

Discover Marine Mammals

Chaperone-Led Field Investigation



Dear Chaperone,

Please guide your students through the following observations. As you ask them the following questions allow them to think about their answers and encourage them to come up with questions of their own. The purpose of this activity is not for them to get all the “right” answers but rather to allow them to practice questioning and observation skills.

Watch one of the walruses swim. What does a walrus have on its body that helps it to swim?

Flippers! Walruses have both front and back flippers. Having a smooth, rounded body also helps them to move easily through the water. Would you be able to swim as well as a walrus?

Look closely at the walrus’s skin. Do they have hair?

Walruses have a little bit of hair on their bodies. However, this hair is not thick enough to keep them warm in the cold water. Walruses have blubber (special fat for marine mammals) under their skin that keeps them very warm.

Find the sea otters. How are they different from the walruses?

They are much furrier than the walruses. Their fur is so thick because they don’t have blubber to keep them warm. Sea otters spend most of their time floating on top of the water. Sea otters have back flippers, but have paws instead of front flippers. Their small paws help them to grab their food. Sea otters eat clams, crabs, snails, sea urchins and even small octopuses!

Find the harbor seals. Are harbor seals more like the walruses or the sea otters?

Harbor seals are closely related to walruses. They are both “sausage” shaped because of the thick blubber under their skin. Both seals and walruses use their large back flippers to push themselves through the water and their shorter front flippers to steer. Walruses and seals both have tiny little tails, but sea otters have long fluffy tails to help them to steer when they float on top of the water.

What do seals, sea otters and walruses have in common (how are they the same)?

They all have fur or hair, whiskers, eyes and noses. All of their ears are hard to see (seals and walruses just have ear holes). They all swim using flippers. They are all mammals that live in the ocean. They are all warm-blooded, don’t lay eggs, nurse their babies and have lungs. None of them can breathe underwater, but they can all hold their breath longer than we can!

Would you like to live in the ocean? Are you a good enough swimmer? Would you be able to stay warm enough?

Encourage students to notice differences between their bodies and those of marine mammals.