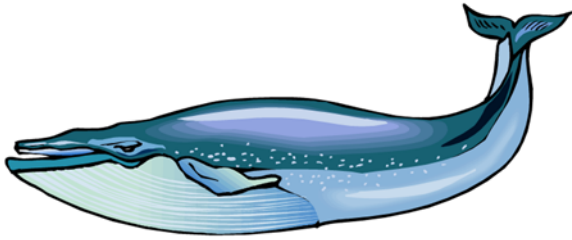


Name _____

Ocean Giants: The Largest Creatures Beneath the Waves



Did you know that the world's oceans are home to some of the most massive and awe-inspiring creatures on Earth? These ocean giants are not only impressive in size but also play a vital role in the balance of marine ecosystems. In this reading passage, we will dive into the depths to discover the largest creatures in Earth's oceans, both in terms of size and sheer volume.

The Blue Whale: The Largest Animal on Earth by Size

When it comes to size, nothing on Earth can match the blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*). Blue whales are the largest animals to have ever existed, even surpassing the largest dinosaurs. These magnificent creatures can reach lengths of up to 100 feet (30 meters) or more, with some individuals known to grow even larger. To put it in perspective, a single blue whale's tongue alone can weigh as much as an elephant!

Blue whales are filter feeders, primarily consuming krill by engulfing large mouthfuls of water and then using their baleen plates to filter out the tiny shrimp-like krill. Despite their enormous size, they feed on some of the smallest creatures in the ocean. These gentle giants are found in oceans worldwide, but their populations have been significantly impacted by historical whaling, and conservation efforts are ongoing to protect them.

The Lion's Mane Jellyfish: The Largest Animal on Earth by Sheer Volume

While the blue whale holds the record for the largest animal by size, the lion's mane jellyfish (*Cyanea capillata*) takes the title for the largest animal by sheer volume. This enormous jellyfish is found in cold, northern waters and has tentacles that can extend for more than 120 feet (36 meters), making it one of the longest creatures on the planet.

What sets the lion's mane jellyfish apart is its bell, which can grow to be over 7 feet (2.1 meters) in diameter. This bell houses the jellyfish's body, including its stinging tentacles. Despite their impressive size, lion's mane jellyfish are mainly composed of water, and their translucent appearance allows them to blend into their surroundings, making them challenging to spot.

Now, let's explore these ocean giants in more detail:



Name _____

The Blue Whale

Blue whales are not only the largest animals on Earth but also incredible swimmers. Despite their massive size, they are known for their graceful movements in the water. Blue whales are often spotted near the ocean's surface during feeding, where they use their enormous mouths to engulf large quantities of water filled with krill. Their throats can expand to allow them to swallow huge amounts of water and krill in a single gulp.

These gentle giants have distinctive mottled blue-gray skin with a lighter underside. They have two blowholes on top of their heads, which expel powerful spouts of water vapor when they surface to breathe. The blowholes are located in such a way that the spouts create a V-shaped misty fountain, a telltale sign of a blue whale's presence.

Blue whales are known for their long migrations, traveling thousands of miles between feeding and breeding grounds. They communicate through a series of low-frequency vocalizations, which can be heard by other blue whales over vast distances.

The Lion's Mane Jellyfish

Lion's mane jellyfish are intriguing creatures found in the cold waters of the Arctic, North Atlantic, and North Pacific oceans. Their mesmerizing appearance is characterized by long, trailing tentacles, which can deliver a painful sting to their prey and potential threats.

The bell of a lion's mane jellyfish is composed of a soft, gelatinous substance that is mostly water. It is transparent and can vary in color from deep red to orange or brown, depending on the jellyfish's diet and habitat. Inside the bell is a network of canals that distribute nutrients throughout the jellyfish's body.

These jellyfish are opportunistic predators, preying on a variety of small marine creatures, including fish, zooplankton, and other jellyfish. Their tentacles are covered in specialized cells called cnidocytes, which contain harpoon-like structures called nematocysts. When a lion's mane jellyfish encounters prey or threats, it uses its tentacles to capture and immobilize them with stinging cells.

Lion's mane jellyfish play a role in marine ecosystems by controlling populations of smaller organisms and providing food for some species of sea turtles and birds.

