

WHALE “TEETH” ACTIVITY

Mammal:	Whales
Concepts Addressed	Nutrient Density, Teeth, Habitats
Materials:	Container for water, sand, beads, combs
Shopping List: [for class]	Container for water Sand Small Beads Combs

Background Information:

There are two kinds of whales: baleen whales and toothed whales. Toothed whales, like the killer whale, are hunters. Baleen whales, like the Pacific Gray Whale, feeds off krill, a small shrimp-like crustacean. Baleen is a material, like the cartilage in human noses, which forms a sieve in the whale’s mouth. The whale scoops up a mouthful from the bottom of the sea, the sand and water strain out, and only the krill are left. Pacific Gray Whales eat 900-2,400 pounds of these tiny krill a day to support their 30-ton bodies.

Instructions:

Fill water about an inch over the sand line in a container. Place some small beads in the sand. The beads represent the krill. Take a comb and sweep up some sand from the container. Shake it slightly. The sand will sieve out; the beads will remain. This is how the baleen works in the whale’s mouth.

Discussion:

It is curious that the largest creatures on the planet eat the smallest food. African elephants (the largest land mammals) support their 12,000 pound (5,455 kg) bodies with grasses. Giraffes (the tallest land mammals) support their 3,500 pound (1,600 kg) bodies with leaves. Baleen whales, which include blue, humpback and grey whales as well as dolphins and porpoises, eat animals, but their food, krill--shrimp-like marine invertebrates that grow no larger than about two and one-half inches (6 cm) and plankton, is tiny. The blue whale, who can weigh 150 tons, only feeds on krill. The whale needs to eat 900-2,400 pounds (1,000 kg) of krill to fill its stomach—each day! All depending on which species you look at.



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