

# Good Health Is Not a Fluke

## OBJECTIVES

Given a husbandry procedure, students will detail shaping steps for teaching the necessary trained behavior.

## MATERIALS

- paper
- pencils

## BACKGROUND

Routine physical examinations and laboratory tests may help detect illnesses in marine animals. Examinations may require samples of urine, feces, mucus, or blood. For example, tests run on blood samples can tell if the animal is fighting an infection (high white blood cell count). Blood samples from killer whales are routinely taken from the blood vessels on the underside of the tail flukes. Trainers have shaped whale behaviors to include a fluke presentation; that is, the whale rolls onto its back and places its flukes on the stage area. Veterinarians then take a sample.



## ACTION

1. Discuss the behaviors of killer whales. Then, review training information (see pages 4 and 12). What tools do trainers commonly use? How do they “tell” a killer whale that a behavior was done correctly?
2. Have students form pairs or small groups. Students will detail the steps necessary to train a killer whale to present its tail flukes and allow a veterinarian to draw a blood sample. What training tools would they use? Would trainers need to link a series of behaviors? How would a trainer “tell” a killer whale to stay still?
3. After adequate time, ask student groups to present results. Does each group link the same behaviors? Does each group use the same reinforcers? Discuss differences.



This killer whale has been trained to present its tail fluke for a blood sample. Here a SeaWorld veterinarian draws blood for routine analysis.