

## LESSON

# 15

# Form an Educated Opinion



## text matters

When teaching the difference between an opinion and an informed opinion, we choose text that

- is about a topic on which kids are likely to have strong opinions
- has an issue, idea, or problem that has two sides
- provides credible evidence for both sides

We want kids to express their opinions from the very beginning, taking the pro side, the con side, or the need-to-know-more position. Subsequent reading about and researching the topic can lead to interesting and compelling debates among the readers as they discover new information.

## resources | materials

### Lesson Texts

“Animals Can!,” pages 2–9, and “The Navy Marine Mammal Program,” pages 10–13, in *Lend Me a Paw* (National Geographic *Ladders* series) [See the article at the back of this book or the downloadable resources. The magazine is available in the Trade Book Pack.]

### Classroom Supplies

- Thinksheet with three columns labeled *Opinion*, *Thoughts & Questions*, and *Informed Opinion*

### Student Supplies

- A copy of two articles: “Animals Can!” and “The Navy Marine Mammal Program”
- A copy of the *Opinion|Thoughts & Questions|Informed Opinion* Thinksheet
- Tablet or other device for online research (*optional*)

## Discern the difference between an opinion and an informed opinion

### why | what

This is the Information Age. Information abounds. Whether online, on TV, or in the papers, information bombards us each and every day. As they grow, students will be blasted with even more information. It is easy to have an opinion on just about anything, and everyone seems to. Kids need to understand that their thinking and opinions matter, but also that issues, ideas, and problems are often complex and multifaceted. Often our first ideas deserve further investigation so we can establish a more informed opinion.

An *opinion* is something we believe that may or may not be grounded in fact. An *informed opinion* is one that is formed from more extensive investigation and study of an issue, idea, or problem. Educating oneself about issues and problems can lead to more informed opinions about them. The notion that reading can change thinking (*Summarize & Synthesize* Lesson 25) is central to this idea. When teaching the difference between opinions and informed opinions, we exercise caution and keep our own opinions to ourselves. We are not attempting to influence opinions; rather, we are making sure our kids understand that the more information they have on a topic, the more informed their opinion will be.

**Related Lesson:** This lesson leads naturally to *Content Literacy* Lesson 16 on debate, where sound evidence gained through research is critical to supporting an informed opinion.

### how | gradual release of responsibility

#### Connect / Engage

- Read aloud and ask kids to preview a text to establish the topic of the day.

#### Model

- Define *opinion* and *informed opinion*.
- Think through an example of a changed informed opinion.

#### Guide

- Read aloud and elicit kids' opinions about the topic.
- Define *pro* and *con*, and ask kids to write their opinions on the Thinksheet.

#### Collaborate

- Ask partners to explore the pros and cons of an argument.

#### Share the Learning

- Prompt kids to consider how informed opinions can be the same as or different from first impressions.



Check [www.comprehensiontoolkit.com](http://www.comprehensiontoolkit.com) for a video of this lesson.

### goals | assessment

*We want students to:*

- understand the difference between an opinion and an informed opinion.
- Take a pro, con, or not-enough-information (NEI) position about an issue.
- recognize that opinions can change when you have more information.

# Form an Educated Opinion

*Discern the difference between an opinion and an informed opinion*

This Lesson Frame can be used with any thought-provoking text or situation to help students differentiate opinions from informed opinions.

Teaching Moves	Teaching Language
<p>Read aloud and ask kids to preview a text to establish the topic of the day.</p>	<p><b>Connect / Engage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ I'll read aloud the first page of this article. Flip through and preview the rest of the text to get an idea of what it is mostly about. Turn to each other and talk. What do you think the article is mostly about?</li></ul>
<p>Define opinion and informed opinion.</p> <p>Think through an example of a changed informed opinion.</p>	<p><b>Model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ How many of you know what an opinion is? Turn and talk about that. What do you think? What's an opinion?</li><li>○ Exactly. An opinion is something you believe.</li><li>○ Today we are going to talk about the difference between an <i>opinion</i> and an <i>informed opinion</i>. Opinions carry more weight if there is information and evidence to back them up. The more facts or evidence to back up an opinion, the more informed that opinion is. To have an informed opinion, people need to read, study, and learn about a topic so that they know enough to make an informed opinion rather than simply having an idea that they believe in. Turn and talk about an opinion you have and whether or not you have enough information to have an informed opinion.</li><li>○ I am of the opinion . . .</li><li>○ Uh oh! When I read about this, I'm not sure I'm right.</li><li>○ I've changed my opinion. Sometimes, when we get more information, we change our opinion. Other times, we get more evidence to support our opinion. You never know until you read and gain more information. Reading often changes our thinking.</li></ul>

**Teaching Language**

**Teaching Moves**

**Guide**

- I'll read the first two pages aloud.
- OK, so what do you think? What is your opinion? Do you think . . . is a good idea or not so much? Turn and talk and share your thinking.
- It's OK not to form an opinion right away. You know what we call that? NEI for "not enough information." No problem! Reading always gives us more information.
- Jot down your opinion in the first column. You may be in favor of . . . That means you are *pro*. Or you may be opposed to . . . That means you are *con*. Or you may think you don't have enough information to have an opinion; if so, you can write *not sure* in the first column. You can jot down the reasons for your opinion in the second column, under *Thoughts & Questions*.

**Read aloud and elicit kids' opinions about the topic.**

**Define *pro* and *con*, and ask kids to write their opinions on the Thinksheet.**

**Collaborate**

- These pages will give you evidence for or against the program. You're going to read these pages with a partner and jot down your opinions and thoughts on the Thinksheet.

**Ask partners to explore the pros and cons of an argument.**

**Share the Learning**

- I heard a lot of buzzing while you were reading these pages! How many of you found evidence that made you stick to your original opinion? Tell us about it.
- How many of you changed your opinion? Did the evidence convince you to change your mind? How many need more information to form an opinion?
- Great. Your opinions are more informed now than they were before you read, right?

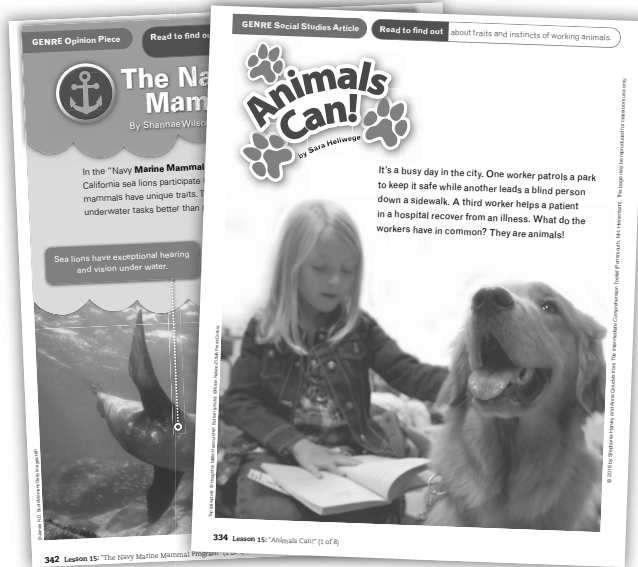
**Prompt kids to consider how informed opinions can be the same as or different from first impressions.**

**reflect | assess**

*Did your students:*

- understand the difference between an opinion and an informed opinion?
- take a *pro*, *con*, or not-enough-information (NEI) position about an issue?
- recognize that opinions can change when you have more information?

# 15 in action



## Lesson Text

The selection in *Lend Me a Paw* titled “The Navy Marine Mammal Program” is ideal for this lesson. It features a topic that is controversial and lends itself to an argument. It even dedicates a page to the con side of the argument and a page to the pro side of the argument. This is a good scaffold for kids as they first learn about two sides of an argument. The article also provides enough information to allow kids to find evidence to form a stronger opinion to support their side—or even to change their minds.

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### Teaching Moves

**Read aloud and ask kids to preview a text to establish the topic of the day.**

**TIP:** *We always keep in mind that we are teaching the reader, not merely the reading. We are on a continual lookout for teaching points that readers can carry with them to other texts. The title offers a teaching point around the notion of a play on words, so taking a moment to teach a bit about a play on words is helpful. In this way, kids will become aware of what that is and will be more likely to notice a play on words the next time they encounter one.*

### Teaching Language

#### Connect / Engage

We have an amazingly cool book today. It’s called *Lend Me a Paw*. You have a copy of the first article in this book, “Animals Can!” Let’s read the first page of this article. *[I read page 2.]* Cool, huh? Flip through and preview the rest of the text to get an idea of what it is mostly about. *[Kids preview the article.]* Turn to each other and talk. What do you think the article is mostly about? *[Kids turn and talk. Some share out that it is about animals that help out in different ways.]* We’ve talked about the importance of titles before. Why do you think this book is called *Lend Me a Paw*?

**Jeremy:** *Because the animals are helping.*

Say more about that, Jeremy.

**Jeremy:** *Well, they are working and helping blind people and stuff.*

Has anyone ever heard the phrase “lend me a hand”? Turn and talk about what that means. *[Kids turn and talk and agree it means helping out.]* So when the writer titled this book *Lend Me a Paw*, it’s a clever way of saying “lend me a hand” to an animal. We call that a *play on words*. A play on words is a clever, even humorous, way of saying something to make the writing more interesting. It’s more

interesting using the word *paw*, since the book is about animals, than using the more common term *hand*. But it basically means the same thing. Does that make sense? *[Kids nod.]* You'll come across many plays on words when you read. Keep them in mind when you read other texts. They make the text more interesting and fun, like this title does.

Now back to the big idea of animals helping. Have you ever seen or heard of animals helping in some of the ways you saw as you previewed the text? Or in any other ways that were not mentioned? Were you surprised by some of the ways animals were shown to help out? Turn and talk. *[After turning and talking, kids share a variety of responses that include different examples of ways animals helped out in the text as well as ways that were surprising. And some share some examples they have seen before that were not mentioned in the text.]*

## Model

How many of you know what an opinion is? Turn and talk about that. *[Kids turn and talk.]* What do you think? What's an opinion?

**Define opinion and informed opinion.**

**Jaquile:** *An opinion is something that you believe.*

Exactly, Jacquile. An opinion is something you believe. Let me give you an example. My husband believes that basketball players are better athletes than baseball players. He says they are bigger, stronger, and faster. That is his opinion. I think he believes this because he is a big basketball fan and doesn't care so much about baseball. That's the problem with opinions sometimes. People sometimes believe stuff whether they have any evidence to support their opinion or not. My husband could be right about his opinion, but to be sure, he'd need evidence to back it up. That would give him a more informed opinion.

Today we are going to talk about the difference between an opinion and an informed opinion. Opinions carry more weight if there is information and evidence to back them up. The more facts or evidence to back up an opinion, the more informed that opinion is. So to have an informed opinion, people need to read, study, and learn about a topic, so that they know enough to make an informed opinion rather than simply having an idea that they believe in. Turn and talk about an opinion you have and whether or not you have enough information to have an informed opinion. *[Kids turn and talk. Several share out.]*

Let's take a look at this page called "Therapy Animals" (page 3). I've heard about therapy animals. They help people calm down. I am of the opinion that my French bulldog, Otis, might make a good therapy dog, because when he jumps up and curls in my lap, he calms me down. I'm going to read this page and check out the infographic to get more information to develop a more informed opinion.

**Think through an example of a changed informed opinion.**

*[I read page 3.]* Uh oh! When I read about these traits, I'm not sure Otis would make the best therapy dog after all. It says he has to be obedient and calm, and

the truth is he is—most of the time—except if he sees a squirrel or a bunny, he goes wild, running around like a maniac, jumping at the window, etc. I have a more informed opinion now from having read more information. Otis makes an amazing pet, but he probably wouldn't be the best therapy dog. I've changed my opinion. Sometimes, when we get more information, we change our opinion. Other times, we get more evidence to support our opinion. You never know until you read and gain more information. Reading often changes our thinking.

Read aloud and elicit kids' opinions about the topic.

Guide

So let's turn to the next selection, "The Navy Marine Mammal Program." This is an opinion piece about how dolphins and sea lions help the military with dangerous tasks. I'll read the first two pages aloud. *[I read pages 10 and 11.]*

OK, so what do you think? What is your opinion? Do you think using marine mammals to do work for the Navy is a good idea or not so much? Turn and talk and share your thinking. *[Kids turn and talk and then share out.]*

**Madison:** *I love animals, so I think it is a bad idea to use them to do dangerous things.*

**Jake:** *I think the program is good because it prevents people from getting injured or even dying.*

**Ella:** *I don't really have an opinion yet. I don't have enough information.*

It's OK not to form an opinion right away. You know what we call that, Ella? NEI for "not enough information." No problem! Reading always gives us more information.

Define pro and con, and ask kids to write their opinions on the Thinksheet.

Take a look at this three-column form, *Opinion/Thoughts & Questions/Informed Opinion*. Now that you've heard me read a bit about the Navy Marine Mammal Program, you might have an opinion about it. Jot down your opinion in the first column. You may be in favor of the program. That means you are pro. Or you may be opposed to the program. That means you are con. Or you may think you don't have enough information to have an opinion; if so, you can write NEI—short for not enough information—in the first column. You can jot down the reasons for your opinion in the second column, under *Thoughts & Questions*. I'll write down my opinion as well and why I believe it. *[Kids write their opinions. Most are in favor of the program, some are opposed, and several are not sure.]*

How many of you are pro? How many con? Who is not sure yet? *[Kids share out.]*

I wrote *Con: I'm against the Marine Mammal program* in the first column. But in truth, I don't really have much information to have an opinion about this. But for now I am con. In the second column, I've written down my thoughts and questions: *I love marine mammals and I am thinking this might be bad for them.*

344 Lesson 15: Opinion/Thoughts & Questions/Informed Opinion Thinksheet (1 of 1)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Opinion	Thoughts & Questions	Informed Opinion
<div>Con</div> <p>I am against the navy marine mammal program.</p>	<p>I love marine mammals and I think the program might be bad for them.</p> <p>Is it dangerous for dolphins + seals?</p>	

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**TIP:** Remember that we are not doing this work to influence kids with our own opinions. We are showing them how to read and study so they can support their own opinions with more evidence and information. We want them to become very comfortable with the difference between an opinion and an informed opinion and to understand that changing their mind in the face of additional information is not failing in any way but is ultimately what learning is all about. We don't share our opinions until they have come up with their own or we might influence them.

Is it dangerous for the dolphins and seals? So I have some thoughts and questions about my opinion. I'm hoping to get a more informed opinion as I read on, because I know I'll learn more about this topic.

Collaborate

OK, now it's your turn. Turn to pages 12 and 13 of the Navy marine mammal article. What do you notice about these two pages?

**Jeremy:** One has the heading Pro and the other has the heading Con.

What do you expect to find on each of these pages, then?

**Madison:** The pro page will be for the marine mammal program. The con page will be against it.

Exactly. These pages will give you evidence for or against the program. You're going to read these pages with a partner and jot down your opinions and thoughts on the Thinksheet. As you read, you'll get a more informed opinion. Maybe you'll change your mind and switch sides. Maybe you'll believe more strongly in your original opinion. Maybe you'll get enough information to make up your mind about it. Maybe you'll still need to do more research to get an informed opinion. Remember to jot down any thoughts or questions you have while you read. Write them in the middle column so you can keep track of how your thinking changes. I'll be around to confer with you. OK, let's read!

**Ask partners to explore the pros and cons of an argument.**

**TIP:** This lesson offers a good opportunity to reinforce and teach some additional language, such as argument, debate, making a claim, etc. Creating and/or adding to an anchor chart of the language of argument will be helpful for kids as they move forward toward debating issues.



**Prompt kids to consider how informed opinions can be the same as or different from first impressions.**

**TIP:** You can follow up this lesson by giving kids an opportunity to debate this issue or any other issue that they have studied and researched. Setting aside a class period or two for kids to take a side, plan their argument, and debate the issue in a more public way is both challenging and fun. See Content Literacy Lesson 16, *Debate an Issue*.

## Share the Learning

*[I call for the kids' attention.]* I heard a lot of buzzing while you were reading these pages! How many of you found evidence that made you stick to your original opinion? *[Most hands are raised.]* Tell me about it.

**Jaquile:** I was against the program, and I'm still against it. This page pointed out that "war is a human problem," and it's not fair to give animals no choice.

**Jake:** But I found out that the animals are well treated and cared for, and they save human lives. So now I'm pro.

Great. Your opinions are more informed now than they were before you read, right? *[They nod.]* Did anyone actually change his or her opinion? Did the evidence convince you to change your mind?

**Ella:** Well, I wasn't really sure to begin with, but now that I've read both sides, I think I'm pro. I'd still like to know more about it.

Good point, Ella! There is much more to learn to form a fully informed opinion on a topic. Doing further research is a powerful way to support your opinion, refine it, or perhaps change it entirely. I encourage anyone who's interested to do further research on the Navy marine mammal program. Try Googling "navy marine mammal program" for the pros.

Great thinking today! Remember, your opinions are always better when they are more informed. And changing your opinion in light of new evidence is nothing to be ashamed of. On the contrary, refining, revising, validating, and/or changing thinking is the hallmark of a serious learner.

## reflect | assess

When reviewing kids' Thinksheets reflecting their opinions before reading and more informed opinions after reading, I look for evidence that they

- understand the difference between an opinion and an informed opinion.
- take a pro, con, or NEI position about an article.
- think about the new information and consider rethinking their position in light of new learning.

## adapt | differentiate

This lesson was done with fifth graders. The kids all seemed to understand that reading and learning can lead to changed thinking. This is the most powerful aspect of this lesson. Too often kids at all grade levels are more concerned with being right than with revising their thinking based on new information. The text scaffolds this lesson very well, with a pro page and a con page. To make this a bit more challenging for sixth graders, we can search for text that shares a range of thoughts on an issue but doesn't lay things out so clearly. For third and fourth graders, we look for text like this that lays out the arguments for both sides to help kids see the difference.

## goals | assessment

*Did your students:*

- understand the difference between an opinion and an informed opinion?
- take a pro, con, or not-enough-information (NEI) position about an issue?
- recognize that opinions can change when you have more information?

1

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Opinion	Thoughts & Questions	Informed Opinion
NEI	The reason is because it can be good and bad. It's good because the mammals can spot things quicker. The bad reason is because they can get hurt.	CON The reason I picked dolphins is because the dolphins should be free and they are separated with family and it's not there now.
	Help with mines but do it without touching it. unlikely to get hurt.	I am still on CON because it's still bad and there using whales too and can't be free.
	The sea mines are design to be destroyed by things.	Now pro.
	My thinking is changing because they don't really get hurt and are well cared.	
	swim in small space.	
	separated by family.	
	No choice stay under whales for long periods.	
	use whales.	
	Mammals do most of the work.	

Lesson 15: Opinion/Thoughts & Questions/Informed Opinion Thinksheet

1 Brisa's Thinksheet shows how her thinking changed back and forth as she read for more information. She began by thinking she didn't have enough information, NEI. As she read, she started leaning toward con, but then she learned the marine mammals were well cared for, so ultimately she changed her thinking to pro. Clearly, she opened her mind to changing her thinking in light of new evidence, and it may change again! But I see little written evidence in the *Questions/Thoughts & Questions* column that led her to change to pro. I would confer with her to clarify that and encourage her to keep reading and doing more research to develop an even more informed opinion.

2

Name Aracell Date \_\_\_\_\_

Opinion	Thoughts & Questions	Informed Opinion
CON	Because some of the animals can get really hurt.	My opinion hasn't changed yet.
	I think that the Navy Marine Mammal Program are too harsh on dolphins.	My opinion is changing
	I think they should end the Navy Marine program	Never Mind because skippy died of a bacterial infection
	They take good care of the animal.	CON
	The baby dolphins are seperated from mothers	
	They do not have a choice	
	Dolphins are trained to guide lost divers to safety.	
	Dolphins are trained to kill enemy swimmers.	

Lesson 15: Opinion/Thoughts & Questions/Informed Opinion Thinksheet

- 2 Aracell started out opposed to the Navy Marine Mammal Program and then began to change her mind, particularly when she learned that the dolphins were rarely hurt. However, during her reading, she uncovered one fact about a dolphin that died of a bacterial infection, and she quickly reverted back to con, where she had been leaning from the beginning. I would confer with her to keep researching and learning more about the topic because the more we know, the more informed our opinion. We often find information to counter those isolated facts that get our attention.



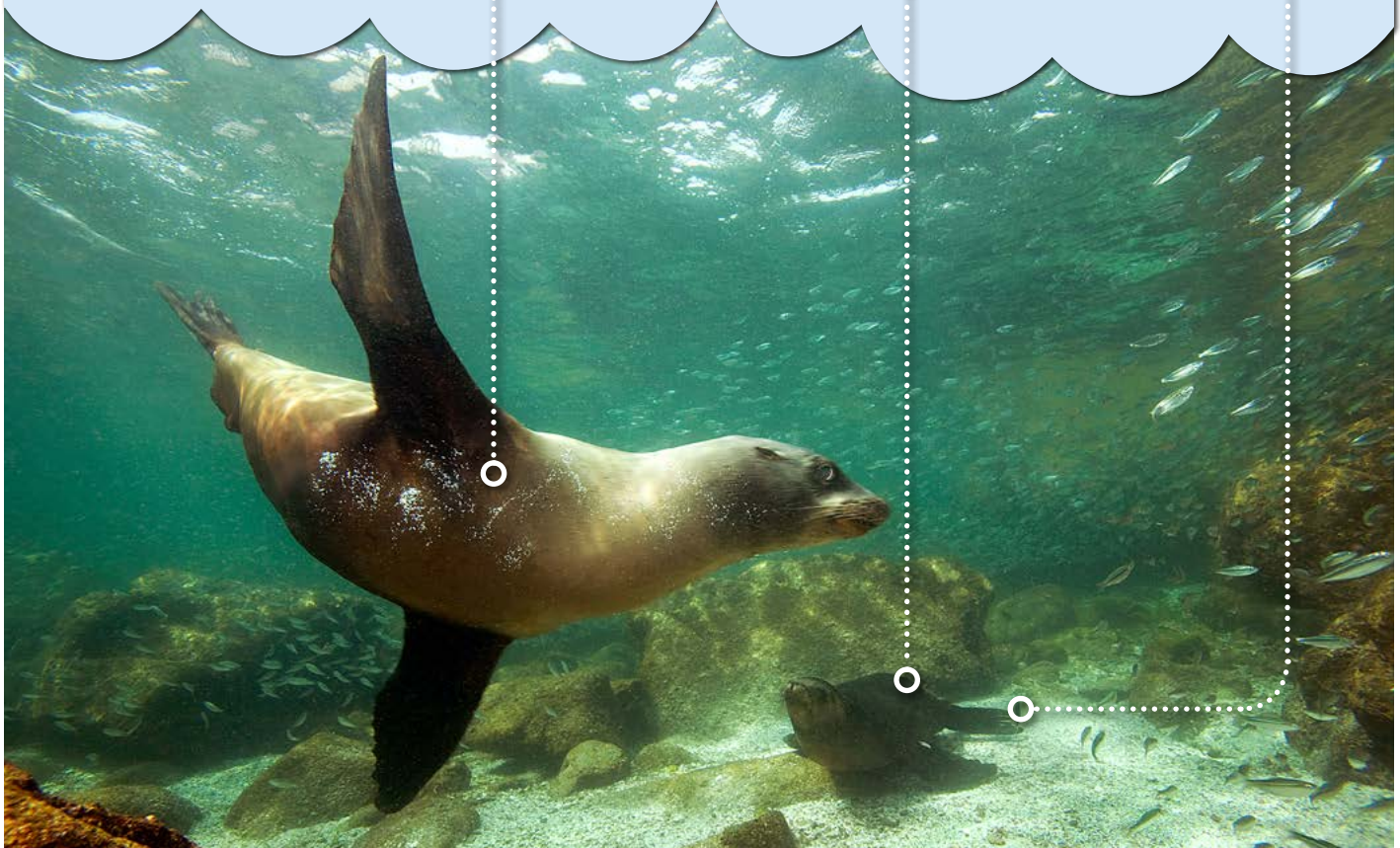
# The Navy Marine Mammal Program

By Shannae Wilson

In the “Navy **Marine Mammal** Program,” bottlenose dolphins and California sea lions participate in U.S. military operations. These marine mammals have unique traits. These **traits** allow them to perform certain underwater tasks better than people or equipment can.

Sea lions have exceptional hearing and vision under water.

Sea lions and dolphins are excellent divers. They can dive deeper than people can. They can also dive more often and stay under water longer.





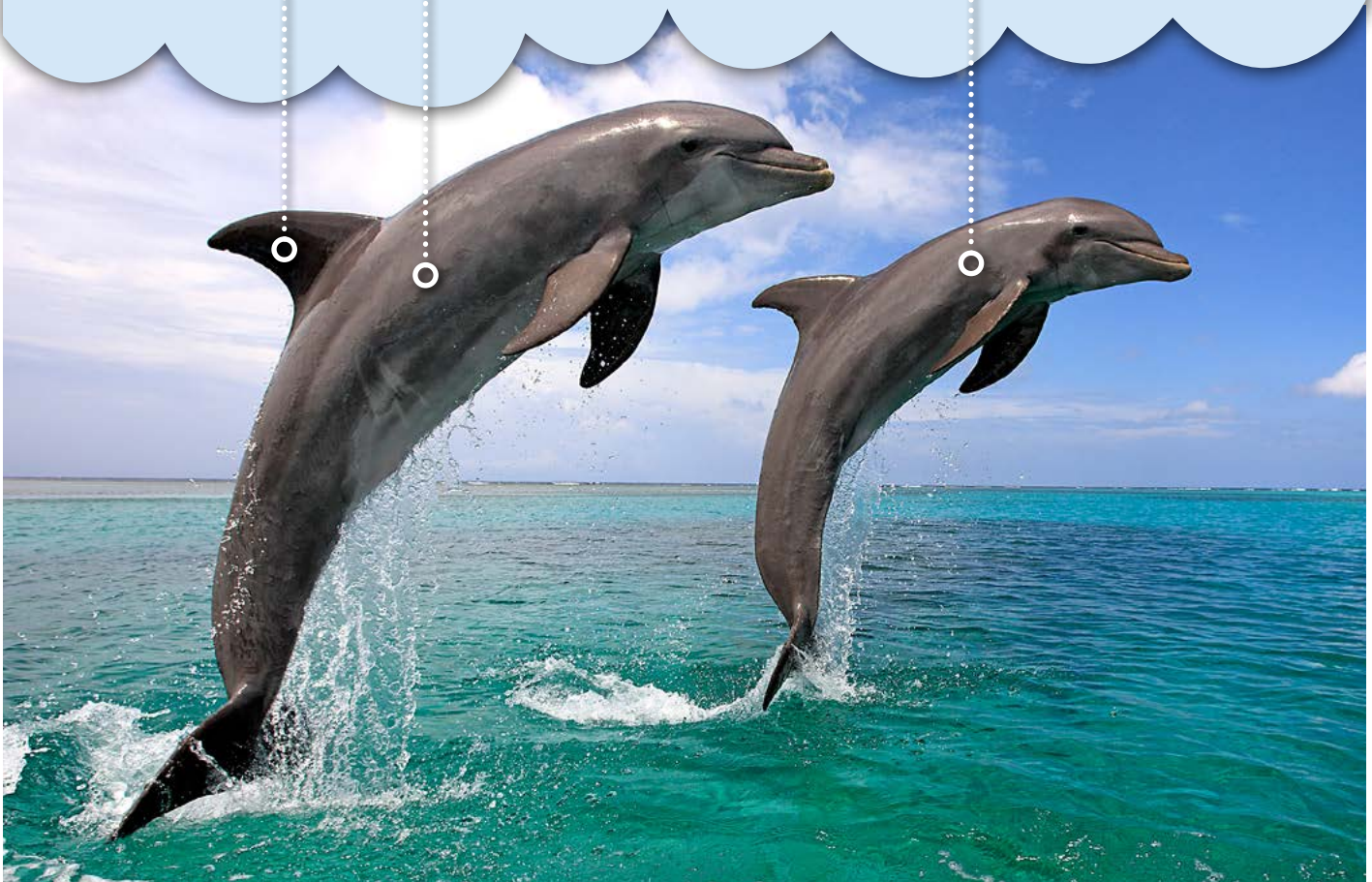
The animals follow **commands** to perform a variety of tasks. They protect ports, ships, and submarines against enemy swimmers. They also locate training equipment and sea mines. A sea mine is a weapon, like an underwater bomb. After the animals locate the objects, the Navy can remove or avoid them.

The animals can be transported to locations all over the world by ship, aircraft, or land vehicle. They have been used in past wars and conflicts.

People have different opinions about the Navy Marine Mammal Program. Some are in favor of the program (pro) and others are against it (con).

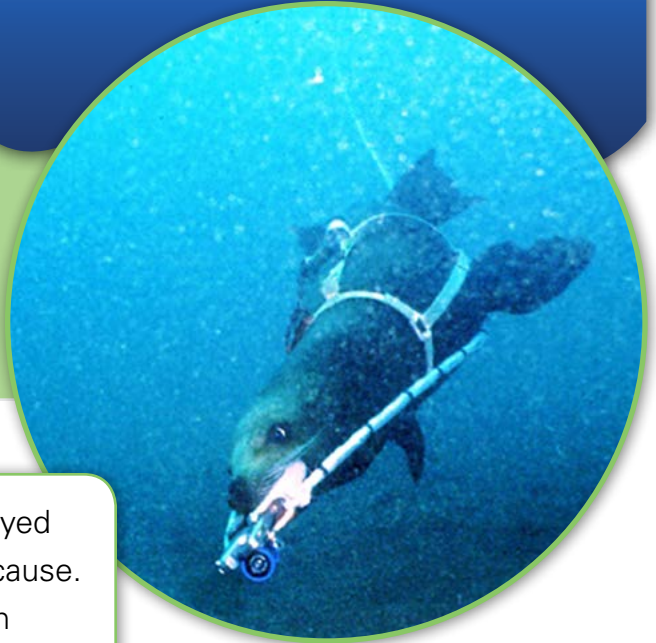
Sea lions and dolphins have an **instinct** to hunt under water.

Dolphins have a sense called **echolocation**. Echolocation allows them to locate objects. Manmade equipment is not nearly as effective at echolocation as dolphins.



# Pro

The Navy Marine Mammal Program should continue because it protects our troops. Also, it does not harm marine mammals. Here are three reasons why you should support it.



1

First, more ships are damaged or destroyed by enemy sea mines than by any other cause. Dolphins and sea lions help prevent such disasters by locating sea mines.

Top: Courtesy of U.S. Navy

2

Secondly, it is unlikely that the animals will be harmed. Sea mines are not designed to be detonated by marine mammals.

Middle: Photographers Mate 2nd Class Bob Houlihan/ Courtesy of U.S. Navy



3

Finally, the marine mammals are well cared for. The animals live in well-maintained enclosures, eat a balanced diet, and have regular physical exams by a veterinarian.

Bottom: Photographers Mate 1st Class Brien Aho/ Courtesy of U.S. Navy

To protect our troops, we should continue the Navy Marine Mammal Program.

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# Con <<



The Navy Marine Mammal Program puts marine mammals at risk. Here are three reasons why you should oppose it.

1

First, it's not possible to provide the proper habitat for dolphins in captivity. In nature, dolphins travel up to 50 miles a day in open water. The Navy can't provide this habitat at all times.

Top: ©James Gritz/Photodisc/Getty Images/HIP

2

Secondly, the capture of dolphins from the wild is harmful. Dolphins live in social groups called *pods*. When they are captured, they are taken away from their pods. Also, some reports say that the capture of dolphins is exhausting and violent.



3

Finally, war is a human problem. Animals are innocent and should not be made to participate. In the U.S., people have the choice to join the military or not to join. These animals do not have a choice.

Bottom: ©Photodisc/Alamy/HIP

To protect marine mammals, we should end the Navy Marine Mammal Program.

**CHECK IN**

Which opinion do you agree with? Think about and state your reasons.



Opinion	Thoughts & Questions	Informed Opinion