

Name _____



How Do Whales Move?

Whales are magnificent swimmers, gliding through the ocean with a combination of strength and grace. Unlike many other animals, whales have unique adaptations that allow them to travel efficiently through water. Their large, powerful tails and streamlined bodies make them some of the most effective swimmers in the animal kingdom.

Tail Power

A whale's movement relies heavily on its tail, or fluke. The fluke is large, strong, and horizontal, unlike the tails of fish, which are vertical. Whales use an up-and-down motion to propel themselves forward in the water. This motion is powered by strong muscles in their lower body, giving them incredible speed and endurance. For example, a blue whale can reach speeds of up to 30 miles per hour when it needs to move quickly.

Streamlined Bodies

Whales are built for swimming. Their streamlined bodies reduce drag as they move through water, making swimming more energy-efficient. They lack external features like ears or fur that could slow them down. Instead, their smooth skin and blubber layers help them glide through the water with ease. This allows whales to migrate long distances, often thousands of miles, without tiring.

Special Techniques

In addition to their powerful tails, whales use their fins to steer and maintain balance. Their pectoral fins, located on either side of their bodies, act like airplane wings, helping them navigate the ocean. Some whales, like humpbacks, even use their long fins to make sharp turns or maneuver around obstacles.

Diving and Surfacing

Whales are mammals, which means they need to breathe air. They often dive deep into the ocean in search of food and then surface to take a breath through their blowholes. Some whales, such as sperm whales, can hold their breath for over an hour, allowing them to dive to great depths.

From their efficient tails to their streamlined bodies, whales are perfectly adapted for life in the water. Their movement is not just about survival but also about thriving in their ocean habitat.