



Ocean STEM Activity: How Do Whales Eat?

How Do Whales Eat?

Depending on the type of food they eat, whales are either classified as toothed or baleen. While toothed whales prey on larger animals, baleen whales eat smaller animals like fish, krill, or zooplankton. Because their food is much smaller, baleen whales use a unique eating method called filter-feeding. Blue, humpback, gray, right, and fin whales are all examples baleen whales.

Baleen whales get their name from the system they use to filter their food. They have plates full of long flexible hairs at the top of their mouth. This brush-like feature is called the baleen. When a whale eats, it takes water containing food into its mouth. Then, the whale partially shuts its mouth and expands its tongue so that the water is forced back out through the baleen. It then swallows the food that remains in its mouth. The size of the baleen depends on what type of food the whale eats. For example, humpback whales eat bigger animals such as fish and krill while right whales feed on plankton which is smaller. So, a humpback whale's filter is not as fine as a right whale's filter.

How Can I Use This in My Lesson Plan?

Summer is the perfect time to try this Ocean STEM Activity in the classroom or at home! Encourage children's natural curiosity about the world they live in by teaching them about biology. Explain how animals have features that help them survive in their own environment. Even different species of baleen whales need different sized filters to trap the food they need to eat. What tools do children use to eat their favorite foods?

By combing through the sand, children will learn how filters work. They will also practice fine motor skills as they figure out how they need to hold the comb when scooping up the raisins. You may even use this activity as another opportunity to practice counting. How many raisins were caught with the comb when you filtered through the sand?

Required Materials:

- Play sand (Item #47047)
- Tub or tray (Item #55582)
- Golden and black/green raisins
- Combs
- Bowl (Item #35830)

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1. Gather Your Materials

Dump your play sand into a shallow tub or tray. Sprinkle golden and black/green raisins on top and cover with sand.

2. Eat Like a Whale!

Use a comb to filter through the sand just like a whale filters through water with its baleen! Scoop up the raisins, or the whale food, with the comb and dump them in a bowl. Kids will love pretending to eat like a fin whale by using a wide tooth comb or like a right whale by using a fine-tooth comb.

