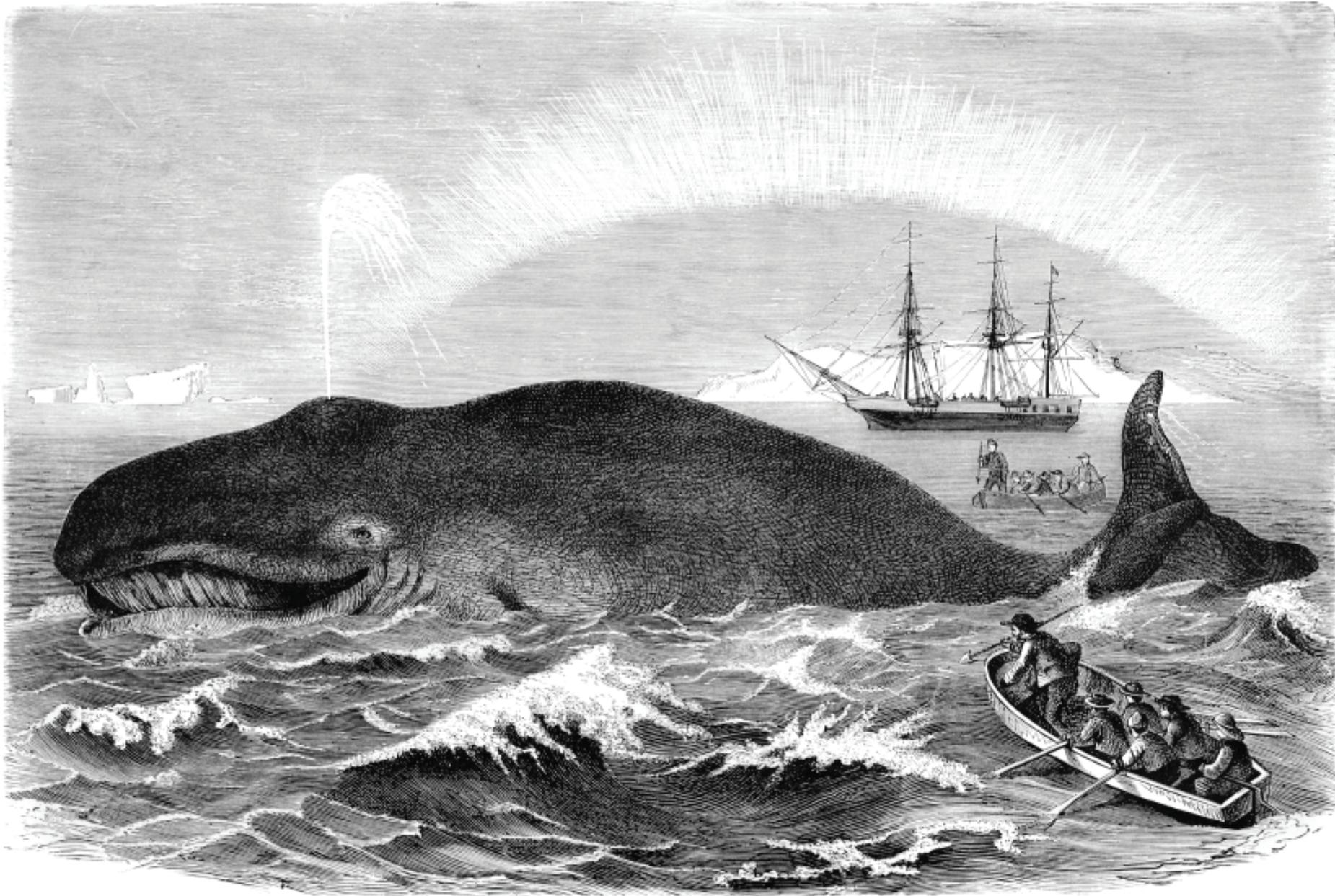


Recovering from the Whaling Industry

Discussion Questions

- 1) What is the history of the whaling industry?
- 2) How are whales protected today?
- 3) Which whales are still endangered?

Early Whaling Industry



Teams of whalers worked together in row boats to harpoon whales during a whale hunt.

Studyladder



Detailed engraving of whale teeth and bones was a practice called 'scrimshaw' and was a popular craft among whalers in the 18th and 19th centuries.

History of Whaling

Early whalers hunted whales with hand thrown harpoons from small row boats, working together in teams to bring the large beasts to shore or to the side of their ships where their carcasses were stripped of their blubber.

This blubber was boiled down into oil and stored in barrels. Whale carcasses were often set adrift in the ocean once the whalers were finished with them.

Whalers generally targeted humpback whales in the early days of whaling because they were easier to catch. When faster boats and improved harpooning technology became available larger whales became the target because they yielded the most oil.

Blue whales were first to be hunted to near extinction. When stocks of Blue whales became hard to find whalers hunted Fin whales. When stocks of Fin whales became depleted whalers turned their attention to Sei whales and then Minke whales.



Whales continued to be hunted for their oil and meat until the International Whaling Commission (formed in 1946) put a ban on commercial whaling in 1986. Norway and Iceland continued to hunt for whales after objecting to the ban and Japan continued to participate in the whaling industry for 'scientific purposes'.

Today, whale stocks are slowly regenerating. Restrictions have remained in place to ensure that threatened species are protected. However, Norway, Iceland and Japan continue to kill a restricted number of whales each season.



"Whalebone Scrapers" by George Walker, etching by Robert Havell, published in "Costumes of Yorkshire," 1813.

This etching shows whalebone scrapers hard at work. The whale bones were sold for building materials or ground down to be made into glue or used for fertiliser. The flexible baleen (called whalebone) was used as stays in corset making and as spokes in parasols and umbrellas.



Whale Use in the 1800s

OIL

The main sought after product was oil. A large right whale could produce 25 tons (22.6 tonnes) of oil. Whale oil was used for cooking and in the production of margarine, candles, soap and cosmetics.

A special oil from the sperm whale, called spermaceti was especially sought after for lamp oil as it burned brightly with less black smoke. Lamp oil sourced from whales was used until the latter part of the century when petroleum products such as paraffin became more popular.

MEAT and BONES

Whale meat was used for human consumption and animal feed. The bones could be used in the building industry and in the manufacture of products such as kitchen utensils. Bones were also ground down and used in the manufacture of glue and fertiliser.

Flexible bone products were made from the baleen plates of whales. They were able to bend a little without breaking. They were used in products like corsets and umbrellas.

TEETH

Ivory products were made from the teeth of large animals. Toothed whales such as sperm whales and killer whales provided ivory that was often carved and used as decoration in a variety of products.

OTHER WHALE PRODUCTS

A special substance called 'ambergris' produced by sperm whales was used in the manufacture of perfumes.



PARIS FASHIONS FOR MARCH.



Today, margarine is made from polyunsaturated fats sourced from plant oils such as olive and safflower oils.

We rely heavily on steel and plastics in our manufacturing industries.



We don't make products from whales any more. We are more concerned about protecting the whales we have left and helping species recover.

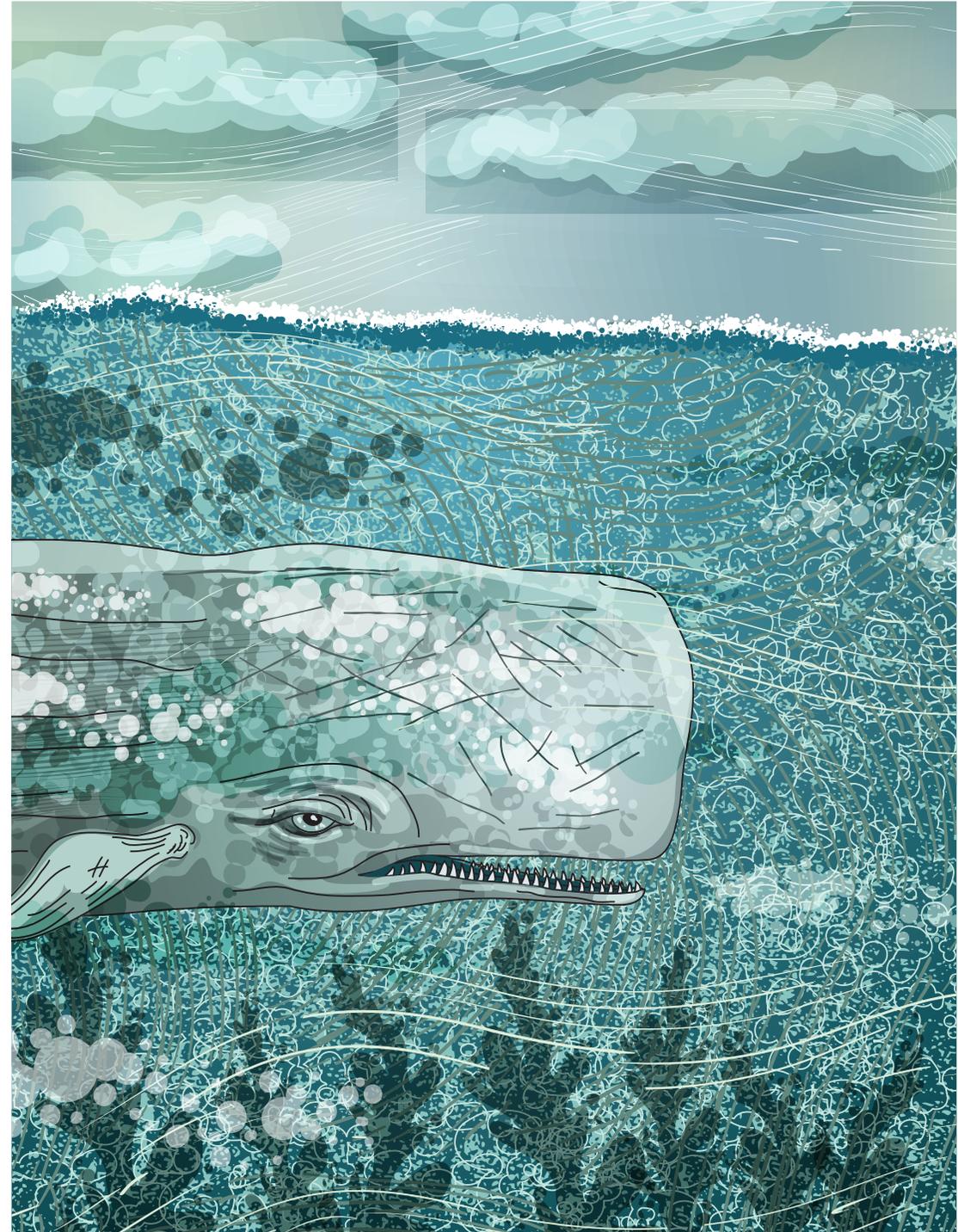
Estimated Whale Populations

Whales were hunted extensively during the 18th and 19th century in Europe and America and this continued into the 20th century in many parts of the world. It is estimated that 2.9 million whales were hunted in the last century alone.

Today, after many decades of no whaling, the populations of many species are still incredibly low. Many whales have been classified as endangered or vulnerable and it will be many more decades before some species recover their pre-whaling populations.

It is estimated that sperm whale populations today are just 30% of the pre-whaling era. Today it is considered a vulnerable species according to the IUCN* Red List of Threatened Species.

The population of blue whales is alarmingly low at only about 10% of pre-whaling figures. This species is considered endangered, with the Antarctic blue whale considered critically endangered.



* International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Protecting Whale Species

According to the World Wildlife Fund, seven out of thirteen of the great whale species are classed as endangered or vulnerable.

The major threats to whale populations are:

Commercial and Scientific Whaling

- Whaling continues to take place in some oceans.

Human Industry

- Entanglement in fishing nets.
- Collision with ships in shipping routes.
- Oil and gas mining noise disrupting whale communication.

Climate Change

- Loss of sea ice disrupting the feeding patterns of their food sources.

