

CURIOSITY AT HOME

WHALE FEEDING



Did you know that whales feed in two different ways? There are toothed whales, called Odontocetes, such as orca and sperm whales, as well as baleen whales, called Mysticetes, such as grey and humpback whales.

Can you find what type of food each kind of whale likes based on how it eats?

MATERIALS

- Large container that holds water, filled half way with water, such as baking pan or large bowl
- Something to represent plankton, such as parsley, grass, or pieces of leaves
- Something to represent fish, such as small plastic toys, candy, large cereal pieces, or packing peanuts
- Something to represent baleen whales, such as fine-tooth comb or toothbrush
- Something to represent toothed whales, such as tweezers, binder clips, or chopsticks
- Activity location that can get a little wet
- Cups
- Stopwatch or other time keeping device

PROCEDURE

- Fill a large container halfway with water. Drop in “plankton” and “fish” and scatter around.
- Decide which type of whale to be first. Toothed whales get tweezers as teeth and baleen whales get a comb as baleen.
- Time out 30 seconds and collect as much food as you can and place it into your cup. **Note: it's going to get wet and fun!**
- Take note of which food source you got more of and which was easier to catch.
- Switch feeding mechanisms and try again.

Experiment continued on next page...



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Odontocetes



Mysticetes

WHAT'S HAPPENING

This activity shows that whales evolved two different methods for feeding. Toothed whales, such as orcas use their teeth to catch bigger food like fish. They are fast and agile swimmers in order to swim after and catch this kind of food. Baleen whales, such as humpback whales, use their filter to scoop up and trap tiny organisms called plankton, like krill. Baleen is made of the same material as your hair or fingernails and it acts just like a broom or coffee filter. These bigger, slower moving whales take large gulps of water and push it out through their baleen, which traps the plankton like a filter. They use their powerful tongues to lick their lips and baleen and swallow their food.



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K-2 EXPLORATION

Here are some questions you can use to explore together:

- Which tool is easier to pick up the big food? Which tool is easier to pick up the small food?
- Intentionally have each whale try to eat the “wrong” food with each feeding structure to test your ideas.
- What do we eat? Are we more like a toothed whale or baleen whale?
- What happens if we comb the small food fast? Slow?



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