

# Whales

Heather Rising



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## What Are Whales?

Whales are mammals that live in the oceans.

Like other mammals, whales are warm-blooded, breathe air and feed their babies with milk.



a humpback whale

All mammals have fur or hair. Baby whales have some hair when they are born. They lose most of it shortly after birth. Adult whales have a few hairs, usually around their mouths and **blowholes**.



There are two main groups of whales – toothed and baleen.

Toothed whales use their teeth to eat fish, squid and even sharks.



Orcas are whales that use their teeth to eat.

The narwhal is a whale with a three-metre tooth, called a tusk, which it uses to spear food.



Baleen whales have **bristles** that hang down from the roof of their mouth. The bristles are called baleen. Baleen is made of keratin. This is the same thing that our own hair and nails are made of.

When water passes through a baleen whale's mouth, **krill** and **plankton** are collected in the baleen. Blue whales can take in over 5000 kilograms of krill a day. That is about the same weight as five small cars.



A grey whale uses its baleen to collect krill and plankton.

Whales have a smooth body with a tail and fins that help them to move through the water. Under their skin, whales have a layer of fat called **blubber**. This fat layer helps the whale to float. It also stops the whale's body heat from escaping, especially in cold water.

Whales store energy in their blubber.

Mother whales use this energy when they are feeding milk to their babies.



A mother humpback whale and her baby move through the water together.

Whales have blowholes on top of their heads, like nostrils. Toothed whales have one hole and baleen whales have two. When whales come to the surface, they first blow through the blowhole to clear any water. This can shoot a fountain of water or mist into the air. When the water is cleared, whales breathe air through these holes.



A humpback whale shoots a fountain of water through its blowhole.