

This workshop was designed for families at a public library. The goal was for students to use observational skills to identify different species of shelled animals. Students who participated were between the ages of 6 and 9. Shells were collected from a beach on the Long Island Sound (Atlantic shells) as well as tidepools in Northern California (Pacific shells).

A table was set up as follows:



Atlantic shells were on the left, and Pacific shells were on the right. Dichotomous keys were placed at both ends of the table. Shells were placed on index cards. The organism's common name and scientific names were written on the back of each index card.

Students worked at their own pace to identify all the shells. We also discussed questions related to shell size and color (for example, what are some reasons the shells collected from the California tidepools tend to be smaller than the shells collected in the Sound?) Coloring pages were also provided when students finished identifying shells.

The dichotomous keys used in the lesson are on the following pages. This website was helpful in creating a key for the Pacific shells: <http://californiatidepools.com/>

This display at Hammonasset beach in Connecticut was helpful in creating a key for the Atlantic shells:



This lesson could be easily adapted for local wildlife in any area. I recommend having some kind of secondary activity (for example, coloring pages) for students who finish identifying the shells quickly.

Can you identify this Atlantic ocean shell?

1. Is it large (>3 inches across) or small (<3 inches across)?

- a. large..... go to question 2
- b. small..... go to question 3

2. Does it have ribbed edges or smooth edges?

- a. ribbed edges..... It's an oyster!
- b. smooth edges..... It's a quahog!

3. Is it white or another color?

- a. white..... go to question 4
- b. not white..... go to question 5

4. Is it ridged or smooth?

- a. ridged..... It's a transverse ark!
- b. smooth..... It's a slipper shell!

5. Is it orange or black and purple?

- a. orange..... It's a jingle shell!
- b. black/purple..... It's a mussel!

Can you identify this Pacific ocean shell?

1. Is it mostly black and purple or mostly another color?

- a. black/purple..... go to question 2
- b. another color..... go to question 3

2. Is it larger than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch across or smaller than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch across?

- a. larger..... go to question 4
- b. smaller..... It's a periwinkle!

3. Is it ridged or smooth?

- a. ridged..... go to question 5
- b. smooth..... It's an owl limpet!

4. Is it circular or elongated?

- a. circular..... It's a turban snail!
- b. elongated..... It's a California mussel!

5. Is it spotted?

- a. spotted..... It's a checkered limpet!
- b. not spotted..... It's a rough limpet!