

FLEYDO ENGLISH SCHOOL

Story Material

The Song of the Whales

An inspiring adventure about a teenager in Iceland who discovers that a planned shipping route threatens the local whale population.

Level: B1 (Intermediate)**Age Group:** Teens (11-16)**Skill:** Reading**Topic:** Nature & Conservation**Duration:** ~50 minutes**Pages:** 26 story pages

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Read and understand a B1-level story about marine conservation
 - ✓ Learn 20 new vocabulary words highlighted in context
- ✓ Practise reading comprehension with multiple-choice questions
 - ✓ Understand environmental themes: ocean noise pollution
 - ✓ Discuss how young people can make a difference

*Note: In the online version, **highlighted vocabulary words** have hover definitions.*

Part 1 — The Story

Chapter 1: The Edge of the World

Kai had never seen a sky so enormous. As the small propeller plane descended through the clouds, the landscape of northern Iceland unfolded beneath him like a painting from another planet: black volcanic rock, bright green moss, silver rivers cutting through valleys, and the dark blue Atlantic Ocean stretching endlessly to the horizon. It was the first week of July, and Kai was spending the entire summer with his aunt Sigrid in Husavik, a fishing village on the north coast of Iceland that was famous for one thing above all others: whales.

His parents had not given him much choice. His father was a software engineer who had been offered a three-month contract in Singapore, and his mother, a translator, was going with him. "It will be an adventure," his mother had said cheerfully while packing his warmest clothes. "Aunt Sigrid is brilliant. You will love it." Kai was not convinced. He was fourteen years old. He wanted to spend his summer with his friends in Bristol, playing football and going to the cinema, not stuck in a remote Icelandic village with a population of two thousand people and no proper shopping centre. But as the plane touched down on the tiny airstrip and he saw Aunt Sigrid waving enthusiastically from beside her battered old Land Rover, he felt a small, unexpected spark of curiosity.

"Welcome to the edge of the world!" Sigrid said, pulling him into a bear hug. She was tall and strong, with windblown blonde hair and the kind of face that always seemed to be on the edge of a smile. She was a **marine** biologist, one of the leading whale researchers in Europe, and she ran a small research station just outside the village. "I have got so much to show you," she said as they drove along the coast road. "The humpbacks arrived two weeks ago, and there is a pod of orcas that have been visiting the bay. Have you ever seen a whale in real life?" Kai shook his head. "Then prepare to have your mind completely blown," she grinned. Through the car window, Kai watched the ocean. Somewhere out there, hidden beneath the dark water, the largest creatures on Earth were swimming, breathing, and singing.

Chapter 2: The Research Station

The research station was a converted fishing warehouse on the harbour, painted bright red with the words HUSAVIK MARINE RESEARCH CENTRE on a blue sign above the door. Inside, it was a fascinating mess of computers, maps, underwater microphones called hydrophones, and shelves lined with books about ocean life. Photographs of whales covered every wall. "This is where the magic happens," Sigrid said. "We study whale communication. Whales do not just make random noises — they sing. Complex, structured songs that can last for hours."

She played Kai a recording through the speakers. The room filled with a sound unlike anything he had ever heard: deep, resonant calls that rose and fell in patterns, mixed with clicks, whistles, and long, haunting moans. "Humpback whales are the most sophisticated singers," Sigrid explained. "Each population has its own song, and the songs change gradually over time. We record them every day and analyse the patterns. It helps us

understand how the whales communicate, where they **migrate**, and whether they are healthy or stressed." She pointed to a graph on her computer. "But recently, something strange has been happening. The songs are changing faster than normal, and the **frequency** is shifting. I have never seen anything like it."

Chapter 3: Freya

The next morning, Kai walked down to the harbour. He was sitting on the harbour wall, eating a chocolate bar and watching puffins, when a girl appeared next to him. She was about his age, with red hair tied in a messy braid and freckles across her nose. "You are Sigrid's nephew," she said. "My name is Freya. My father runs the whale-watching boat tours. I have been on the water every day since I was three years old."

"I am Kai," he said. "Do you always introduce yourself by listing your qualifications?" Freya laughed. "In a village this size, everyone knows everything about everyone. I already know your name, that you are from Bristol, that you support Arsenal, and that you once ate twelve pancakes in one sitting at your aunt's birthday party." Despite the embarrassment, Kai liked Freya immediately. She was direct, funny, and clearly loved the ocean as much as Sigrid did. She offered to take him whale watching that afternoon on her father's boat. "You have not really arrived in Husavik until you have seen the whales," she said.

Chapter 4: The Changing Song

Nothing in Kai's life had prepared him for the moment a humpback whale surfaced ten metres from the boat. The animal was immense — at least fifteen metres long — its dark grey body covered in barnacles and scars, its enormous tail rising slowly out of the water before slapping down with a sound like thunder. But Freya's smile faded when they reached the northern end of the bay. The **species** that usually gathered here were nowhere to be seen.

"This is not normal," Freya said. That evening, Sigrid confirmed what Freya had noticed. "The humpbacks have moved further offshore. Over the past three weeks, they have gradually shifted their position by about fifteen kilometres to the east. And their songs have changed significantly." Even Kai could hear the difference between the June recording and the recent one. The June recording was calm and melodic. The recent recording was faster, more repetitive, and seemed agitated.

"Something is disturbing them," Sigrid said. Kai looked at a map on the wall showing the whales' usual **habitat**. A red line had been drawn across the bay. "What is that red line?" he asked. "That is the proposed route for the new Northern Atlantic Shipping Lane. A consortium of shipping companies wants to open a major commercial route through these waters. It would bring enormous container ships right through the whales' **habitat**. The environmental impact assessment is still being reviewed, but I have heard rumours that some survey ships have already started testing the route. Unofficially."

Chapter 5: The Evidence

The next day, Kai and Freya borrowed Sigrid's underwater recording equipment and went out on the water. They dropped hydrophones at three different points along the proposed shipping route and recorded for six hours. Beneath the natural sounds of the ocean, there was a constant, low-frequency rumble — the sound of large engines and **sonar** equipment from survey ships mapping the sea floor. "That is what is disturbing the whales," Sigrid said. "Underwater noise **acoustic** pollution. It interferes with their ability to **navigate**, communicate, and find food."

"The whale calves are the most **vulnerable**," she continued. "They rely on their mothers' songs to stay together. If the background noise is too loud, they can become separated." Kai felt a knot tighten in his stomach. "Can we stop the shipping route?" he asked. Sigrid shook her head. "It is not that simple. The shipping lane would bring jobs and money to the region. But if we can prove it would cause serious damage to the whale population, the **ecosystem**, and the local **biodiversity**, we might be able to get the route changed." She looked at them. "Are you two ready to help me build a case?"

Chapter 6: Building the Case

Over the next three weeks, the research station became a war room. Sigrid, Kai, and Freya worked from early morning until late at night, gathering data, recording whale songs, tracking movements, and documenting every change in behaviour. Kai learned to use hydrophone equipment, analyse sound spectrograms, and identify individual whales by their unique tail markings. They were also joined by two university students, Elias and Marta, who were studying **marine** biology.

"We need more than just data," Freya said. "Data convinces scientists, but it does not always convince politicians. We need to make people care." She looked at Kai. "What if we made a **documentary**?" Over the following week, Kai edited together footage from the whale-watching trips, underwater recordings of the changing songs, interviews with Sigrid, and dramatic before-and-after comparisons. Freya recorded the narration. They called the film "The Song of the Whales."

Chapter 7: Going Public

They uploaded the **documentary** to the internet on a Tuesday evening. By Thursday, it had been viewed over two hundred thousand times. By the weekend, three million. Environmental organisations, wildlife photographers, and celebrities shared it. International news channels picked up the story. Journalists arrived in Husavik. They also launched an online **petition** calling for an independent environmental review. Within a week, it had fifty thousand signatures from thirty-two countries.

But the success also brought opposition. The shipping consortium called the documentary "emotional propaganda" and claimed their operations followed all regulations. Several local politicians who supported the shipping lane criticised Sigrid's research, suggesting her data was incomplete and biased. Kai felt angry, but Sigrid reminded him: "This is how these things work. We expected resistance. What matters is that we have the evidence."

Chapter 8: The Hearing

The Icelandic government announced a public hearing in Akureyri. Both sides would present their evidence. Sigrid's team prepared meticulously. They invited Professor Tanaka, a world-renowned expert in **acoustic** ecology from the University of Tokyo, to provide independent **testimony**. The night before the hearing, Kai could not sleep. He texted Freya: "Nervous about tomorrow." She replied: "Same. But we have the truth on our side."

The shipping consortium presented first: polished graphs, economic projections, hundreds of jobs, millions in revenue. They acknowledged "minor environmental adjustments" but insisted their plans met all regulations. Then Sigrid presented her research: the acoustic data, the tracking data, the behavioural evidence. Professor Tanaka stated that the proposed route would cause "significant and potentially irreversible damage" to the **indigenous** whale population.

Chapter 9: Speaking Up

Finally, Kai stood up. His hands were trembling, but his voice was steady. "Three months ago, I had never seen a whale. I came to Iceland because my parents sent me here. But then I heard the whales sing for the first time, and everything changed. These are not just animals. They are intelligent, social beings with complex languages. They have been migrating through these waters for thousands of years. We have no right to destroy their home for the sake of faster shipping." He paused. "I am fourteen years old. I cannot vote, I cannot make laws. But I can ask you to listen to the evidence and make the right decision. Because if we do not protect these creatures now, future generations will never forgive us." The room was silent. Then the applause began.

Chapter 10: The Decision

The committee deliberated for ten days. The **petition** reached one hundred and fifty thousand signatures. The decision was a **compromise**. The committee required the consortium to redesign the route to avoid the whales' core areas, reduce ship speeds in sensitive zones, limit **sonar** use during migration season, and fund a long-term **marine** monitoring programme.

"It is not a complete victory," Sigrid admitted. "The route will still go ahead, and there will still be some impact. But the whales' most important areas are now protected, and the monitoring programme means we can track any changes." "It is a good start," Freya said. "And it proves that ordinary people can make a difference when they stand up for what is right." Kai looked at the map. The red line of the shipping route had been redrawn, curving away from the whales' territory. It was proof that listening — really listening — could change the course of things.

Chapter 11: The Last Song

On his final evening in Iceland, Kai went out on the water one last time. Freya drove the boat to the northern end of the bay, where the humpbacks had returned to their feeding grounds.

The sun was low on the horizon, turning the sea to liquid gold. They cut the engine and drifted in silence. Then Freya lowered the hydrophone into the water. The whale song filled the air — slower, deeper, and more peaceful than the recordings from earlier in the summer.

A humpback surfaced thirty metres away, its enormous body rising gently from the water. It exhaled with a sound like a sigh, sending a plume of mist into the golden light. Then it raised its tail, held it there for a moment as if waving goodbye, and slipped silently beneath the surface. Kai felt tears on his cheeks. "Thank you," he whispered. "For everything." Freya put a hand on his shoulder. "You will come back," she said. "Every summer," he replied. "Every single summer." He took out his phone and recorded the last few minutes of the whale song. Because some sounds, once heard, become part of who you are. And the song of the whales had become part of Kai.

The End

*The ocean is the largest **habitat** on Earth, home to millions of **species** that depend on clean water and quiet depths to survive. Every year, human activity fills the underwater world with noise that disrupts the creatures who live there. But every year, people like Kai, Freya, and Sigrid prove that it is possible to make a difference. One voice can start a conversation. One recording can open millions of ears. One song can change the world. Listen carefully. The whales are still singing.*

Part 2 — Key Vocabulary

Words shown in **blue bold** in the story are listed below.

Word	Type	Definition
marine	<i>adjective</i>	relating to the sea and the creatures that live in it
migrate	<i>verb</i>	to move from one place to another at different times of the year
species	<i>noun</i>	a group of animals or plants that share similar characteristics
frequency	<i>noun</i>	the number of times something happens; in sound, how high or low it is
habitat	<i>noun</i>	the natural home or environment of an animal or plant
conservation	<i>noun</i>	the protection of natural environments and wildlife
petition	<i>noun</i>	a written request signed by many people asking for change
ecosystem	<i>noun</i>	all the living things in an area and how they depend on each other
sonar	<i>noun</i>	a system using sound waves to detect objects underwater
documentary	<i>noun</i>	a film or programme that gives facts about a real subject
navigate	<i>verb</i>	to find the way from one place to another
campaign	<i>noun</i>	an organised effort to achieve a social or political goal
testimony	<i>noun</i>	a formal statement about something you know or have experienced
compromise	<i>noun</i>	an agreement where both sides give up something they want
advocate	<i>noun/verb</i>	a person who publicly supports a cause; to speak in favour of
biodiversity	<i>noun</i>	the variety of different types of life found in a particular area
acoustic	<i>adjective</i>	relating to sound or the sense of hearing
vulnerable	<i>adjective</i>	weak and easily hurt, physically or emotionally
indigenous	<i>adjective</i>	naturally existing in a place; native
sustainable	<i>adjective</i>	able to continue without causing damage to the environment

Part 3 — Comprehension Quiz

Answer these questions about the story.

Question 1

Why did Kai go to Iceland?

- A) He won a competition
- B) His parents were working in Singapore
- C) He was studying marine biology
- D) He wanted to learn Icelandic

Question 2

What was Aunt Sigrid's profession?

- A) Fishing captain
- B) Marine biologist studying whale communication
- C) Wildlife photographer
- D) University professor

Question 3

How did Freya know about Kai before they met?

- A) Read about him online
- B) Sigrid told everyone in the village
- C) They exchanged emails
- D) She saw his social media

Question 4

What was happening to the whales' songs?

- A) Becoming louder
- B) Changing faster than normal and sounding stressed
- C) They stopped singing
- D) Learning new songs

Question 5

What caused the disturbance?

- A) Unusual fishing
- B) Rising temperatures
- C) Noise from survey ships testing a shipping route
- D) New harbour construction

Question 6

What did Kai and Freya create?

- A) A research paper
- B) A documentary film
- C) A book
- D) A podcast

Question 7

How did the shipping consortium respond?

- A) Praised the film
- B) Called it emotional propaganda
- C) Offered to fund research
- D) Ignored it

Question 8**What did Kai say at the hearing?**

- A) Demanded all shipping be banned
- B) Asked the committee to listen and protect the whales
- C) Criticised politicians
- D) Refused to speak

Question 9**What was the committee's decision?**

- A) Rejected the route completely
- B) Approved without changes
- C) Required the route to be redesigned
- D) Delayed for five years

Question 10**What did Kai promise at the end?**

- A) Become a filmmaker
- B) Return to Iceland every summer
- C) Move permanently
- D) Stop eating fish

Answer Key

#	Ans	Question
1	B	Why did Kai go to Iceland?
2	B	What was Aunt Sigrid's profession?
3	B	How did Freya know about Kai before they met?
4	B	What was happening to the whales' songs?
5	C	What caused the disturbance?
6	B	What did Kai and Freya create?
7	B	How did the shipping consortium respond?
8	B	What did Kai say at the hearing?
9	C	What was the committee's decision?
10	B	What did Kai promise at the end?

Thank you for reading! Visit www.fleydo.com for more stories and materials.