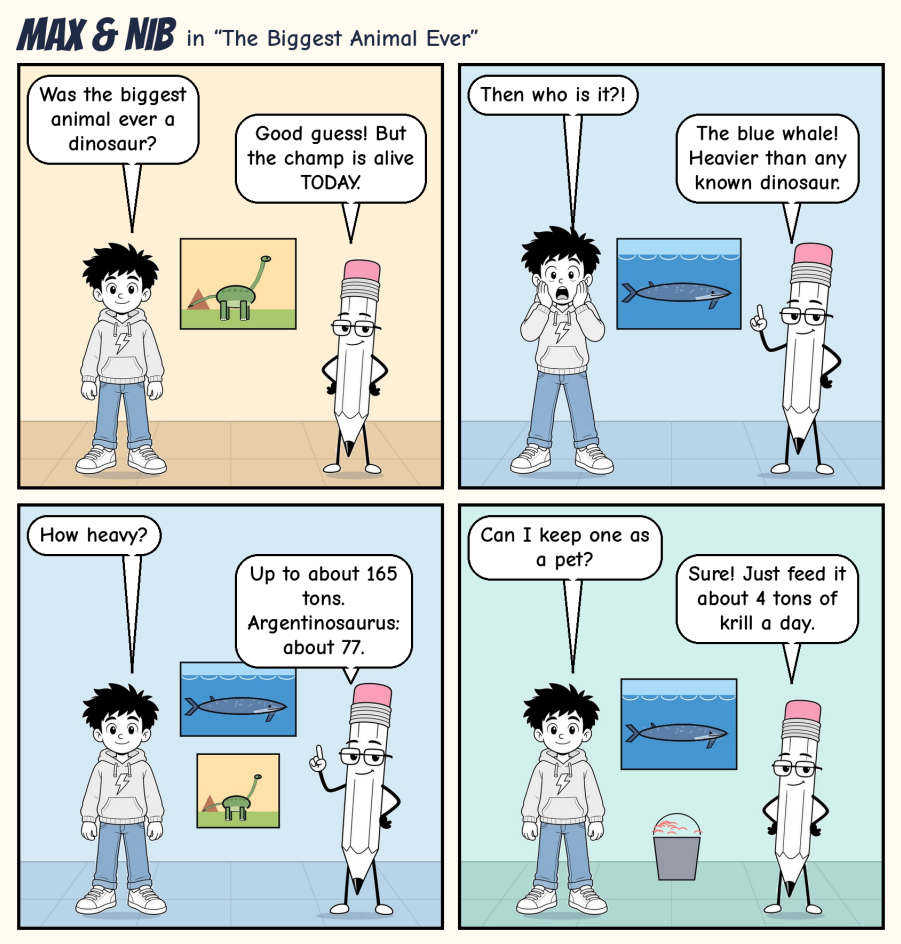


Name: _____ Date: _____

What's the Biggest Animal That Ever Lived?

Animal Science · Grades 3–6 · About 15 minutes · Max & Nib

Cool facts

What is the biggest animal that has ever lived? Many people guess a giant dinosaur. But the record holder is alive right now: the blue whale. The biggest blue whales can grow about 100 feet long, longer than a basketball court, and weigh up to about 330,000 pounds. That is about 165 tons! One of the biggest dinosaurs, Argentinosaurus, is thought to have weighed about 77 tons. Some long-necked dinosaurs were as long as a blue whale, or even longer, but none of them were as heavy. Scientists have to estimate dinosaur weights from fossil bones, because no one could ever put a dinosaur on a scale. The ocean water helps hold up the whale's huge body. Blue whales eat tiny shrimp-like animals called krill, about 4 tons of them a day!

Questions

1. What is the biggest animal that has ever lived?

2. Is the blue whale extinct, or alive today?

3. Some dinosaurs were longer than a blue whale. Why do we still say the blue whale is the biggest animal ever?

4. A big blue whale weighs about 165 tons. Argentinosaurus weighed about 77 tons. How many more tons does the whale weigh?

Show your work

Write about it

If you could swim next to a blue whale for one minute, what would you want to see or find out? Why?

Cool Fact A blue whale's heart weighs about **400 pounds**, about as much as a piano! (NOAA)



What's the Biggest Animal That Ever Lived? — Answer Key

Grades 3–6 · For teacher or parent use

Answers

1. What is the biggest animal that has ever lived?

   The blue whale.

2. Is the blue whale extinct, or alive today?

   It is alive today.

3. Some dinosaurs were longer than a blue whale. Why do we still say the blue whale is the biggest animal ever?

   Because it is the heaviest. The biggest blue whales weigh up to about 165 tons, more than any known dinosaur (Argentinosaurus was about 77 tons).

4. A big blue whale weighs about 165 tons. Argentinosaurus weighed about 77 tons. How many more tons does the whale weigh?

   About 88 tons more (165 − 77 = 88).

Writing prompt: If you could swim next to a blue whale for one minute, what would you want to see or find out? Why?
Accept any reasoned answer for the writing prompt. For adults: NOAA Fisheries lists blue whales at up to about 110 feet and 330,000 pounds (about 150 metric tons); London's Natural History Museum gives up to 180 metric tons. Argentinosaurus is estimated at about 70 metric tons (about 77 US tons), and dinosaur weights are estimates from incomplete fossils. Some titanosaurs were longer than blue whales, so the blue whale's record is for weight. Krill: the Natural History Museum says blue whales eat around 4 tonnes a day.

Sources

- NOAA Fisheries: Blue Whale — https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/blue-whale
- NOAA Fisheries: The Big-Hearted Blue Whale — https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/big-hearted-blue-whale
- Natural History Museum (London): The life of the blue whale — https://www.nhm.ac.uk/bluewhale/ocean/record-breaker/
- Natural History Museum (London): Argentinosaurus — https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/dino-directory/argentinosaurus.html

Cool Fact Even a **newborn** blue whale is bigger than most cars: about 7 to 8 meters (23 to 26 feet) long!

Cool Fact Blue whales are **endangered**. Whaling in the past made them rare, and today they are protected by law.