

Name _____



What Do Whales Look Like?

Whales are some of the largest and most majestic animals in the world. They are mammals, meaning they breathe air and give birth to live young. Whales come in many shapes and sizes, but they all share some common characteristics that make them easy to identify.

One of the most noticeable features of a whale is its size. Whales are the largest animals on Earth, with the blue whale holding the title for the biggest. A blue whale can grow up to 100 feet long and weigh as much as 200 tons—that's about the weight of 33 elephants! On the smaller end of the spectrum, the dwarf sperm whale measures only about 9 feet long. Despite the difference in size, all whales have long, streamlined bodies designed to glide smoothly through the water.

Whales come in different colors and patterns, depending on the species. Some, like the blue whale, are a solid grayish-blue color, while others, like orcas (also known as killer whales), have striking black and white patterns. Humpback whales often have white markings on their flippers and bellies, and their unique tail markings help scientists identify individual whales.

A whale's body is perfectly adapted for life in the ocean. Their tails, called flukes, are broad and strong, helping them move powerfully through the water. Whales also have fins, or flippers, on their sides for steering. Unlike fish, whales have a blowhole on top of their heads, which they use to breathe. When they exhale, the water vapor creates a spout or spray that can be seen from far away.

Another special feature of some whales is baleen. Baleen whales, like humpbacks, have plates made of a stiff, comb-like material in their mouths. These plates help them filter tiny food like krill and plankton from the water. Toothed whales, such as orcas and sperm whales, have sharp teeth for catching larger prey like fish or squid.

Whales are truly remarkable creatures, with features and adaptations that make them well-suited to life in the ocean.