

Learning Guide



Manatees

We hope you enjoyed learning all about the gentle manatee—and how we can help protect them. Extend your learning with this print-ready Learning Guide!



What's in this Learning Guide?

Get Set to Listen

Answer TRUE or FALSE statements before and after listening to the episode.

Vocabulary

Discussion Questions

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.1, SL.3-8.3

Writing Prompts and Extension Projects

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.1, W.3-8.2, W.3-8.3, W.3-8.4, W.3-8.7, W.3-8.8

Manatees vs. Other Animals: Comparison Research Activity

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3-5.2, W.3-5.7, RI.3-5.9, W.3-5.2; NGSS 4-LS1-1

Manatee Habitat Map: Reading Passage & Map Activity

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.2, RI.3.1, RI.3.2, RI.3.7, National Geography Standard 1, NGSS 3-LS4-4

Save the Manatees

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.2, W.3.2, SL.3.4, W.3.7; NGSS 3-LS4-4

Manatee Math

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.3.OA.A.3, 3.OA.D.8, 3.NBT.A.2, 4.NBT.B.4,

Manatee Movement Game

SHAPE America National Standards 1, 2, & 4

Additional Resources & Book List



The Children's Hour
kids public radio

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<https://www.childrenshour.org/manatees/>



Get Set to Listen

1. Before listening!

Read each statement and write TRUE or FALSE based on what you already know.



2. After listening!

Based on what the experts said in the episode, write TRUE or FALSE.



Before Listening	TRUE or FALSE?	After Listening
	1. Manatees can only live in saltwater.	
	2. Manatees are herbivores and eat plants like seagrass.	
	3. Manatees usually weigh between 800 and 1,200 pounds.	
	4. Manatees like to live in water warmer than 68°F and sometimes gather near warm water from power plants in the winter.	
	5. Manatees are closely related to dolphins and whales.	
	6. All species of manatees are currently safe and not threatened.	
	7. Throwing trash away properly can help protect manatees.	

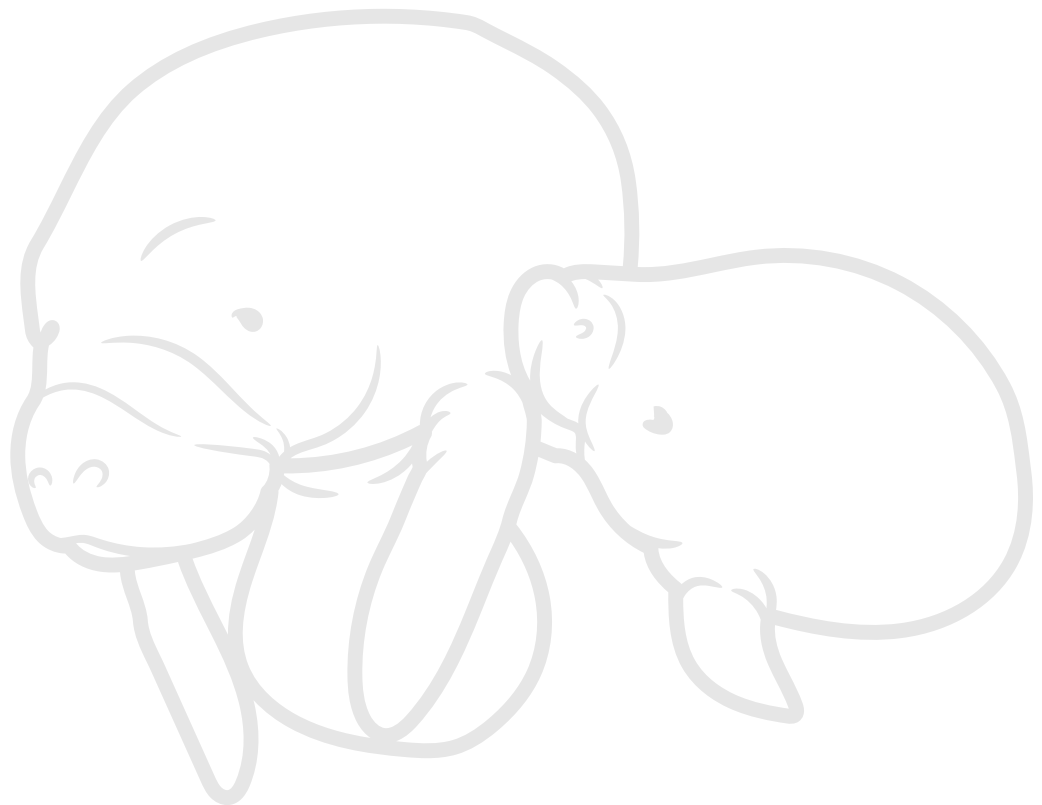
What did you learn?



Get Set to Listen

Answer key

1. FALSE. Manatees are highly adaptable and can live in freshwater, brackish water (mixed salt and fresh), and saltwater. They often move between these different aquatic environments to find food and warmth.
2. TRUE
3. TRUE
4. TRUE
5. FALSE. The closest relatives of manatees are elephants and [hyraxes](#).
6. FALSE. The West Indian manatee, which includes the Florida subspecies, is currently listed as threatened.
7. TRUE





Vocabulary

Listening for Words

1. Make a four-column chart and label the columns “I don’t know,” “I’ve seen or heard, but don’t know the meaning,” “I think I know the meaning,” and “I know the meaning.”
2. Write the vocabulary word in the column that describes how well you know the meaning of the word.
3. Listen to [the episode](#). Note how the speaker uses the words.

Matching Words with Definitions

1. Print and cut apart the word and definition cards.
2. Spread out the word cards so you can see them all. One by one, attach a definition card to each word card.

Writing with New Words

After working with the words and definitions, write a one-page essay or story that uses at least three of the words.

manatee

A large, slow-moving aquatic mammal that lives in warm water and eats plants.

aquatic

Living or growing in water.



Vocabulary

mammal

A warm-blooded animal that breathes air, has hair or skin, and feeds milk to its babies.

herbivore

An animal that eats only plants.

brackish water

Water that is a mix of fresh water and salt water.

marine science

The study of oceans, sea life, and ocean environments.



Vocabulary

conservation

Protecting animals and nature so that they do not disappear.

endangered

When a species is in danger of becoming extinct.

threatened

When a species may become endangered if it is not protected.

extinct

When a species no longer exists on Earth.



Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think manatees are sometimes called “sea cows”?
2. Why do you think manatees need warm water to survive?
3. Why is it dangerous or illegal for people to touch manatees?
4. What can people do to help protect manatees and their habitats?
5. Would you like to see a manatee in the wild or at an aquarium? Why?
6. If you were a marine scientist, what would you want to study about manatees?
7. What are some dangers manatees face in the wild?
8. What surprised you the most about manatees in the episode?

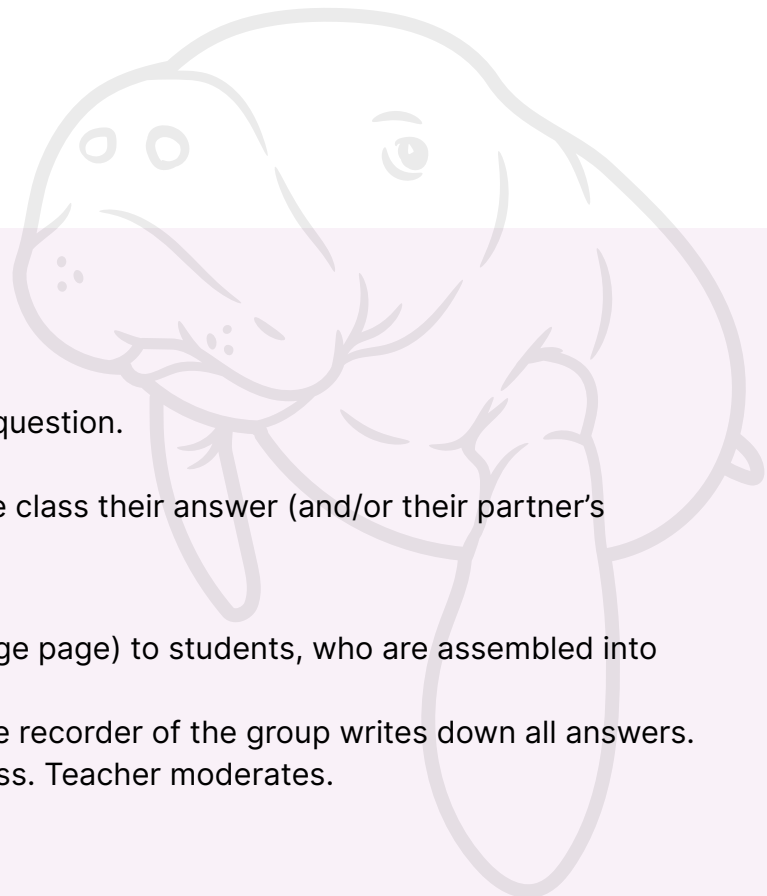
Group Discussion Strategies

Think Pair Share:

1. Individually, student writes down their answer to a question.
2. Students pair up and tell each other their answers.
3. Teacher calls for volunteers to share with the whole class their answer (and/or their partner's answer). Teacher notes key words/phrases on board.

Round Robin:

1. Teacher poses one question (written on top of a large page) to students, who are assembled into small groups of 3 or 4.
2. Students take turns brainstorming the answers. The recorder of the group writes down all answers.
3. The leader reads the group's ideas to the entire class. Teacher moderates.





Writing Prompts

Narrative Prompts

1. Imagine you are a baby manatee. Describe a day in your life. Where do you go and what do you do? What dangers do you face?
2. Imagine you visit Clearwater Marine Aquarium and see a manatee for the first time. Describe your experience.

Extension: Write about the encounter from the manatee's perspective.

Informative/Explanatory Prompts

1. Listen to [The Children's Hour, "Manatees" episode](#) and read books and articles to learn about manatees (see "Additional Resources" and "Book List"). Write an article about manatees that includes:
 - What a manatee is
 - Where manatees live
 - What they eat
 - One interesting fact

Extension:

- Make a manatee facts poster. Add drawings of seagrass, warm springs, or baby manatees.
- Conduct a mock interview where one person asks a "marine scientist" questions about manatees and the other answers them.

2. Explain how manatees survive in their environment. Include what they eat, how they breathe, take care of their young, and how they stay warm.

Extensions:

- Create a diagram of a manatee with labeled features.
- Create a "Manatee Survival Guide."

Opinion/Persuasive Prompts

1. Many manatees are hurt by boats. Should boats be banned in areas where manatees live? Support your reasons with examples.
2. What, if anything, should humans do to protect manatees?

Extension: Create a brochure persuading people that they should protect manatees, and include examples of how.



Manatees vs. Other Animals

Listen

- [Part 1: What Animals Are Manatees Related To?](#)

Research

some of the manatee's closest relatives, as well as some that *look like* they might be related.

- dugong ([article](#), [video](#))
- Steller's sea cow ([article](#), [video](#))
- elephant ([article](#), [video](#))
- hyrax ([article](#), [video](#)-start at 1:19)
- walrus ([article](#), [video](#))
- dolphin ([article](#), [video](#))
- whale ([article](#), [video](#))

Compare

Use this chart to compare manatees to other animals. Put an 'X' if the animal has that trait.

Trait	Manatee	Dugong	Steller's Sea Cow	Elephant	Hyrax	Walrus	Dolphin	Whale
Mammal (live birth & milk)								
Plant eater								
Thick, wrinkled skin								
Flat teeth for grinding plants								
Nails on toes or flippers	x	x	x	x	x			
Have a common ancestor	x	x	x	x	x			
Lives in water								



Manatees vs. Other Animals

Compare

Take a closer look at the animals that share a common ancestor with manatees (dugongs, Steller's sea cows, elephants, hyraxes).

What special features do they each have?

For example, manatees, dugongs, Steller's sea cows, hyraxes, and elephants all have [prehensile faces](#), which means they can grasp and hold things with their faces.

Write

What interesting things did you notice and learn from your research about each of the following animals?

Manatees: _____



Dugongs: _____



Steller's sea cows: _____



Hyraxes: _____



Elephants: _____



Create

Choose one animal and make a poster comparing it to a manatee.



Manatees vs. Other Animals

Answer key

Compare

Use this chart to compare manatees to other animals.

Trait	Manatee	Dugong	Steller's Sea Cow	Elephant	Hyrax	Walrus	Dolphin	Whale
Mammal (live birth & milk)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Plant eater	x	x	x	x	x			
Thick, wrinkled skin	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Flat teeth for grinding plants	x	x	x	x	x			
Nails on toes or flippers	x	x	x	x	x			
Have a common ancestor	x	x	x	x	x			
Lives in water	x	x	x			x	x	x



Manatee Habitat Map

Listen

- [Part 2: Where Do Manatees Live?](#)

Read

the following passage adapted from the [Save the Manatees website](#).

Manatees are part of a group of animals called Sirenia. This group includes the West Indian Manatee, Amazonian Manatee, African Manatee, Dugong, and the extinct Steller's Sea Cow.

The Florida manatee is a type of West Indian manatee that lives mostly in Florida. West Indian manatees live in the United States, Mexico, Central America, and parts of South America. They can live in freshwater, saltwater, or a mix of both.

The Amazonian manatee lives in the Amazon River in South America. It is the smallest kind of manatee and eats plants that grow in freshwater.

The African manatee lives along the coasts and rivers of West Africa. Scientists are still learning about this species.

The dugong lives in warm ocean waters in the Indo-Pacific region along the coastlines of southern Asia, eastern Africa, and northern Australia. Dugongs eat seagrass, and some males grow small tusks.

The Steller's sea cow used to live in the cold Bering Sea near Alaska and Russia. It was a giant relative of the manatee, growing up to about 30 feet long. Sadly, people hunted it until it became extinct.

All of these animals are plant-eating mammals that live in water. Because they eat plants, they usually live in shallow waters where sunlight helps plants grow. Many of these animals are endangered or vulnerable, which means they need protection so they do not disappear.

Comprehension Questions

1. What group of animals do manatees belong to? _____
2. What is the name of the type of manatee that lives mostly in Florida? _____
3. Name two other animals that are part of the Sirenia group. _____

4. Which manatee species lives in the Amazon River? _____
5. Where do African manatees live? _____
6. Why do sirenians usually live in shallow water? _____



Manatee Habitat Map

Make a Manatee Habitat Map

Use the information from the passage to label the world map showing where manatees live:

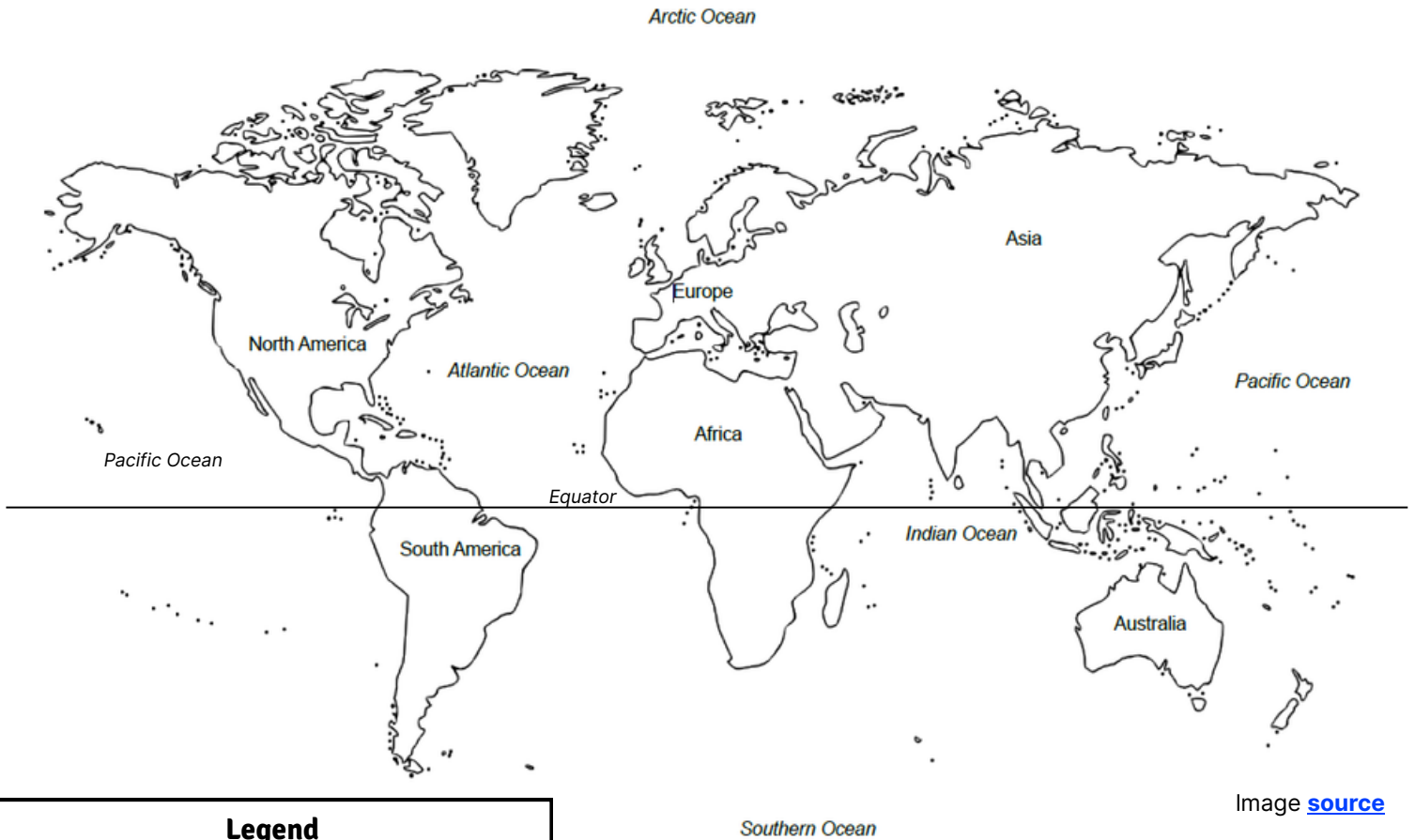


Image [source](#)

Legend



Dugong



Steller's sea cow (extinct)



West Indian manatee
(Florida manatee)



West African manatee



Amazonian manatee

[Video: How far do Florida manatees migrate?](#)

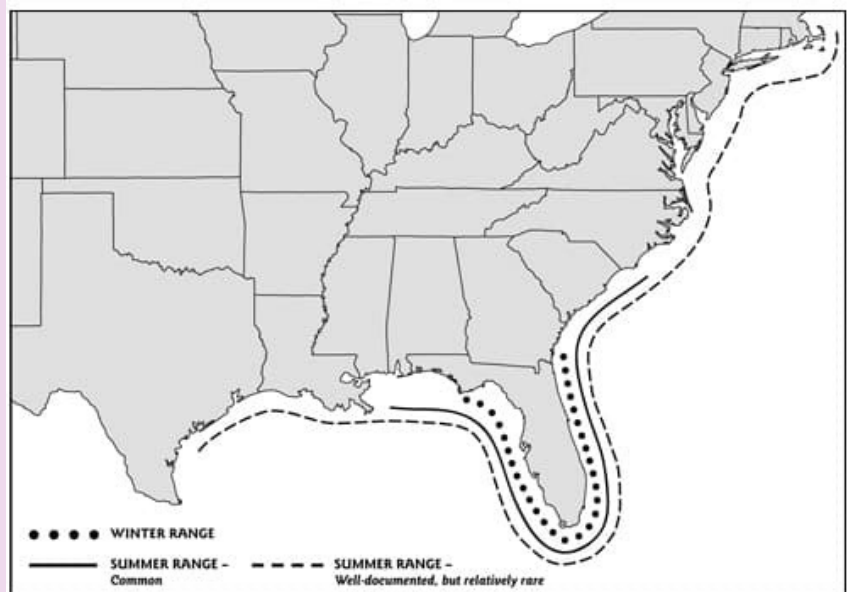


Image [source](#)

Reflect

Why do you think most manatees live near the equator?



Manatee Habitat Map

Answer key

Label

the world map showing where manatees live:

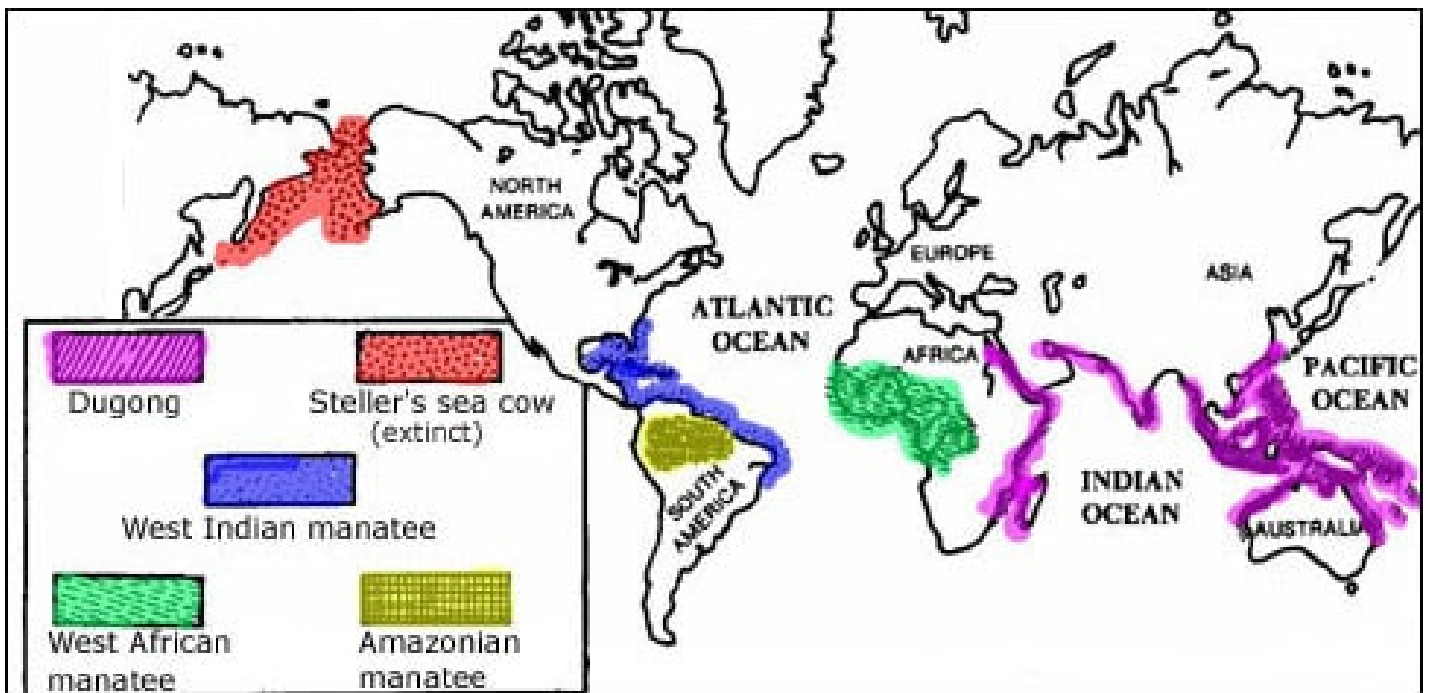


Image [source](#)

Reflect

Why do you think most manatees live near the equator?

Because all manatees that are currently alive on Earth need warm water, and it is consistently warm near the equator.



Save the Manatees

Listen

- [Part 3: Are Manatees Still Endangered?](#)

What dangers do manatees face?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

How can people help protect manatees?

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____



Create

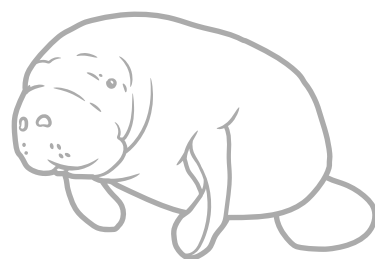
Make a poster, brochure, or record a PSA educating people about manatees and how to protect them!



Manatee Math

Solve the following manatee math problems!

1. A Manatee can eat about 10% of its body weight each day. If a manatee weighs 1,000 pounds, how many pounds of plants does it eat in one day?
2. Some manatees can weigh 3,000 pounds. If a 3,000-pound manatee eats 10% of its body weight, how many pounds of plants does it eat in one day?
3. A baby manatee stays with its mother for about 5 years. How many months is 5 years?
4. Most manatees live about 30 years, but a manatee named Snooty lived 69 years. How many more years did Snooty live than the average manatee?



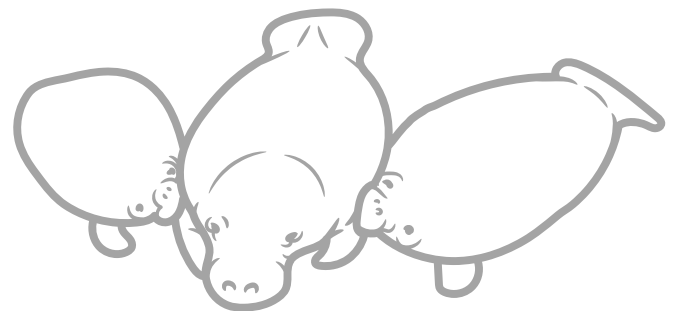


Manatee Math

5. Most manatees are about 10–12 feet long. If one manatee is 10 feet long and another is 13 feet long, how many feet longer is the bigger manatee?

6. One year, scientists recorded that over 1,000 manatees died. If 600 of those died from starvation, how many died from other causes?

7. Most manatee mothers have 1 baby, but sometimes they have twins (2 babies). If 6 mother manatees each had 1 baby, how many babies would there be? If 2 mothers had twins, how many babies would those two mothers have?





Manatee Math

8. Manatees need water that is at least 68°F . If the water temperature drops to 60°F , how many degrees too cold is the water for manatees?

9. A 1,200-pound manatee eats 10% of its body weight in plants. How many pounds of plants does it eat each day?

10. If a manatee swims 12 miles in one day and swims the same distance for 3 days, how many miles did it travel in total?





Manatee Math

Answer key

1. 100 pounds of plants per day
2. 300 pounds of plants per day
3. 60 months
4. 39 years longer
5. 3 feet longer
6. About 400 died from other causes
7. 6 babies, 4 babies
8. 8 degrees too cold
9. 120 pounds of plants per day
10. 36 miles



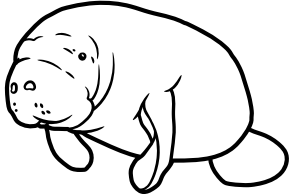


Manatee Movement Game

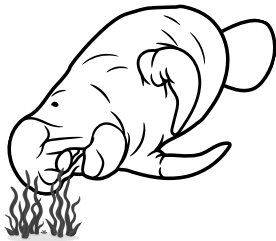
Learn about manatees by acting out their behaviors!

Manatee Moves

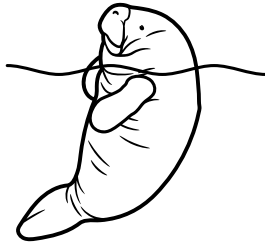
- **Slow Swim:** Move around the room very slowly, like a gentle giant in the water.



- **Eating Plants:** Pretend to nibble on seagrass with your hands.



- **Coming Up for Air:** Pretend to float to the surface and take a big breath.



- **Going to Warm Water in Winter:** Move quickly to a “warm water” area (you can mark it with a carpet square, hula hoop, or taped area).



Variations

- Simon Says
- Freeze Dance

Discuss

- *Why do manatees move slowly?*
- *Why do they eat plants?*
- *How often do they come up for air?*
- *Why do they need warm water in winter?*



Additional Resources

[Clearwater Marine Aquarium: Manatee Rehabilitation Center](#)

Learn about manatee rescue and care efforts from the Clearwater Marine Aquarium, where our guest Andrea Herman works.

[National Geographic Kids: West Indian Manatee](#)

A great article full of manatee facts for kids.

[Britannica Kids article: Manatee](#)

A great article full of manatee facts for kids, including pictures and videos.

[Manatee Facts for Kids](#)

This page will help you learn about manatees.

[Comeback Critter: Florida Manatee](#)

This article from National Geographic Kids describes conservation efforts to protect the Florida manatee.

[Learning to Live with the Manatee Next Door](#)

An article from BBC Earth.

[Manatee Crafts from Save the Manatee Club](#)

Make a tabletop manatee, a manatee puppet, or use old calendar photos of manatees to make a variety of craft projects.

[Create a 3D Manatee Craft Project](#)

Suitable for kids 3rd grade and up.

Videos

[Gentle Giants Struck by Boats in Florida](#)

This BBC Earth video describes the risks manatees face as well as conservation efforts.

[Manatee Rescue! Kratts Creatures](#)

Join the Kratt brothers as they learn about manatee injuries and skin.

[Wild TV: Manatees](#)

Join veterinarian Mark Lowe as he talks about manatees.



Book List



This is a Sea Cow

by Cassandra Federman

The subject of a 2nd grader's school report comes to life to correct misconceptions about herself in this whimsical story, full of interesting facts.

ages 4-7



Mary Manatee

by Suzanne Tate, illustrated by James Melvin

Follow a mother and her calf in this heartwarming tale of resilience and love as they seek safety in the vast waters.

ages 5-9



Manatee Rescue

by Nicola Davies (part of the Heroes of the Wild Book Series)

When her father's hunt leaves a baby manatee orphaned, Manuela decides to try to save it. But can she overcome her own past beliefs and those of her community members to protect it for good?

ages 7-10



Manatees

by Melissa Gish (part of the Living Wild Book Series)

Learn all about the mysterious lives of manatees and what it will take to protect them in this non-fiction picture book.

ages 8-12



Manatee Summer

by Evan Griffith

In his last summer before middle school, Peter and his friend discover an injured manatee they decide to try to protect. Peter grapples with his grandfather's sickness and tests to his friendship while he works to save what's important to him.

ages 8-12