



Science

Genre

Informational Nonfiction

provides information about real people, living things, places, situations, or events.



Text Feature

Graphs are diagrams that show the relationships among objects. They make it easy to compare different amounts or sizes.

Content Vocabulary

mammals

traits

organisms

carnivores

The LARGEST Creature on Earth

by Yolanda Robertson

What is the largest animal that ever lived on Earth? Do you think it is a dinosaur? Guess again! It's the blue whale, and it is still on Earth today. A blue whale can grow to be as long as a nine story building turned on its side. The blue whale is so vast that its heart alone weighs about 1,000 pounds and is about the size of a small car.

The blue whale is just one kind of whale. There are many members of the whale family, including porpoises and dolphins. All of these animals belong to the family of sea creatures called Cetaceans. The name *Cetacean* comes from the Latin word *cetus*, meaning large sea animal, and from

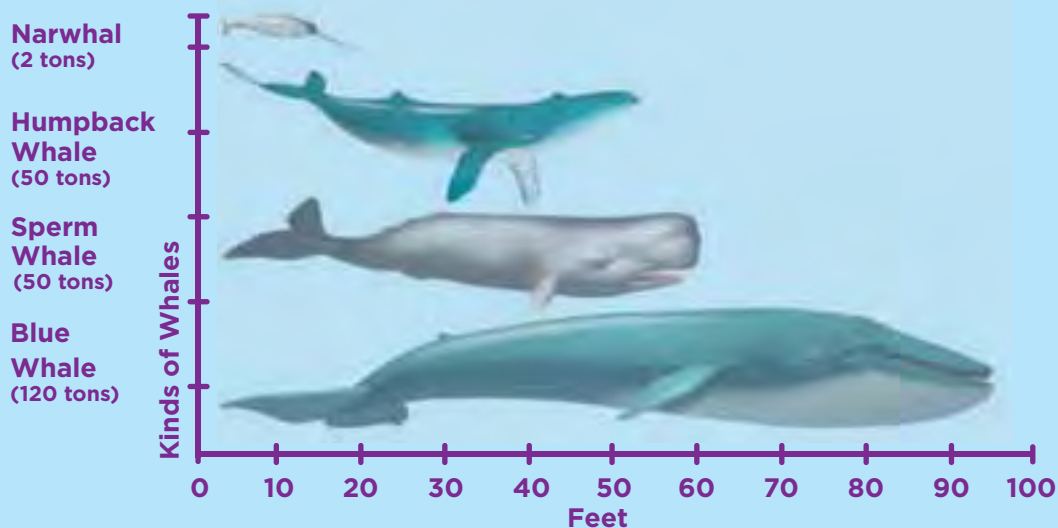
the Greek word *ketos* meaning sea monster.

Despite living in water, whales are not enormous fish. Like human beings, whales are **mammals**. All mammals share common **traits**, such as using lungs to breathe air and nursing their young. Mammals are warm-blooded, have a heart with four chambers, and have hair. They generally live on land, but whales and manatees are two mammals that spend their entire lives in the water. Unlike humans who use their noses to breathe, whales breathe air through blowholes on top of their heads. There are two main groups of whales—baleen whales and toothed whales. Each has special traits.

Big Whales, Bigger Whales!

Reading a Graph

You can use this graph to compare the weights and lengths of four kinds of whales.





Baby humpback whale

Baleen Whales

Baleen whales have two blowholes. Instead of teeth they have baleen plates or comb-like structures that strain food from the water. These enormous whales have hundreds of baleen plates. The largest baleen whale is the blue whale. Similar to an enormous vacuum cleaner, a blue whale will suck in and eat up to 8,000 pounds per day of tiny, shrimp-like **organisms** called krill.

Like all other whales, baleen whales live in pods, or small groups. These whales also “sing” to each other. Many whales communicate by singing. The blue whale’s songs are the loudest, even louder than a jumbo jet. Scientists think the baleen whale with the most complex songs is the humpback whale. Male humpbacks make very distinct types of clicks and whistles. Some of their songs can last for thirty minutes. You can even buy recordings of

humpback whale songs. However, female humpback whales do not sing. One theory scientists have is that males are probably using this whale music to court female humpback whales.

Toothed Whales

A toothed whale has one blowhole and many teeth. The largest of the toothed whales is the sperm whale. Its brain alone weighs up to 20 pounds and is the largest of any animal. Sperm whales are **carnivores**, and they eat about 2,000 pounds of food a day. Their favorite food is the giant squid, but they also eat fish and octopus.

Two other toothed whales that are much smaller than the sperm whale are the porpoise and the dolphin. A quick look at these three creatures makes it difficult to believe that they are related, but a close study will reveal shared traits. One thing that sperm whales, dolphins, and porpoises all do is “fluking.” Fluking is the way in which these whales dive for food. They start by lifting their tails into the air. This helps them pick up speed so that they can plunge down and feed in deeper waters.



Fluking tooth whale

Unicorn or Whale?

The strange-looking narwhal is a toothed whale that lives in the Arctic Ocean. The male narwhal is known for its long tooth, called a tusk, which looks like a long, pointed broomstick. The narwhal's special tooth grows out of the front of its head and can be up to ten feet long. Years ago, before they knew about narwhals, some people thought these tusks came from unicorns.

Scientists know about more than 80 kinds of Cetaceans, and they believe that there may be more types

of whales that have not yet been discovered. So the next time you are at the ocean, watch for whales. Maybe you'll discover a new breed of Cetaceans!



Male narwhal with tusk

Connect and Compare



1. Look at the graph on page 629. What are the differences in weight and length between blue and sperm whales? **Reading a Graph**
2. Based on the information in the article, how is the mouth structure of baleen whales suited for their diet of krill? **Analyze**
3. Think about "The Largest Creature on Earth" and *The Gri Gri Tree*. How do you think Ana Rosa would have described a fully grown blue whale? How do you think it would compare to the description given in "The Largest Creature on Earth"? **Reading/Writing Across Texts**



Science Activity

Research three or four whales not mentioned in the article and make a bar graph that compares the weights of each type of whale.



Find out more about whales at www.macmillanmh.com

Writer's Craft

Figurative Language

Writers choose the words of a poem carefully to paint a picture for the reader. They often use **figurative language**, including personification, to describe the sights, sounds, and even smells of a scene.

Write a Descriptive Poem

Dolphin Watching

by Manny S.

I watched a dolphin jump so high
It nearly touched the cloudless sky.
And when it came back to the sea,
Its foamy splash delighted me.

Today I watched a dolphin dance.
Its leaps put me into a trance.
Sunlight sparkled on the sea's waves,
Like gleaming gems from distant caves.

Today I watched a dolphin dash.
Its dorsal fin moved like a flash.
It skimmed through waves of white
and green.

No better surfer have I seen.

I used personification when I wrote that dolphins dance and dash.

I described the dolphin as a surfer.

Your Turn

What fascinates you about a body of water? Is it the water itself or the creatures living in it? Choose something about an ocean, lake, or other body of water to describe in a poem. Make every word count as you describe a scene or a creature. Use the writer's checklist to check your writing.



Writer's Checklist

- Ideas and Content:** Did I choose **figurative language** to help the reader see what I am describing?
- Organization:** Does my poem build in energy, pulling the reader along?
- Voice:** Does my poem include my feelings?
- Word Choice:** Did I select colorful words that have a strong visual appeal?
- Sentence Fluency:** Does my poem have a pleasing rhythm when it is read aloud?
- Conventions:** Did I use irregular adjectives correctly? Is every word spelled correctly?