

WHALE BLUBBER ACTIVITY

Mammal:	Whales
Concepts Addressed:	Nutrient Density; Habitats; Anatomy; Energy Systems; Insulation
Materials:	Ice water, Crisco, Paper towels
Shopping List: [for class]	Bucket or bowl Crisco Paper towels

Background Information:

The Pacific gray whale has the longest known migration of any mammal. They feed in Alaska in the summer, eating 900-2,400 pounds of krill a day. When they begin their journey to Mexico in the fall, the mothers weight 30 tons and are coated in a 5 – 10 inch layer of blubber. The mothers will swim 24 hours a day, travel 10,000 miles, gestate a 2,000 pound baby, and produce 6 tons of breastmilk—all with NO food. Even if they wanted to eat, there would be no food available to them because the krill they feed on are only found in Alaska. For 270 days each year, they live off their blubber. Fat is a concentrated food source for the whales. This fat layer not only provides nourishment for them, but also helps keep them warm during the long journey. This activity uses solid fat to show the insulation properties of the whale's fat.

Instructions:

Put Crisco around one pointer finger of the participant while leaving the other one clean. Dip both fingers (one with and one without Crisco) into ice water and keep them there for about a minute. Ask: How do the fingers feel? Do they feel different? The Crisco finger resembles the blubber on a whale. The Crisco keeps the participant's finger warm, just like the blubber keeps the whale insulated.

Have the students rub their fingers together, comparing the fat-coated fingers with uncoated fingers. What's the difference?

Discussion:

Fat has many functions in the body. Most kids know that fat provides a place to store energy, but they may not know that it plays an essential role in lubricating the insides. It protects the body from injury and it insulates it against both hot and cold. This activity helps kids experience the way that fat insulates the body and protects it from cold.



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