

How Big is a Whale?

Introduction: Unless you have seen a full whale skeleton, you may not realize how truly large whales are. This activity can help all ages visualize the massive nature of these amazing animals by measuring them out. This will focus mainly on whale species that can be found in the Gulf of Maine but a few other species are included for comparison.

Background: All whales, dolphins, and porpoises make up a group of marine mammals called cetaceans, scientifically classified in the Order *Cetacea*. From there, *Cetacea* can be broken down into two different types – whales that have teeth (*Odontocetes*) and whales that have baleen (*Mysticetes*), a structure that helps them feed by filtering their food from the seawater. Generally speaking, mysticetes are larger than most odontocetes. The largest animal in the world is the blue whale at around 100 feet long – that is about 2 school buses!

While also being one of the largest animals on the planet, whales also play a very important role in nature. They are vital in our ecosystem as key fertilizers for phytoplankton. Phytoplankton are little plants that live in our oceans and create oxygen. They get their nutrients from whales pooping at the oceans surface. Since oceans make up around 71% of our Earth's surface, phytoplankton creates over half of the oxygen you breath! As you are out measuring whale lengths and getting fresh air, thank a whale for pooping!

Materials:

- Measuring tape (or measuring stick)
 - If you don't have a measuring tape, you can use string and a ruler and measure out feet that way
- Chalk or something to mark the length of each species

Activity:

Using the species information below, measure out the various lengths of toothed and baleen whales in a large open space. Please note you will need at least 100 feet in length! Start at a fixed point and walk or draw out the full length of each whale species, marking the species as you go along. Afterwards, compare the average length of various whale species and note the overall difference in size between baleen whales and toothed whales.







We encourage you to practice safe physical distancing and good sanitary practices if you are having neighbors or people outside of your household help. In addition, be creative! We would love to see what you come up with so feel free to share and tag us on social media!


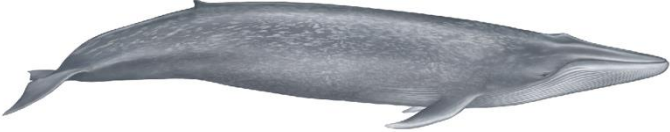
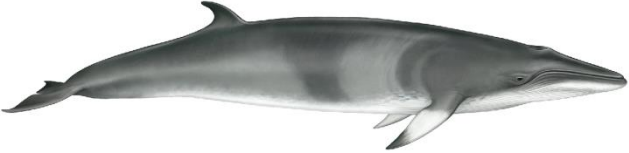
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Species	Length (average)	Image
Bottlenose dolphin (toothed whale)	12 feet (3.7 meters)	
Harbor porpoise (toothed whale)	5 feet (1.5 meters)	
Orca (toothed whale)	30 feet (9.1 meters)	
Sperm whale (toothed whale)	45 feet (13.7 meters)	
Humpback whale (baleen whale)	50 feet (15.2 meters)	
Humpback newborn calf	12 feet (3.7 meters)	

<p>Fin whale (baleen whale)</p>	<p>70 feet (21.3 meters)</p>	 A detailed illustration of a Fin whale, shown in profile facing right. It has a long, slender body with a small dorsal fin and a long, slightly curved tail.
<p>Blue whale (baleen whale)</p>	<p>100 feet (30.5 meters)</p>	 A detailed illustration of a Blue whale, shown in profile facing right. It is the largest whale, with a very long, thick body and a small dorsal fin.
<p>Minke whale (baleen whale)</p>	<p>26 feet (8 meters)</p>	 A detailed illustration of a Minke whale, shown in profile facing right. It has a long, slender body with a small dorsal fin and a long, slightly curved tail.