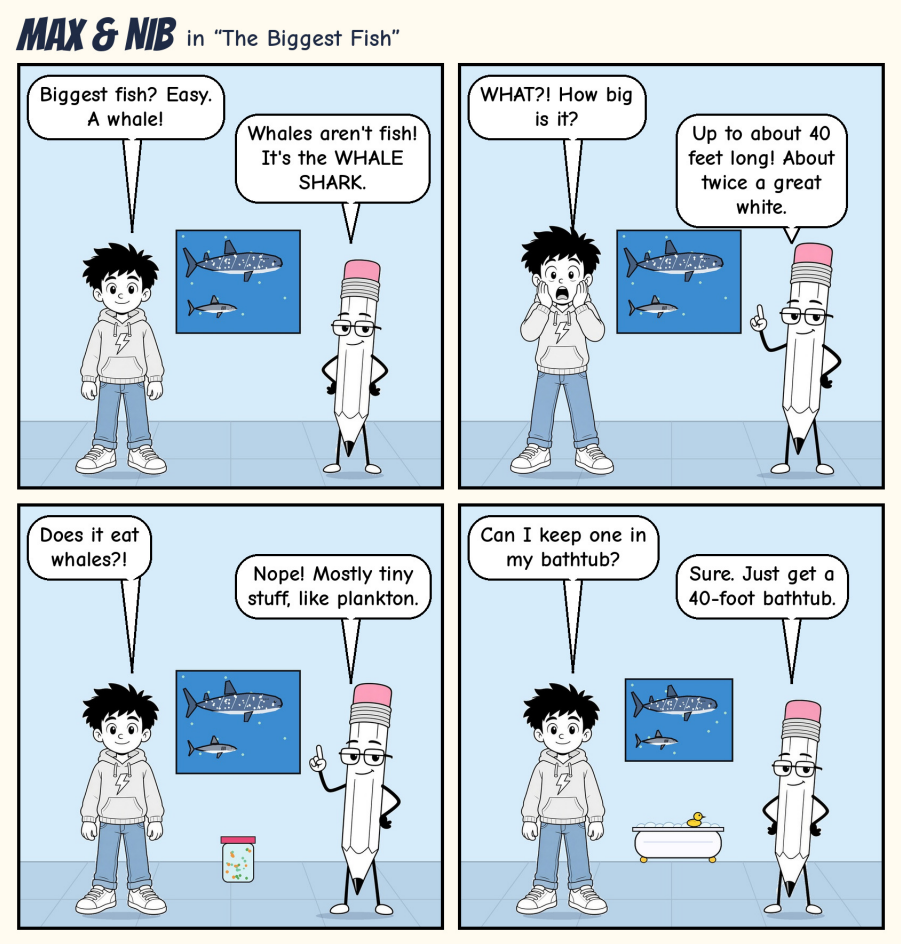


Name: _____ Date: _____

What's the Biggest Fish in the World?

Animals · Grades 3–6 · About 15 minutes · Max & Nib

Cool facts

Can you guess the biggest fish in the world? It is not a whale! Whales are mammals, and they breathe air with lungs, just like you. The biggest fish is the whale shark. It got its name because it is as big as some whales, but it is a shark, and sharks are fish. NOAA says whale sharks may grow up to about 40 feet long. That is about twice as long as a great white shark, which grows up to about 20 feet. Even though whale sharks are giants, they eat mostly small things, like plankton, small fish and squid. A whale shark swims with its huge mouth open and strains its food out of the water. Whale sharks live in warm seas all around the world.

Questions

1. What is the biggest fish in the world?

2. Why doesn't a whale count as a fish?

3. What does a whale shark mostly eat?

4. A whale shark can grow to about 40 feet long. A great white shark grows to about 20 feet. How many feet longer is the whale shark?

Show your work

Write about it

Would you rather swim near a gentle whale shark or watch one from a boat? Explain why.

Word Record **Plankton** are tiny living things that drift in the water. Many are too small to see without a microscope.

Cool Fact Scientists think whale sharks can live about **60 to 100 years**! (NOAA)

What's the Biggest Fish in the World? — Answer Key

Grades 3–6 · For teacher or parent use

Answers

1. What is the biggest fish in the world?
   The whale shark.

2. Why doesn't a whale count as a fish?
   Whales are mammals. They breathe air with lungs.

3. What does a whale shark mostly eat?
   Small things, like plankton, small fish and squid.

4. A whale shark can grow to about 40 feet long. A great white shark grows to about 20 feet. How many feet longer is the whale shark?
   About 20 feet longer (40 − 20 = 20). That is about twice as long.

Writing prompt: Would you rather swim near a gentle whale shark or watch one from a boat? Explain why. Accept any reasoned answer for the writing prompt. For adults: NOAA's Ocean Service says whale sharks (Rhincodon typus) are the biggest fish and may grow up to about 40 feet (12 m) by some estimates; Smithsonian Ocean notes they have been known to reach about 60 feet (18 m). NOAA Fisheries says white (great white) sharks grow up to about 20 feet (up to 21 feet in its quick facts). The blue whale is larger than any fish, but whales are mammals. Sizes vary, so the sheet uses “about.”

Sources

- NOAA Ocean Service: What is the biggest fish in the ocean? — https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/bigfish.html
- NOAA Fisheries: White Shark — https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/white-shark
- Smithsonian Ocean: What is the Biggest Shark? — https://ocean.si.edu/ocean-life/sharks-rays/what-biggest-shark-chart-shows-diversity-shark-sizes
- NOAA Education: Marine mammals — https://www.noaa.gov/education/resource-collections/marine-life/marine-mammals

Cool Fact Some estimates say a whale shark can weigh as much as **40 tons**, and its mouth can be about **1 meter (3 feet)** long! (NOAA)

Cool Fact A whale shark’s back has a **checkerboard pattern** of white, yellow and grey. (NOAA)

Cool Fact Whale sharks like warm water, about **68–77°F**. (NOAA)