

ACTIVITY: ANATOMY OF DOLPHINS

Vocabulary:

Mammal ~ A kind of animal that has hair or fur on its body at some point in its life, is warm-blooded, breathes air, and feeds on its mother's milk as a baby; most mammals have live births

Pectoral fins ~ The pair of fins located on either side of a dolphin's body, behind its head

Rostrum ~ The beak-shaped mouth of a dolphin

Adapt ~ To change in order to better meet the conditions of the surrounding environment

Blowhole ~ The single opening through which dolphins breathe

Melon ~ A dolphin's rounded, fatty forehead

Eye ~ Dolphins have two eyes, each capable of independent movement

Dorsal fin ~ The upright fin along the center of a dolphin's back

Flukes ~ The pair of flat horizontal flippers that form the dolphin's tail

Peduncle ~ The area, or tail stock, behind the dorsal fin leading to the flukes

Background:

Dolphins, like humans, are mammals. And, although dolphins do not have arms or hands, their pectoral fins (or flippers) contain all the same bones as the human arm and hand. Dolphins use their pectoral fins to steer in the water and touch other dolphins. Dolphins, like humans, also have teeth. Their cone-shaped teeth can be seen inside their rostrum. Unlike us, dolphins do not have a nose or external ear and, of course, dolphins spend their entire lives in the water.



Scientists think that the closest living relative to dolphins is the hippopotamus! Over time, dolphins' bodies have become adapted to their ocean environment and it is thought that dolphins have existed in their current form for about 5 million years. The dolphin's body has evolved to the streamlined, fusiform shape it currently assumes. The skull is "telescoped" in appearance with the blowhole now on the top of the head functioning as a built in snorkel. The blowhole is located just behind the dolphin's melon, which is the dolphin's rounded, fatty forehead. Binocular vision is possible only below the head; the eyes usually function independently to provide separate fields of view. Some dolphins have a dorsal fin, which is an upright fin along the center of the back. Dolphins propel themselves through the water with a single muscular peduncle, or tail stock, and flukes. They are strong and graceful swimmers and often breach through the water's surface in aerial displays related to play, food-searching and social activity.

Activity:

On the next page is a diagram of a dolphin's body. See if you can label the dolphin below with the correct body parts.

Notes to Instructor: trace diagram on transparency or make photocopies. Ask students to define the words from the vocabulary list, helping them along the way. Have students label the diagram or complete it together on the transparency.

Further Resources:

Know a dolphin's body part (Podcast):

http://www.dolphincommunicationproject.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1113&Itemid=285

Dolphin Mittens (Podcast):

http://www.dolphincommunicationproject.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1221&Itemid=278

Do dolphins have hair? (Podcast):

http://www.dolphincommunicationproject.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1166&Itemid=278



