- Commercial whaling is the one human threat to whales we can, and should, simply consign to history – the world's remaining whale populations have enough to contend with. So let's get on with talking about whale conservation instead.

Task:

Read the information above.

1. Write down at least three reasons why we should continue hunting whales.
2. Write down at least three reasons why we should not hunt whales.
3. Form an opinion and write an article explaining your point of view. You can agree *and* disagree if you like!