

Learning Guide



Whales

We hope you enjoyed learning all about whales. 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

Whale Stories: Activity

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.2 / SL.5.2, SL.4.4 / SL.5.4, RF.4.4 / RF.5.4, 4.5 / SL.5.5, W.4.3 / W.5.3, 4.4 / W.5.4, L.4.3 / L.5.3; National Core Arts Standards: Theatre: TH:Pr4.1.4 / TH:Pr4.1.5;

Whale Communication: “Sing a Whale Song” Sound Lab

National Core Arts Standards: Music: MU:Cr1.1.4 / MU:Cr1.1.5, MU:Cr2.1.4 / MU:Cr2.1.5, MU:Pr4.1.4 / MU:Pr4.1.5, MU:Re7.1.4 / MU:Re7.1.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1 / SL.5.1

Whale Communication: Echolocation Experiment

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.7 / RI.5.7; NGSS: 4-LS1-2, 5-ESS3-1, 4-PS4-2, MS-LS1-8

Whale Size Comparison: Activity

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.2 / SL.5.2; RI.4.3 / RI.5.3, RI.4.7 / RI.5.7, CCSS.MATH.4.MD.A.2 / 5.MD.A.2, 4.MD.A.2, 4.MD.A.3 / 5.MD.C.3

Migration Mapping: Interpret Maps & Charts / Create an Ocean Journey Mural

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.2 / SL.5.2, RI.4.7 / RI.5.7, RI.4.9 / RI.5.9, SL.4.5 / SL.5.5; NGSS: 4-ESS2-2; National Core Arts Standards: Visual Arts: VA:Re7.2.4 / VA:Re7.2.5; NGSS: 5-ESS3-1

Additional Resources & Book List



The Children's Hour
kids public radio

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



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. Whales are the largest animals to ever live on Earth, including the dinosaurs.	
	2. Whales are fish.	
	3. Whales' ancestors lived on land.	
	4. All whales have teeth.	
	5. Some whales migrate thousands of miles every year.	
	6. Humans have always lived in peace with whales.	
	7. Whales use sound to communicate and navigate.	

What did you learn?



Get Set to Listen

Answer key

1. TRUE. The blue whale is the largest animal ever, even bigger than dinosaurs.
2. FALSE. Whales are mammals, which means they breathe air and have some hair.
3. TRUE. Scientists believe whales evolved from hoofed land animals millions of years ago.
4. FALSE. Some whales have teeth (toothed whales), while others have baleen plates instead.
5. TRUE. For example, gray whales travel thousands of miles between feeding and breeding areas.
6. FALSE. Unfortunately, whales were hunted heavily in the past, nearly causing extinction for some species.
7. TRUE. They use vocalizations and echolocation to communicate and find food.



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.

whale

A large marine mammal that lives in the ocean.

marine biologist

A scientist who studies ocean life.



Vocabulary

migration

The long journey animals take from one place to another each year.

baleen

Brush-like plates in some whales' mouths used to filter food from water.

plankton

Very small organisms floating in the ocean.

krill

Tiny shrimp-like animals that many whales eat.



Vocabulary

echolocation

Using sound to find objects, food, or navigate underwater.

vocalization

Sounds made by animals to communicate.

interference

Noise that disrupts or blocks communication.

masking

When natural or human-made noises interfere with a whale's ability to hear or interpret important sound signals. When background noise is at a similar frequency to whale vocalizations, it drowns out the vocalization, reducing the distance over which whales can communicate, navigate, or find prey.



Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think whales “sing”? What might their songs mean?
2. Why do you think scientists study whale songs?
3. What challenges do scientists face when studying animals underwater?
4. Why might ocean noise pollution be a problem for whales?
5. Would you want to swim with a whale? Why or why not?
6. If you could be a whale for a day, what would you want to experience?
7. How might the ocean change if whales disappeared?
8. What are some ways people can help protect whales and oceans?

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. Write a diary entry from a whale's perspective during migration. What do you see, hear, and feel?
 - Include at least one challenge (pollution, noise, or predators).
 - Write from either first-person ("I") or third-person ("the whale").
2. Write a story about a whale trying to communicate through its song. What is it trying to say?

Informative/Explanatory Prompts

1. What are the two main types of whales, and how are they different? Give examples of each type. Describe how they eat and survive.

Extension: Include labeled diagrams of their body parts, diet, habitat, and habits.

2. Explain why whales sing and how scientists study their sounds.

Extension: Include how noise pollution affects whale communication.

3. Describe how and why whales migrate long distances each year. Include where they travel and why (food, breeding, temperature).

Extension: Add a map or diagram.

4. Explain how litter affects rivers, animals, and people.

- Use examples like plastic in oceans and rivers or trash in schoolyards.
- Suggest solutions.

Extension: Hold an environmental "Teach-In" like the ones that inspired the first Earth Day. Students become "experts" and teach mini-lessons. Invite other classes to attend.

Opinion/Persuasive Prompts

1. Do you think whale watching is helpful or harmful? Include both sides before stating your opinion.
 - Use examples (like friendly whales or boat noise).
2. Convince others to reduce ocean pollution to help whales survive. Include facts and emotional appeals.

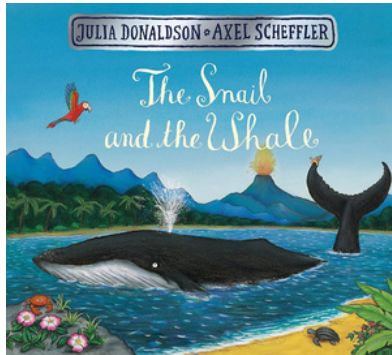
Extension: Suggest simple actions kids and families can take.



Whale Stories

Listen

- [Part 1: Julia Donaldson's Story "The Snail and the Whale"](#)



The Snail and the Whale

by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler

Lyrically rhyming picture book tells a story of friendship and adventure, and proves that even the smallest of us can make a big difference. It has been adapted into an audiobook, stage play, and [short film](#).
ages 2-7

Perform

Practice reading this book or another.

Be sure to check out the "Book List" in this Learning Guide for ideas!

Then, share your story with an audience or record it yourself!

Write

For even more fun, write your own version of a whale story to perform or record.





Whale Communication

Listen

- [Part 2: Types of Whales](#)

“Sing a Whale Song” Sound Lab

Create your own “whale song” using voices, instruments, or objects (cups, desks, etc.).

Discuss

- How does the “noise pollution” mask the whale songs?
- What effects does masking have on the whales?
- What, if anything, can humans do to prevent masking?

Extensions

- Record and compare songs—how are they similar to real whale communication?
- Add “noise pollution” (clapping, talking).

Echolocation Game

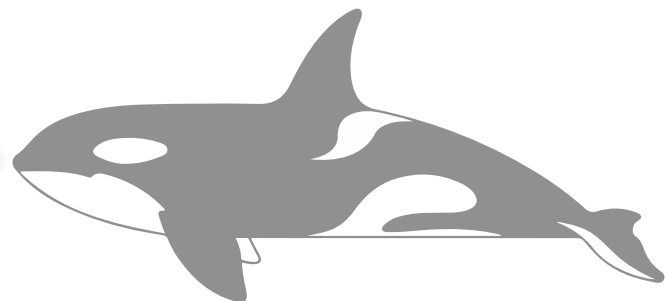
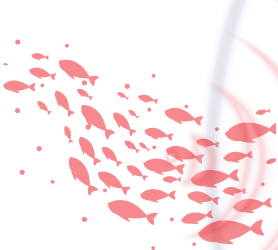
Watch

[Guess How Whales Hear!](#)

Play & Learn

Blindfold one person (the “whale”) who must find others using sound clues (claps, snaps). Play is similar to “Marco Polo”.

- Add obstacles to simulate ocean challenges.
- Discuss how whales use echolocation in real life.





Whale Size Comparison

Listen

- [Part 2: Types of Whales](#)

Read

[How Big is a Whale?](#) to learn about how the different species compare.



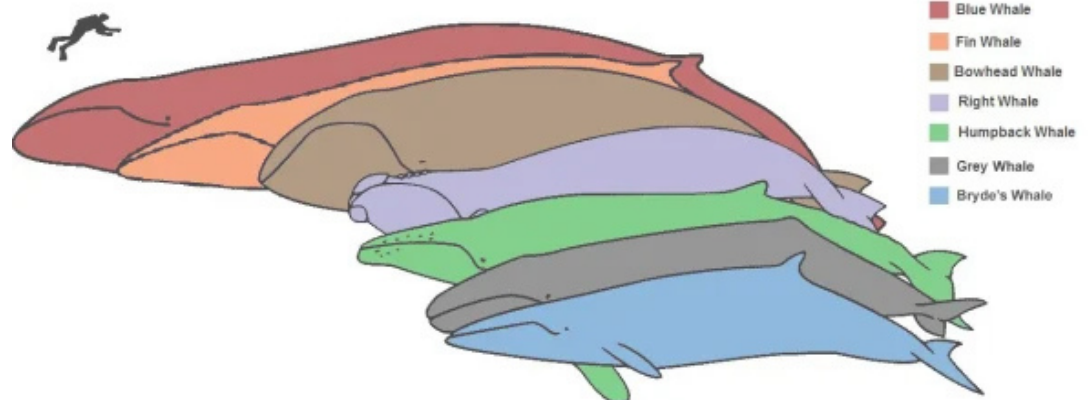
Measure

Go outside and measure out the length of different whales using tape or string.

- *How do whales compare to dinosaurs or school buses?*
 - School bus: 30 feet
 - Gigantosaurus: 41 feet
- *Estimate how many kids would fit inside!*



Type of Whale	Length in Feet
Blue Whale	100
Fin Whale	90
Bowhead Whale	58
Right Whale	65
Sperm Whale	53
Humpback Whale	52
Gray Whale	49





Migration Mapping

Listen

- [Part 3: Whale Facts](#)

Watch

Dana performs her song [“Migration” from the album A Place to Call Home](#).

Map Whale Migrations

Study [this map of whale migrations](#) from the World Wildlife Fund.

Compare

Use this chart to compare whale migration to other marine animals.

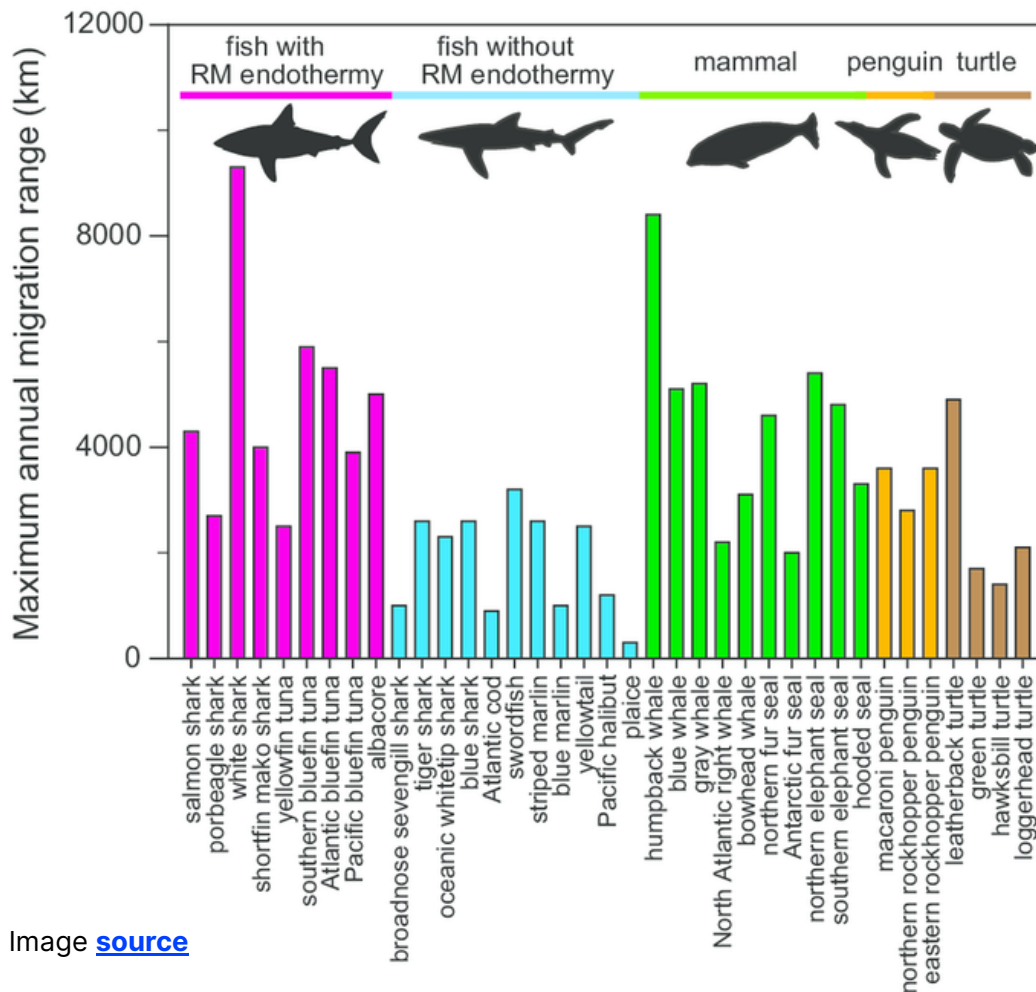


Image [source](#)

Ocean Journey Mural

Create a large mural showing a whale migration route (from Mexico to the Arctic).

- Label stops (feeding areas, breeding lagoons).
- Add dangers along the way (ships, oil spills, nets).



Additional Resources

[Ocean Alliance](#)

Marine mammal research and conservation since 1971.

[Whale and Dolphin Conservation - North America](#)

Learn all about how you can help save these amazing creatures.

[World-First Map Exposes Growing Dangers Along Whale Superhighways](#)

This article discusses the dangers whales face on their migrations. It includes an excellent map of whale migration routes and a video from WWF about protecting migration corridors.

Videos

[The Snail and the Whale](#)

Watch the short film adaptation of Julia Donaldson's popular children's book, read by [The Children's Hour crew on the "Whales" episode](#) (segment 3:45-4:43).

[Guess How Whales Hear!](#)

Learn what the ocean sounds like and how one marine biologist learned more about how whales hear.

[Whales for Kids](#)

Learn all about toothed and baleen whales. Download the accompanying lesson plan for grades 3-5 from [learnbright.org](#).

[BBC Earth Kids: Wild Bites: Whales](#)

Learn all about whales in this video.

[Whale Facts](#)

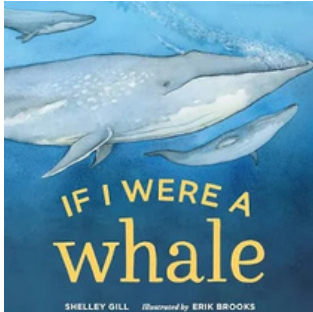
This short video comes with an accompanying [lesson plan from study.com](#).

[Our Planet: Humpback Whales](#)

Watch this clip from the Netflix documentary.



Book List

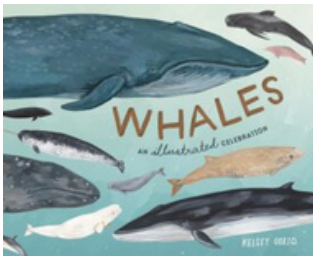


If I Were a Whale

by Shelley Gill

This colorful rhyming book introduces the youngest readers to the different types of whales and their various habitats.

ages 2-6

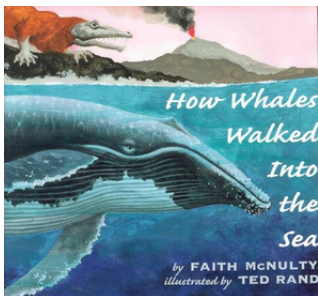


Whales: An Illustrated Celebration

by Kelsey Oseid

This beautifully illustrated book explores whales, dolphins, and porpoises, showing their size and details while teaching about their anatomy, behavior, diet, evolution, and different species.

ages 6+

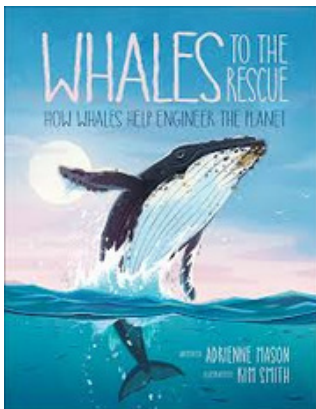


How Whales Walked into the Sea

by Faith McNulty, illustrated by Ted Rand

Learn about the fossil record that allows us to trace the fascinating evolutionary journey of whales as they transitioned from land-dwelling mammals back into marine mammals.

ages 7-11

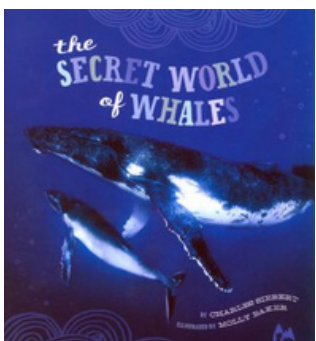


Whales to the Rescue: How Whales Help Engineer the Planet

by Adrienne Mason, illustrated by Kim Smith

Learn all about the types of whales and their habits, as well as how they help our planet, including sections about "The Poop Pump", in this engaging non-fiction book.

ages 8-14



The Secret World of Whales

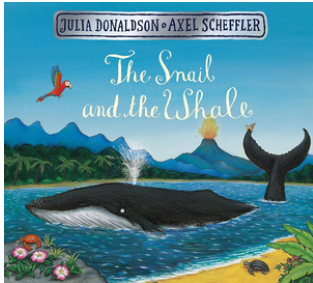
by Charles Siebert, illustrated by Molly Baker

This book explores how humans' relationship with whales has changed over time, from fear to hunting to protection, while also explaining whale science and encouraging readers to help protect them.

ages 8-14



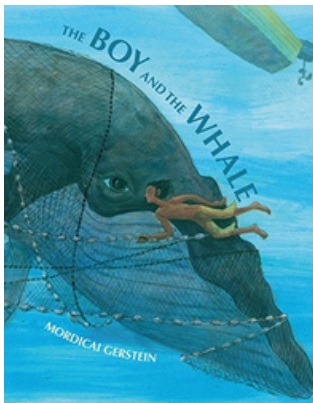
Book List



The Snail and the Whale

by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler

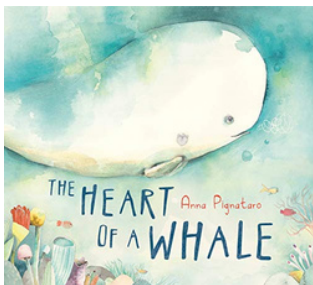
Lyrical rhyming picture book tells a story of friendship and adventure, and proves that even the smallest of us can make a big difference. It has been adapted into an audiobook, stage play, and [short film](#).
ages 2-7



The Boy and the Whale

by Mordcai Gernstein

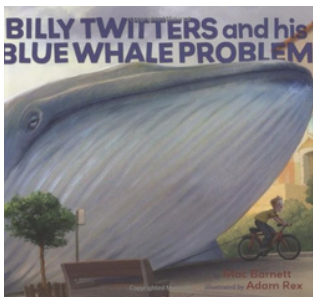
The book tells the tale of a boy and his father, who is a fisherman. One day, they happen upon a whale that's stuck in one of their nets. The boy feels compelled to dive in to save the whale.
ages 4-8



The Heart of a Whale

by Anna Pignataro, illustrated by Kim Smith

This beautifully illustrated book tells the story of a lonely whale singing his song in search of friends in the vast ocean. It teaches kids about kindness, empathy, sadness, and eventually, relief.
ages 3-7



Billy Twitters and His Blue Whale Problem

by Kylie Westway, illustrated by Tom Jellett

The story is about a child, Bruno, who is weary of taking baths and is fond of making excuses. Both of these scenarios, combined with the fact that he encounters a whale in the tub, make this book a humorous read.
ages 4-9