National Marine Mammal Foundation
Draw What's in the Ocean!

Focus: Introduce marine plastic pollution through drawing and discussion.
Audience: adaptable, K-12
Time: 15-20 minutes

Learning Objectives

By the end of the activity, students will be able to:

- Identify animals and other features commonly associated with the ocean.
- Recognize that plastic pollution and discarded fishing gear can harm marine wildlife.
- Describe at least one way human activities affect ocean ecosystems.
- Reflect on how people can help protect the ocean.

Materials

- Paper and drawing materials (pencils, markers, or crayons)
- Images of marine wildlife impacted by plastic pollution, marine debris, and discarded fishing gear.**
    - Examples include a hermit crab with a bottle cap for a shell, turtle entanglement, fishing line around a sea lion, fishing net covering a coral reef, fish swimming among a plastic blag.

***Instructor Preparation: Select an image that is appropriate for your students' age group. Preview the image before class and decide how much detail to share. Images of entangled wildlife can be upsetting, especially for younger students.*

Instructions:

1. Invite the students to draw the ocean (3-5 minutes)

> "Today, we're going to explore the ocean. I want you to draw what's in the ocean. Think about the animals that live there, what the ocean looks like, and anything else you imagine when you think about the ocean. There are no right or wrong answers!"
>
> Allow students a few minutes to draw independently. Encourage them to include whatever comes to mind rather than giving them examples that might influence their drawings.

2. Share and Explore the Drawings (3–5 minutes)

Invite students to share what they drew. Ask questions such as:

- "What kinds of things did you include in your ocean?"
- "Who drew a fish? A shark? A dolphin?"
- "How many of you drew a sea turtle?"
- "What else did you include in your picture?"

Acknowledge the variety of drawings and highlight the animals and habitats students associate with a healthy ocean. Then ask: "When you picture the ocean, what do you think it looks like? What do you think life is like for the animals that live there?" Allow a few students to respond before moving to the next step.

3. Introduce a Different Reality (2–3 minutes)

Ask the class: "How many of you drew a sea turtle? Did anyone draw a sea turtle like this?" (Show students the image of a sea turtle entangled in discarded fishing net).

Pause briefly to give students time to look at the image. Avoid immediately explaining it; allow students to observe and react. We encourage pausing after showing the image and asking, "What do you notice?" before explaining what happened, allowing students to make their own observations and connections.

Explain that plastic pollution is not always something floating on the surface or washing up on a beach. Discarded fishing nets, ropes, and other plastic debris can become

entangled around marine animals, making it difficult for them to swim, feed, or move. Some animals are injured or can even die as a result.

4. Connect the Image to Plastic Pollution (3–5 minutes)

Build on students' observations to explore how pollution enters the ocean. Explain that plastic can reach the ocean through littering, stormwater runoff, rivers, coastal activities, and lost or discarded fishing gear.

Clarify that plastic pollution takes many forms, from large pieces of debris and abandoned fishing gear to tiny fragments known as microplastics.

Some examples of discussion questions include:

- "Where do you think the fishing net in this picture might have come from?"
- "What other ocean animals might be affected by plastic pollution?"
- "Why might plastic pollution be difficult to clean up once it reaches the ocean?"

5. Reflect and Identify Solutions (3–5 minutes)

Bring the discussion back to the students' original drawings.

Ask:

- "If you drew the ocean again, would you add anything or change anything?"
- "What do you think a healthy ocean should look like?"
- "What are some things people, communities, or businesses could do to prevent plastic pollution?"

Invite students to suggest solutions at different levels, such as reducing unnecessary single-use plastics, recycling, disposing of waste properly, supporting responsible fishing practices, participating in community cleanups, and preventing plastic waste from entering waterways.

Emphasize that individual choices can help, but preventing marine pollution also requires action from communities, industries, and governments.

DRAW: WHAT'S IN THE OCEAN

POP
for a porpoise

