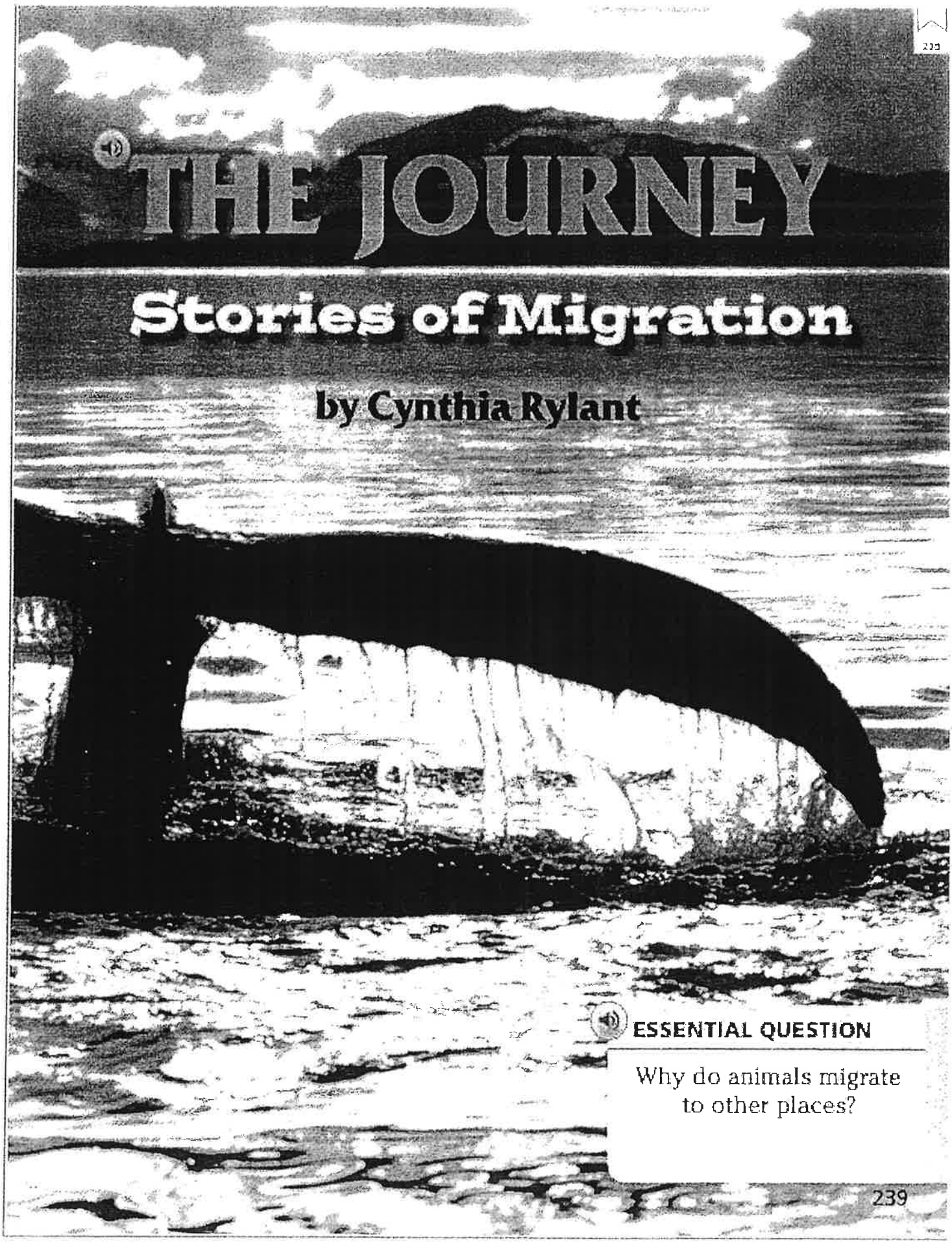


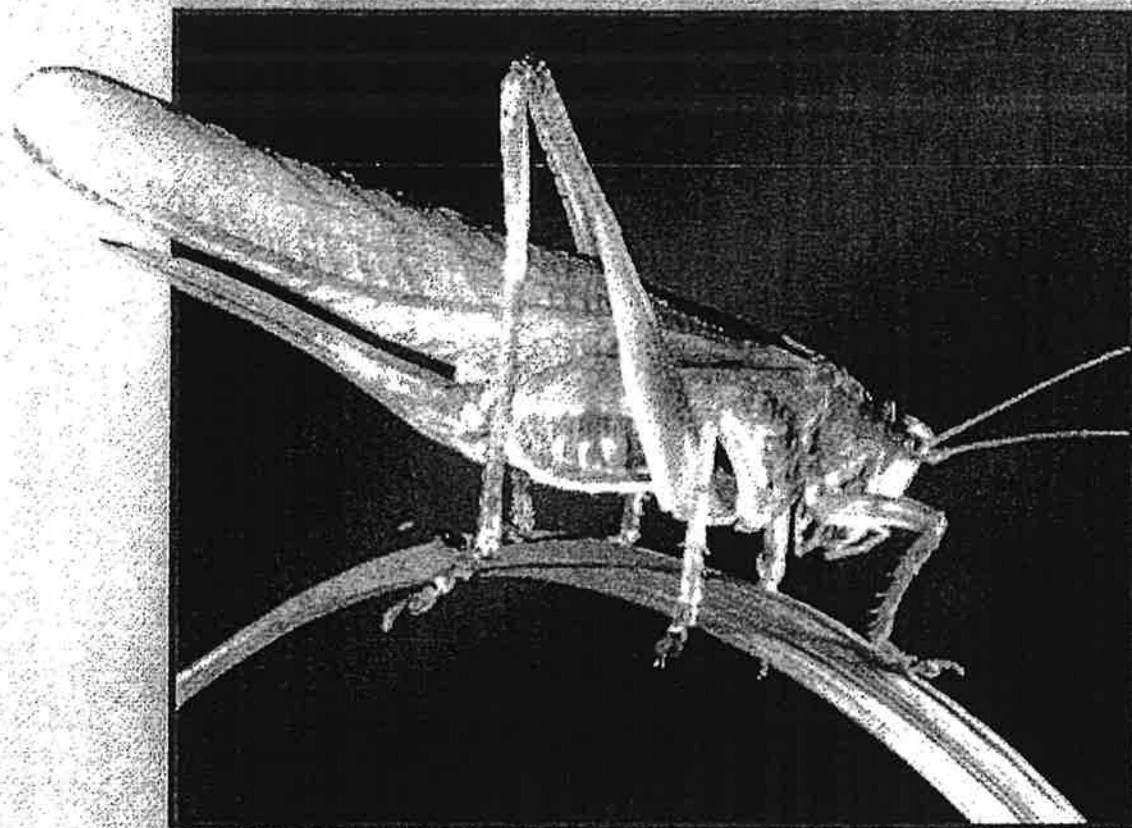
Introduction

Most creatures live out their lives in the places where they are born. The tiny mouse runs in the fields where his mother ran. The gray squirrel lives in the same tall trees all her life. The cow stays on the farm.

But there are some creatures who do not stay where they are born, who cannot stay. These are the creatures who migrate. Their lives will be spent moving from one place to another. Some will migrate to survive. Some will migrate to create new life. All will be remarkable.

Here are the stories of two of these remarkable travelers—so different from each other but so alike in one profound way: Each must *move*.

The Locusts

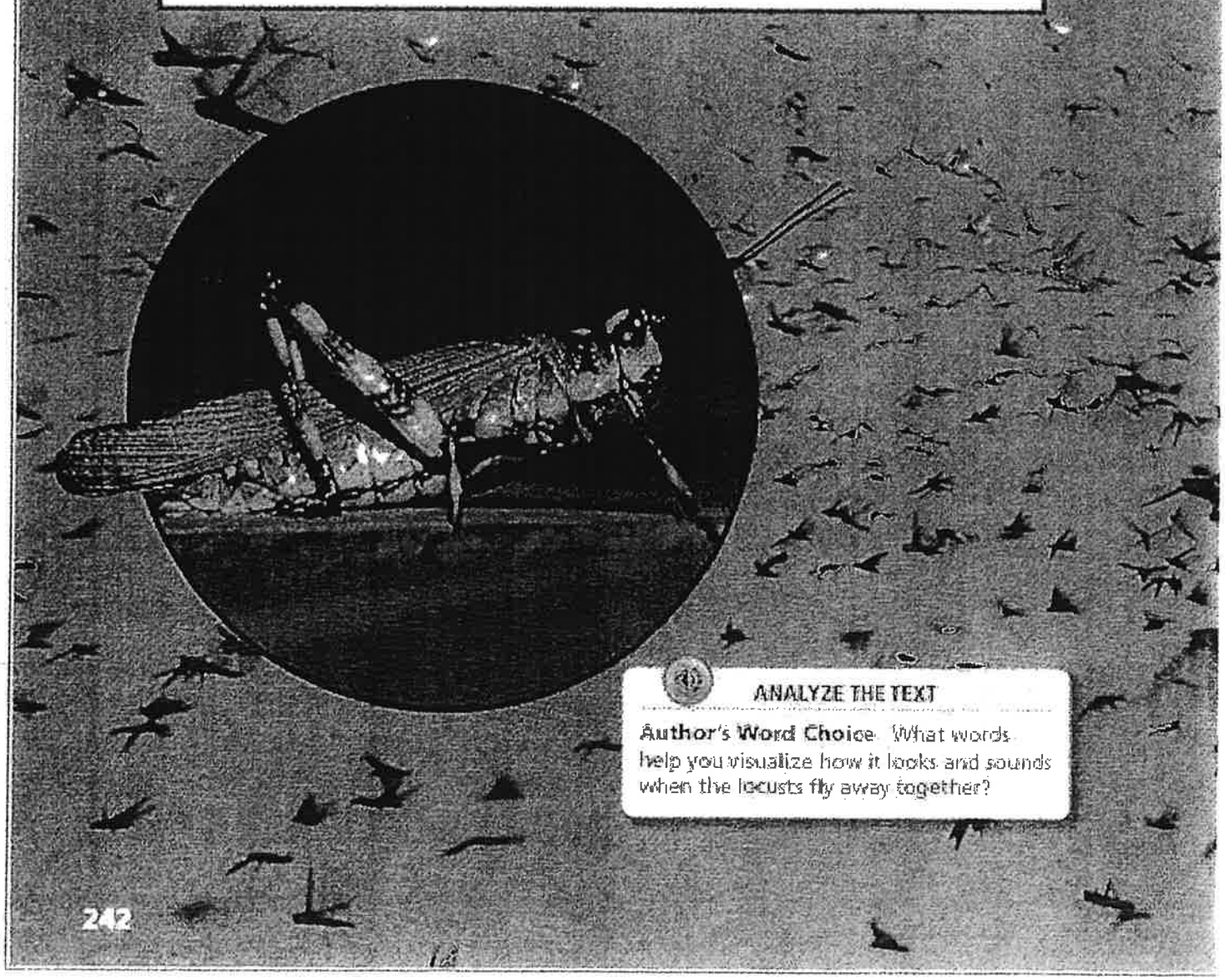


There are few migrations as dramatic and frightening as when the desert locusts are moving across Africa. These insects are actually young grasshoppers, and grasshoppers usually do not travel.

But sometimes too many grasshopper eggs are laid in one small area, and when the grasshoppers are born, there isn't enough food. The grasshoppers now have only one choice for survival: to migrate in search of vegetation.

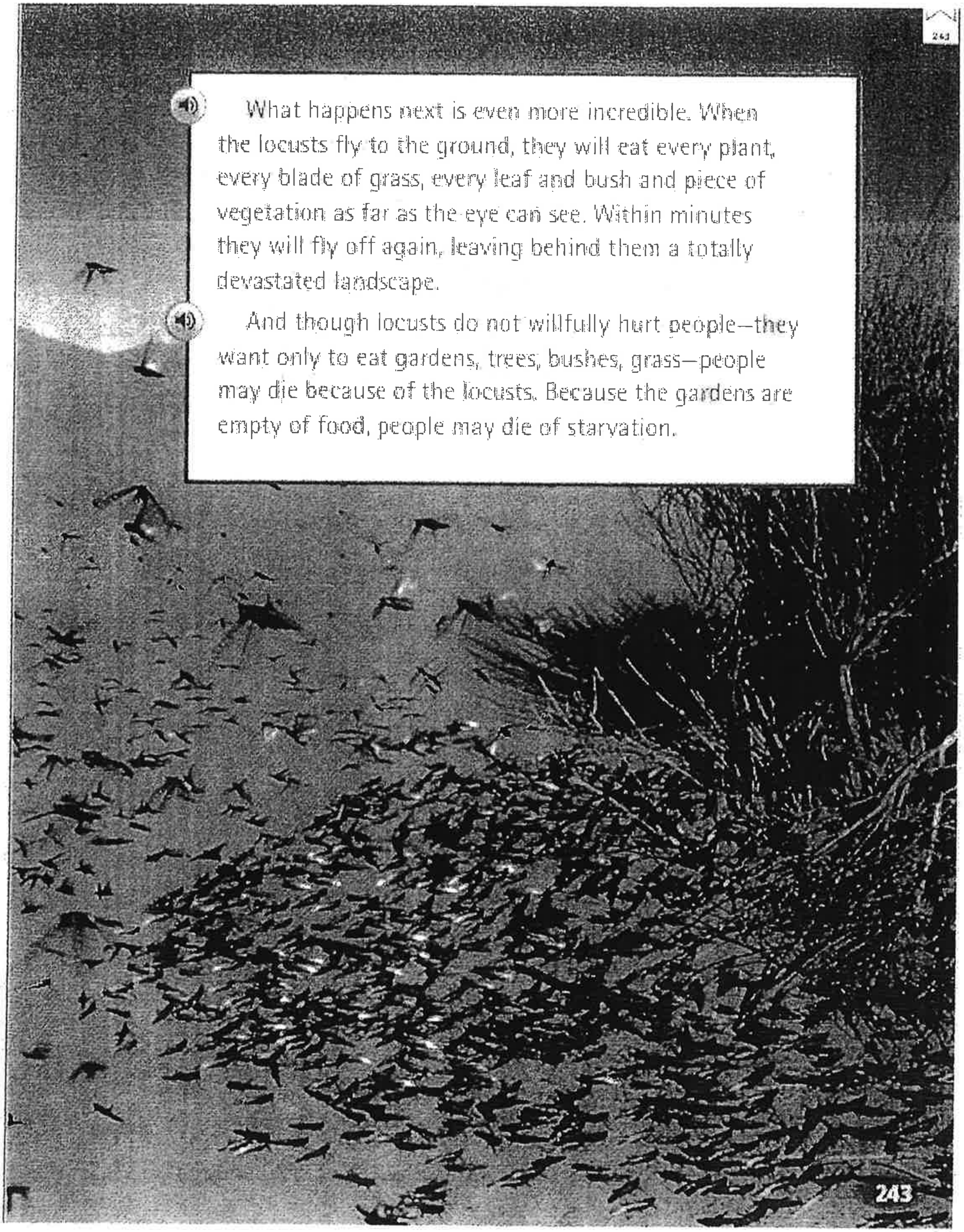
And so these grasshoppers will begin changing. Their bodies will turn from light green to dark yellow or red. Their antennae will grow short rather than long. And when they rise up to fly together by the *billions*, they will be grasshoppers no more. They will be locusts.

A cloud of desert locusts in the sky is an unbelievable sight. There are so many locusts that they block out the sun. It seems like night. And in the sudden darkness there is a terrible thunderous noise. It is the noise of a billion wings.



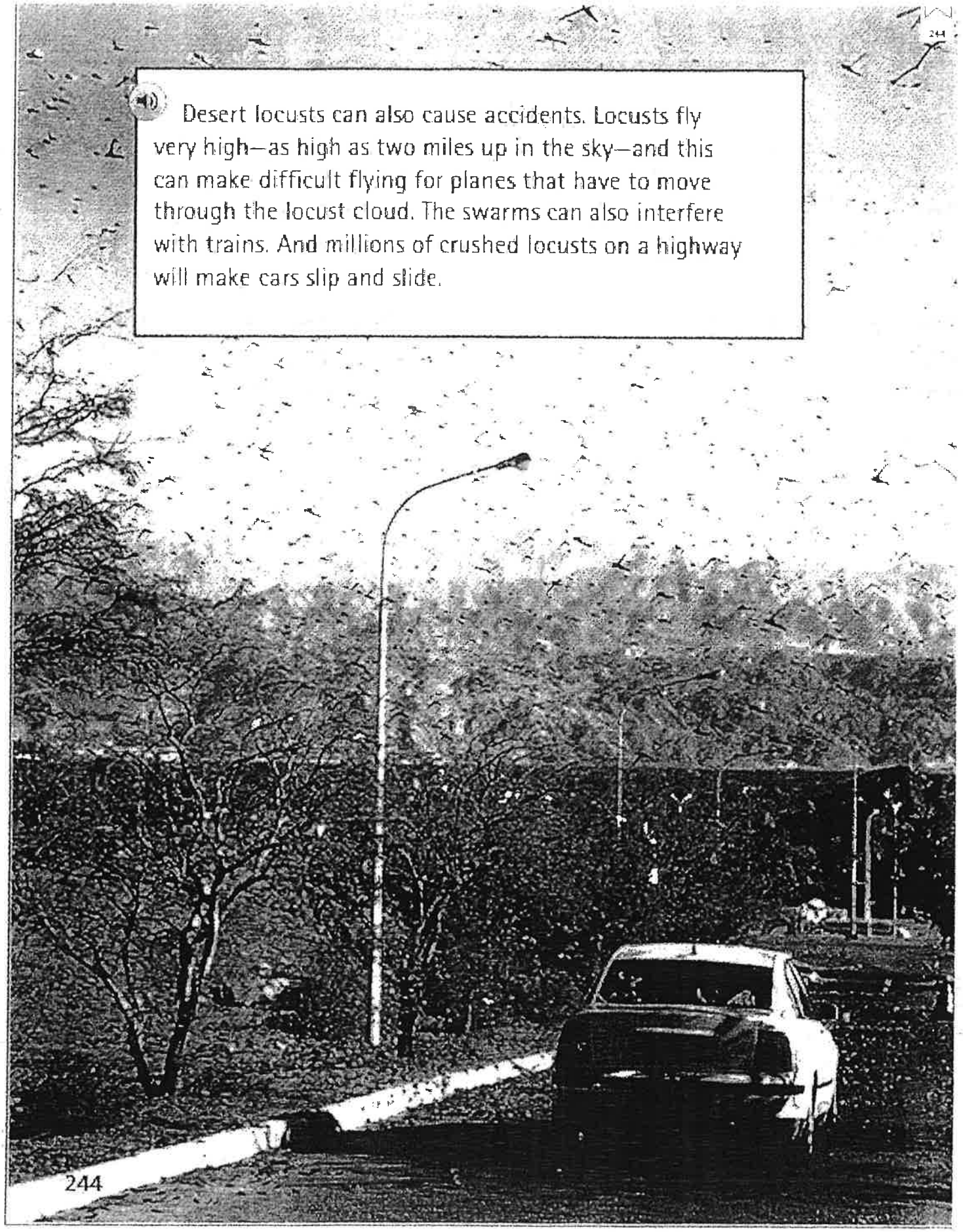
ANALYZE THE TEXT

Author's Word Choice What words help you visualize how it looks and sounds when the locusts fly away together?



What happens next is even more incredible. When the locusts fly to the ground, they will eat every plant, every blade of grass, every leaf and bush and piece of vegetation as far as the eye can see. Within minutes they will fly off again, leaving behind them a totally devastated landscape.

And though locusts do not willfully hurt people—they want only to eat gardens, trees, bushes, grass—people may die because of the locusts. Because the gardens are empty of food, people may die of starvation.


Desert locusts can also cause accidents. Locusts fly very high—as high as two miles up in the sky—and this can make difficult flying for planes that have to move through the locust cloud. The swarms can also interfere with trains. And millions of crushed locusts on a highway will make cars slip and slide.
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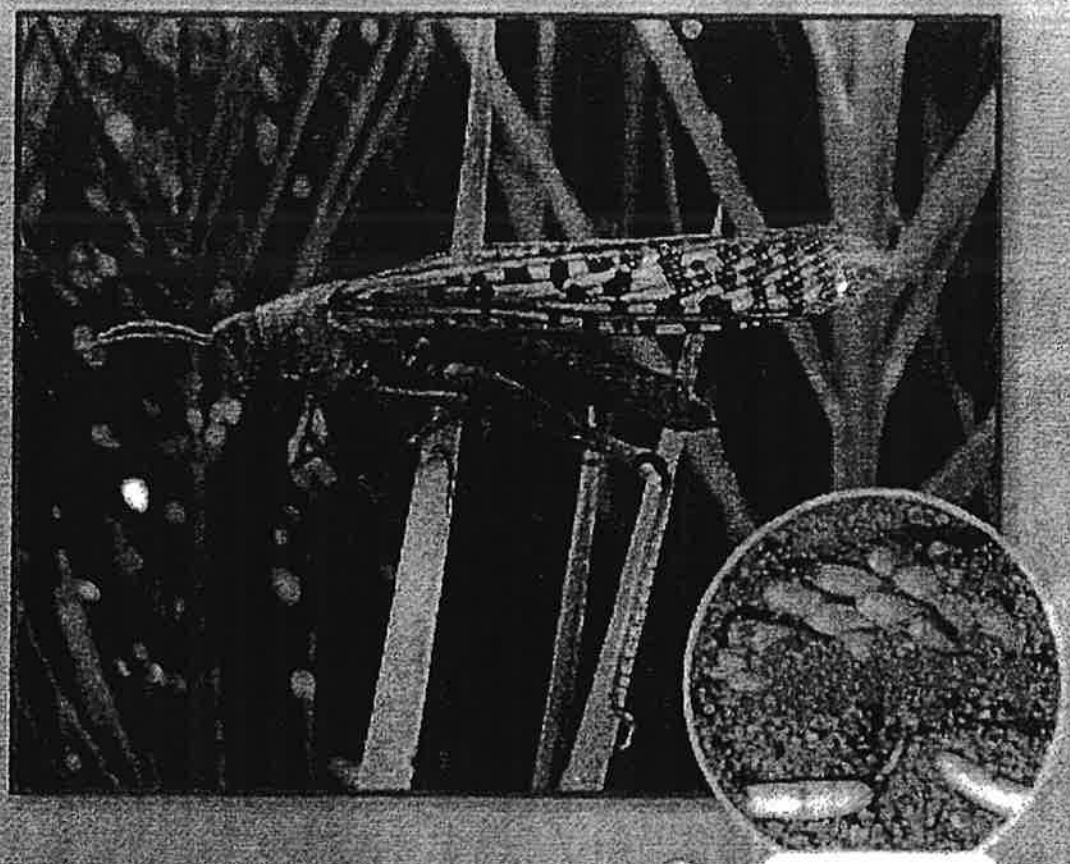
There are many stories in history about the terrible devastation of locust plagues. It is written that in ancient times, one locust swarm covered 2,000 square miles.

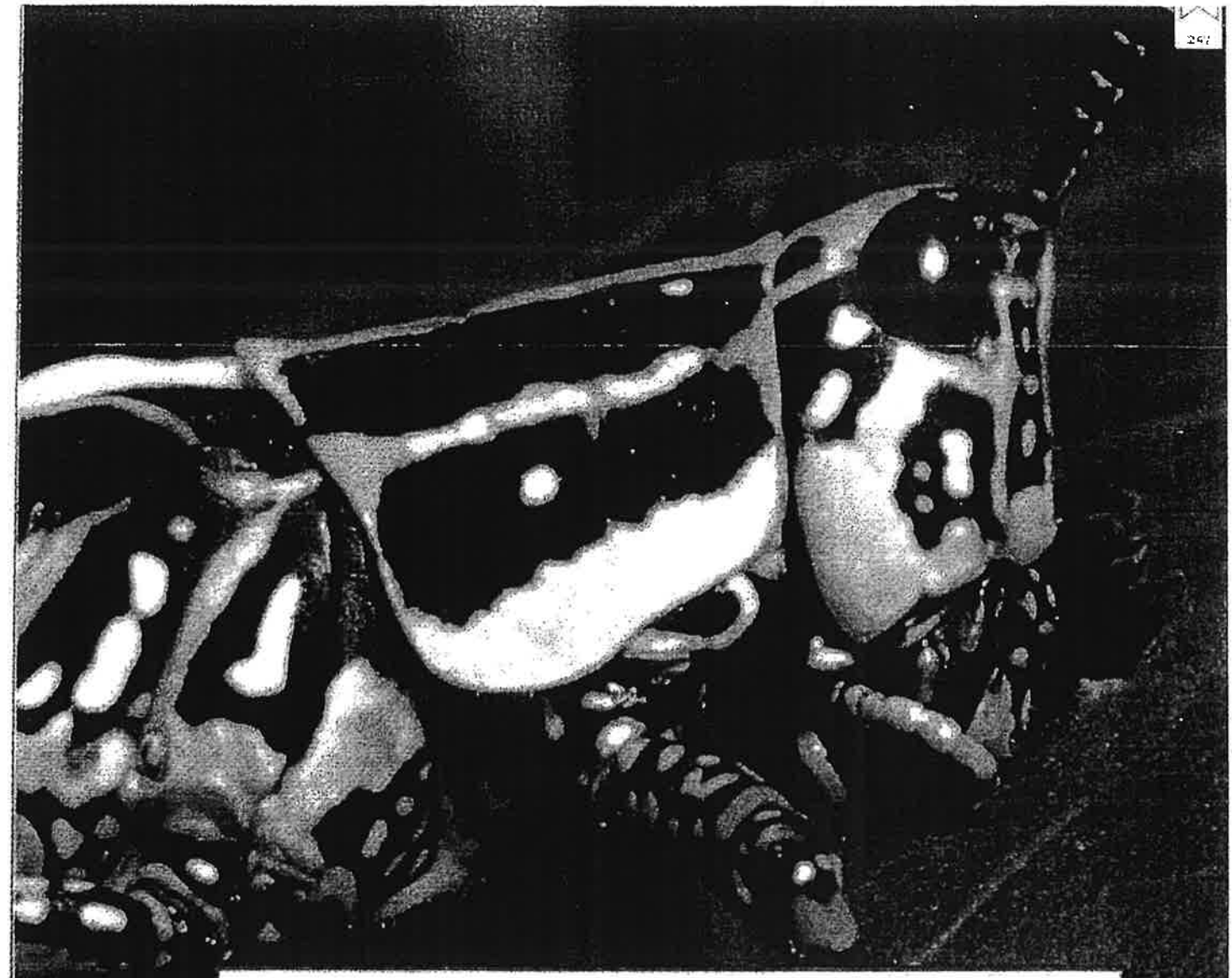
The swarms today are not nearly as large as that. But they can still be quite big, often as much as one hundred square miles. Imagine so many insects in the sky!



locust eggs

As the locusts migrate in search of food, they ride the winds from one area of rainfall to the next. (There is always more food where it rains.) They travel on sunny mornings and stop in late afternoon to roost for the night.

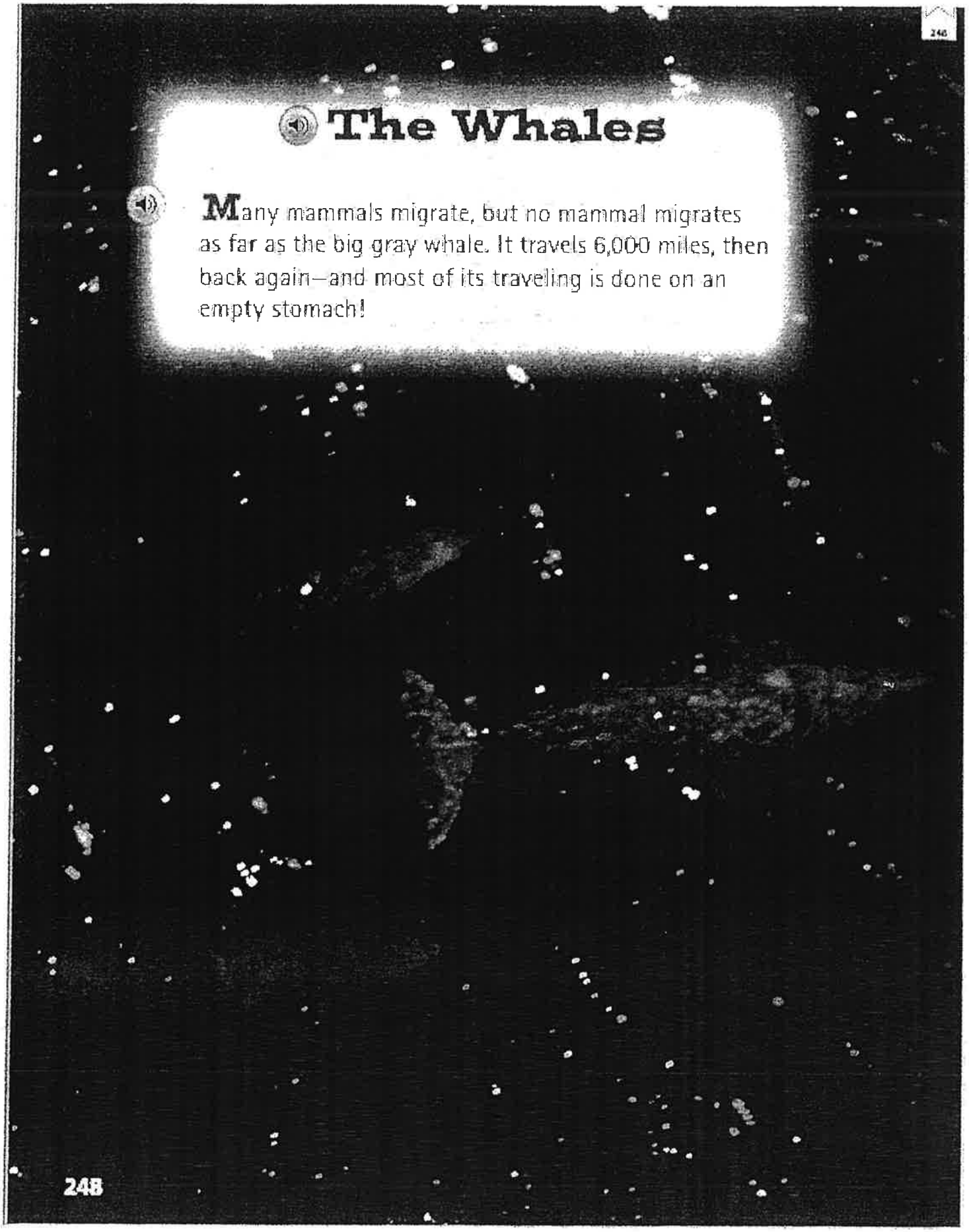
When they reach a rainy area, they mate and die. Then their eggs will hatch and a new swarm of locusts begins moving. This will happen again and again until one day a swarm will return to the same place where the very first locusts began.



And if the eggs laid are not too many, and if there is plenty of food when the new eggs hatch, there will be no locust swarms for a while. Only pale green grasshoppers moving quietly about.

But someday too many eggs may be laid, and the newly hatched grasshoppers will be much too hungry. These grasshoppers will begin to look a little different and act a little different.

Then they will rise up together by the billions—as desert locusts—and they will fly.



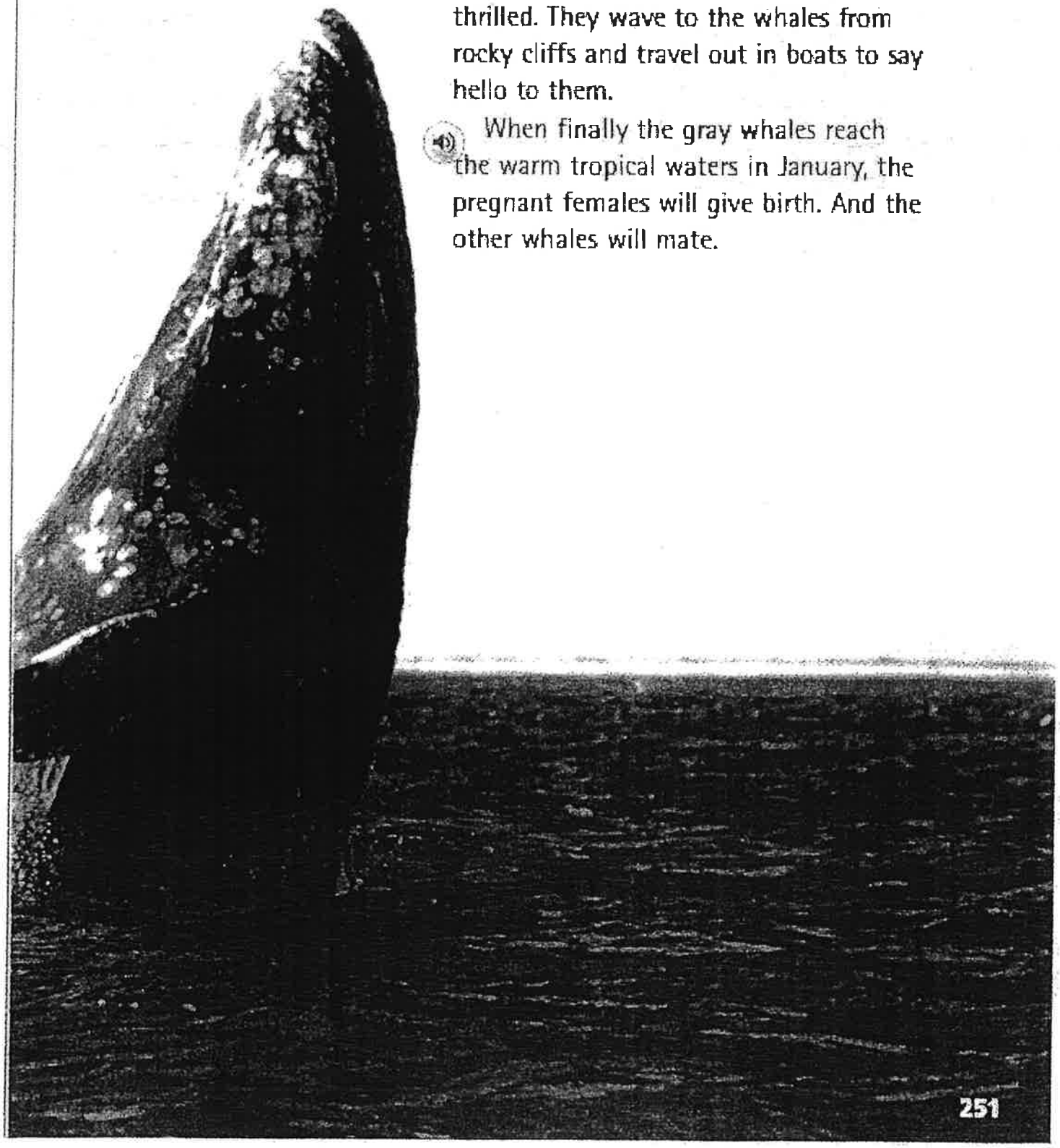
The Whales

Many mammals migrate, but no mammal migrates as far as the big gray whale. It travels 6,000 miles, then back again—and most of its traveling is done on an empty stomach!

Gray whales love the cold waters near the North Pole because the waters are full of the food they love to eat. The whales live on tiny ocean shrimp and worms, and the Arctic waters are full of these in summer. The whales eat and eat and eat, straining the tiny food through strips of baleen in their mouths. (Instead of teeth, the grays have baleen—long strips of a hard material similar to fingernails.)

The gray whales swim and eat mostly alone through the summer. But in the fall, they will begin to look for some traveling companions, because the whales know one thing for certain: that they must migrate. In winter, the Arctic seas are going to be filled with solid ice. And the whales will die if they stay.

The first gray whales to leave the Arctic are the pregnant females. These expectant mothers want to have plenty of time to reach the warm waters of California and Mexico before they give birth. No mother wants to have a baby in icy water!

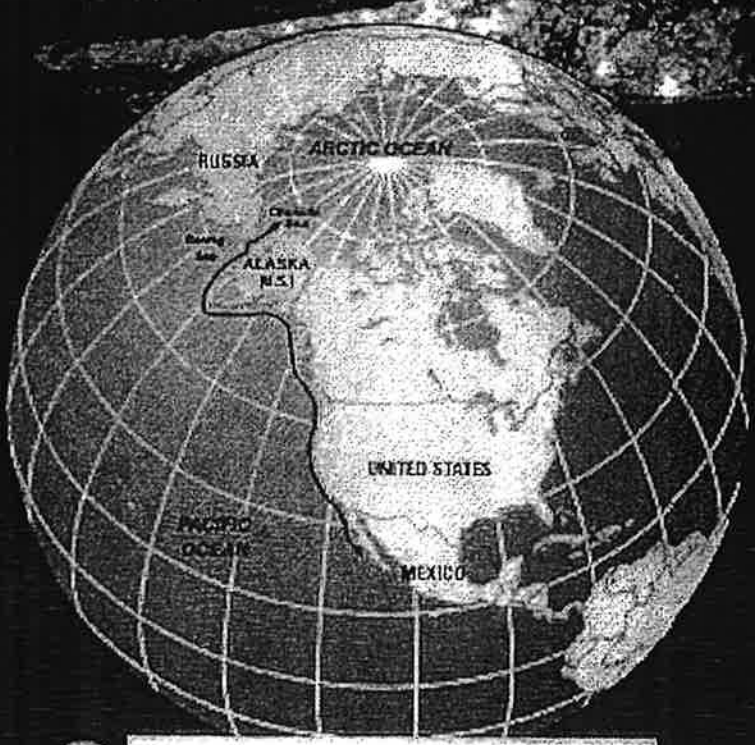


As they travel, the whales often swim near shore, and people along the way are thrilled. They wave to the whales from rocky cliffs and travel out in boats to say hello to them.

When finally the gray whales reach the warm tropical waters in January, the pregnant females will give birth. And the other whales will mate.

With new calves among them, all of the whales will enjoy life in the peaceful lagoons for a while. Then in March, they will be ready to head back to the Arctic for the summer. They haven't forgotten how they love to eat there!

This time the males will leave first, and the females and calves will stay behind for another several weeks. The calves will have more time to grow and get stronger for the long journey.



The arrows on the map show the gray whales' 6,000-mile journey from the Arctic, then back again.

Finally, all of the whales will travel, up past Oregon, past Washington, through the waters of Alaska and Asia, up near the North Pole. How do the whales find these Arctic waters? No one is sure. The whales might follow the shape of the ocean beds. They might sense the earth's magnetic field, like living compasses. They may use echolocation—sending out sounds which bounce back and describe what is all around.

But somehow the whales will travel that long 6,000-mile journey north, and they will find the same chilly waters they left behind. When they arrive in the Arctic, they will separate and enjoy a summer of fine ocean eating.

ANALYZE THE TEXT

Compare and Contrast What is the same about the two trips that whales make? What is different?