

Name \_\_\_\_\_



## Whales: Giants of the Ocean

Whales are some of the most fascinating creatures on Earth. They are mammals, which means they are warm-blooded, breathe air, and give birth to live young. Unlike fish, whales do not have gills. Instead, they have a blowhole on top of their heads that allows them to breathe. When you see a whale spouting water into the air, it is actually exhaling through its blowhole.

Whales come in many shapes and sizes. The blue whale, the largest animal on the planet, can grow up to 100 feet long and weigh as much as 200 tons! In contrast, the dwarf sperm whale is much smaller, growing only about 9 feet long. Most whales have a streamlined body that helps them glide through the water with ease. Their tails, called flukes, are powerful and help propel them forward.

Whales are divided into two main groups: baleen whales and toothed whales. Baleen whales, like humpbacks and blue whales, have comb-like structures called baleen plates in their mouths. These plates help them filter small creatures like krill and plankton from the water. Toothed whales, such as orcas and sperm whales, have sharp teeth and hunt fish, squid, and other sea creatures.

Whales live in oceans all over the world. Some species, like humpback whales, migrate thousands of miles each year to find food or give birth. Others, like beluga whales, stay closer to colder waters. Whales are social animals and often live in groups called pods. They communicate with each other through a variety of sounds, including clicks, whistles, and songs. The songs of humpback whales can be heard for miles underwater!

Unfortunately, many whales face threats from human activity. Pollution, ship strikes, and fishing nets can harm them. Some species were once hunted to near extinction but are now protected by international laws. Conservation efforts have helped some populations recover, but others remain endangered.

Whales are truly remarkable animals. Their size, intelligence, and unique adaptations make them a vital part of the ocean ecosystem. They remind us of the importance of protecting our planet's wildlife.

