

Exemplar Read-Aloud Informational Texts – Amazing Whales!

Thomson, Sarah L. *Amazing Whales!* New York: HarperCollins, 2006. (2005)

A blue whale is as long as a basketball court. Its eyes are as big as softballs. Its tongue weighs as much as an elephant.

It is the biggest animal that has ever lived on Earth – bigger than any dinosaur.

But not all whales are this big. A killer whale is about as long as a fire truck. Dolphins and porpoises are whales too, very small whales. The smallest dolphin is only five feet long. That's probably shorter than your mom.

There are about 80 kinds of whales. All of them are mammals. Dogs and monkeys and people are mammals, too. They are warm-blooded. This means that their blood stays at the same temperature even if the air or water around them gets hot or cold.

Mammal babies drink milk from their mothers. Whale babies are called calves.

And mammals breathe air. A whale must swim to the ocean's surface to breathe or it will drown. After a whale calf is born, its mother may lift it up for its first breath of air.

A whale uses its blowholes to breathe. It can have one blowhole or two. The blowholes are on the top of its head. When a whale breathes out, the warm breath makes a cloud called a blow. Then the whale breathes in. Its blowholes squeeze shut. The whale dives under the water. It holds its breath until it comes back up.

When sperm whales hunt, they dive deeper than any other whale. They can hold their breath for longer than an hour and dive down more than a mile.

Deep in the ocean, where the water is dark and cold, sperm whales hunt for giant squid and other animals.

Some whales, like sperm whales, have teeth to catch their food. They are called toothed whales. Other whales have no teeth. They are called baleen whales. (Say it like this: bay-LEEN.) Blue whales and humpback whales are baleen whales. They have strips of baleen in their mouths. Baleen is made of the same stuff as your fingernails. It is strong but it can bend.

A baleen whale fills its mouth with water. In the water there might be fish or krill. Krill are tiny animals like shrimp. The whale closes its mouth. The water flows back out between the strips of baleen.

The fish or krill are trapped inside its mouth for the whale to eat.

Some whales, like killer whales, hunt in groups to catch their food. These groups are called pods. A whale mother and her children, and even her grandchildren sometimes live in one pod.

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