

Survivor!

OBJECTIVES

Students investigate how a sea lion pup's behavior is important for its survival.

BACKGROUND

The first years of an animal's life are often the most difficult. Only 40% to 60% of California sea lion pups survive their first year. Predators, weather, and prey availability all play a role in sea lion life. A sea lion learns behaviors for avoiding predators, finding prey, and navigating at sea to help it survive.

MATERIALS

- large outdoor play area

per student group:

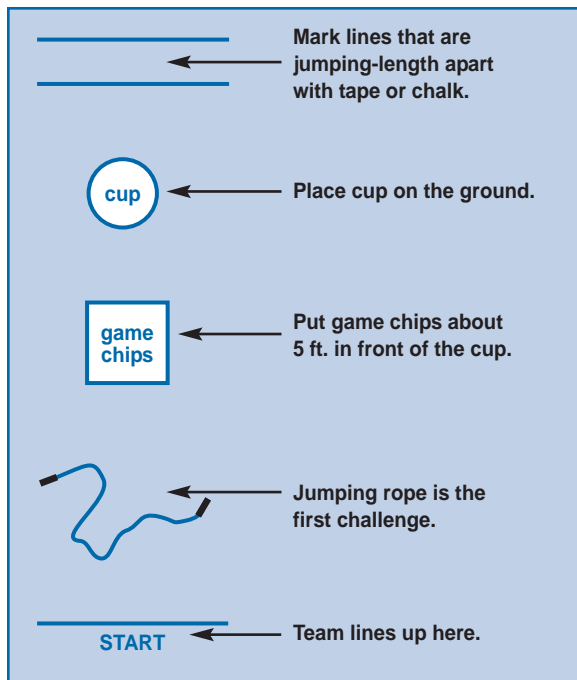
- one jump rope
- plastic game chips
(at least one per student)
- drinking cup
- chalk or masking tape
- eight index cards
(optional, for grades 2–3)



ACTION

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Set up two identical obstacle courses on the playground as indicated here.



IN CLASS

1. Ask students what they think a sea lion pup's life is like and what behaviors it does. Explain that many sea lions don't survive the first few years of live. They succumb to predators or aren't successful at foraging for prey.
 - ◆ Ask students to think of dangers a seal lion pup might encounter. List their ideas on the board.
 - ◆ With the students' help, list on the board behavior that help a sea lion avoid being eaten by a predator. (Examples: swim fast, jump out of the water, turn quickly, bite a would-be attacker.)
 - ◆ Next have students name behavior that will help a sea lion reproduce. (Examples: live in groups, call to one another, males establish territories.)

- ◆ Finally, ask students to list behavior for finding prey. (*Examples: hearing, seeing, fast swimming, agility in the water.*)
2. Divide students into two teams. Explain that the teams will compete in an obstacle-course relay that symbolizes the dangers of a sea lion's first year at sea. Each student will have a turn to complete the obstacle course.
 3. Demonstrate the behaviors that students have to do to successfully get through the obstacle course. These represent sea lion behaviors:
 - ◆ **Jumping rope** represents avoiding predators. A student must jump rope four times without mistake to successfully avoid a predator. (If a student messes up, he or she is symbolically "eaten" and is out of the game.)
 - ◆ **Dropping a game chip into the drinking cup** represents finding and eating prey. A student must place a game chip between his or her knees, carefully "walk" to the cup, and drop the chip into the cup. (If a student drops his or her chip before reaching the cup or misses the cup, he or she symbolically "starves" and is out of the game.)
 - ◆ **Jumping over the chalk marks or tape** represents hauling out on land to rest. (If a student isn't able to clear the mark, they symbolically "die" at sea, and they are out of the game.)
 4. Begin play with teams lined up behind the starting line of each playing lane. At your signal, the first team member in each group completes the obstacle course, then returns and tags the next person in line. A waiting team member begins the obstacle course when tagged. If a student is out of the game, they immediately return and tag the next team member. The team with the most survivors at the end of the game is the winning team.
 5. Repeat the simulation several times to give everyone a chance to complete the entire obstacle course.
 6. *Optional, for grades 2-3:* Add an element of chance to the game. Give each team a set of "Survivor Chance Cards." Each team member draws a card before starting the obstacle course. Make the "Survivor Chance Cards" ahead of time by writing each of the following statements on a separate index card:
 - ◆ You are caught in a storm. Do all of the challenges twice.
 - ◆ You become a snack for a killer whale. You are out.
 - ◆ A shark is chasing you! Keep an eye out for it – walk backward through each challenge.
 - ◆ The SeaWorld Animal Rescue Team cuts you loose from a net. Go directly to the haul-out (jump) challenge.
 - ◆ You feast on a large school of slow-moving fish. Skip the food (game chip) challenge.
 - ◆ You are tangled in trash! Hop on one foot through all the challenges.
 - ◆ A beach clean-up team has improved your habitat. Skip a turn and take a rest.
 - ◆ You are too fast for a predator to catch. Go directly to the food (game chip) challenge.