

LEVELED BOOK • Q

# Sharks



Written by Kira Freed • Illustrations by Cende Hill

**Multi  
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# Sharks



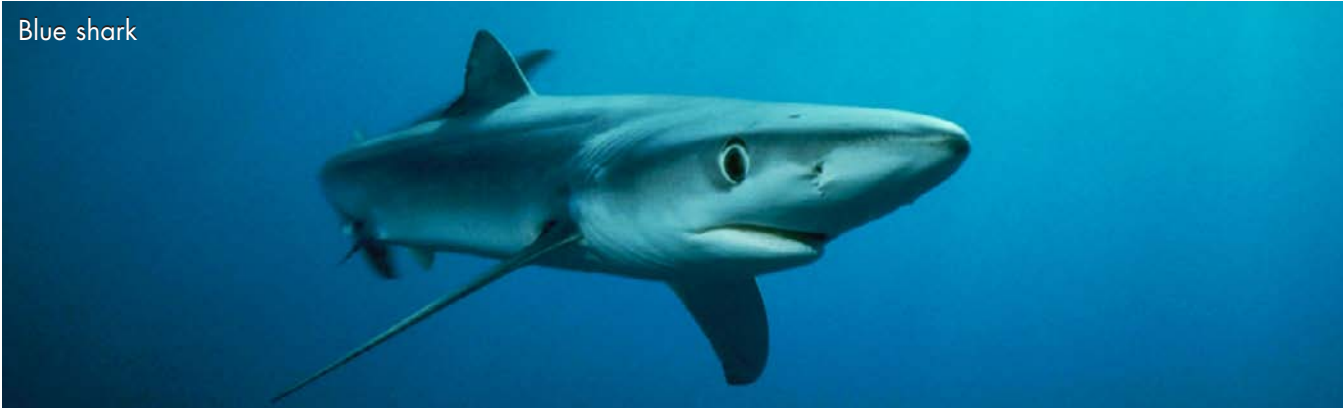
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Blue shark



## **Introduction**

Sharks have lived in the world's oceans for more than 350 million years. They were even around before dinosaurs walked on Earth. There are more than 350 kinds of sharks. They can be found from the equator to the poles and from shallow seashores to the deepest waters. Sharks are some of nature's most successful hunters.

Rays such as this southern stingray are close relatives of sharks.

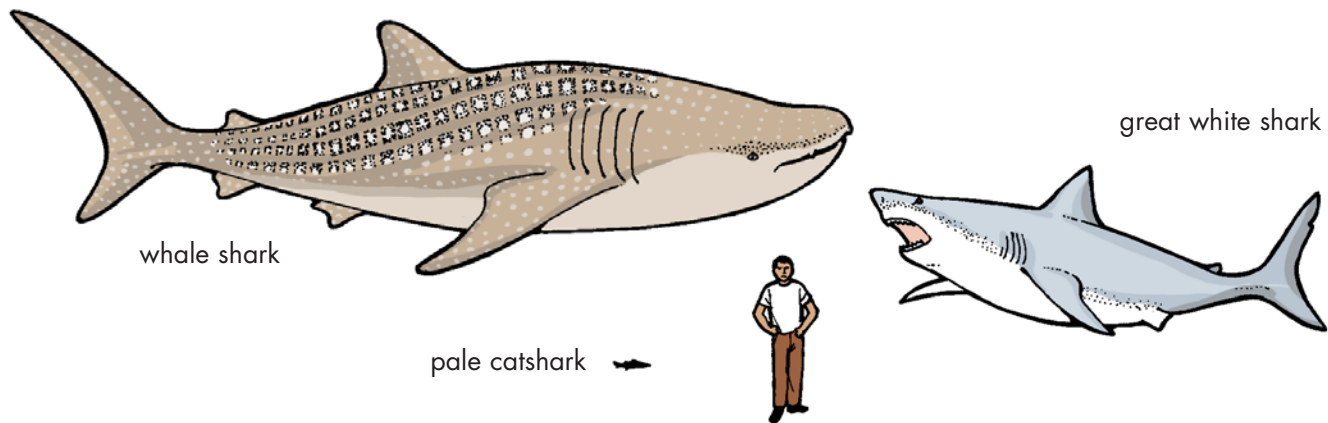


Sharks are fish. But unlike most other fish, sharks have no bones. Shark skeletons are made of **cartilage**, which is the same material that gives human ears their shape. Unlike most fish, sharks have rough skin. The closest relatives of sharks are skates and rays, which are flat, diamond-shaped fish.

Mako shark



Sharks have an excellent sense of smell and are able to see well in poor light. They are especially sensitive to the sounds and movements of injured animals. Sharks can even sense the tiny bits of electricity that are produced by all living things. Sharks can sense fish buried under the sand on the ocean floor.

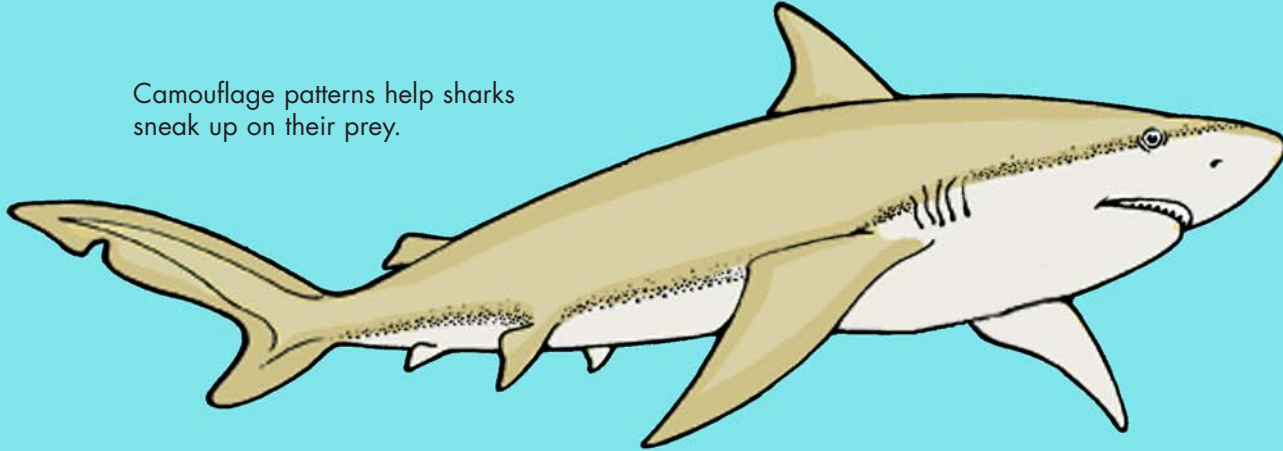


Size variation in sharks and comparison with human

## Physical Description

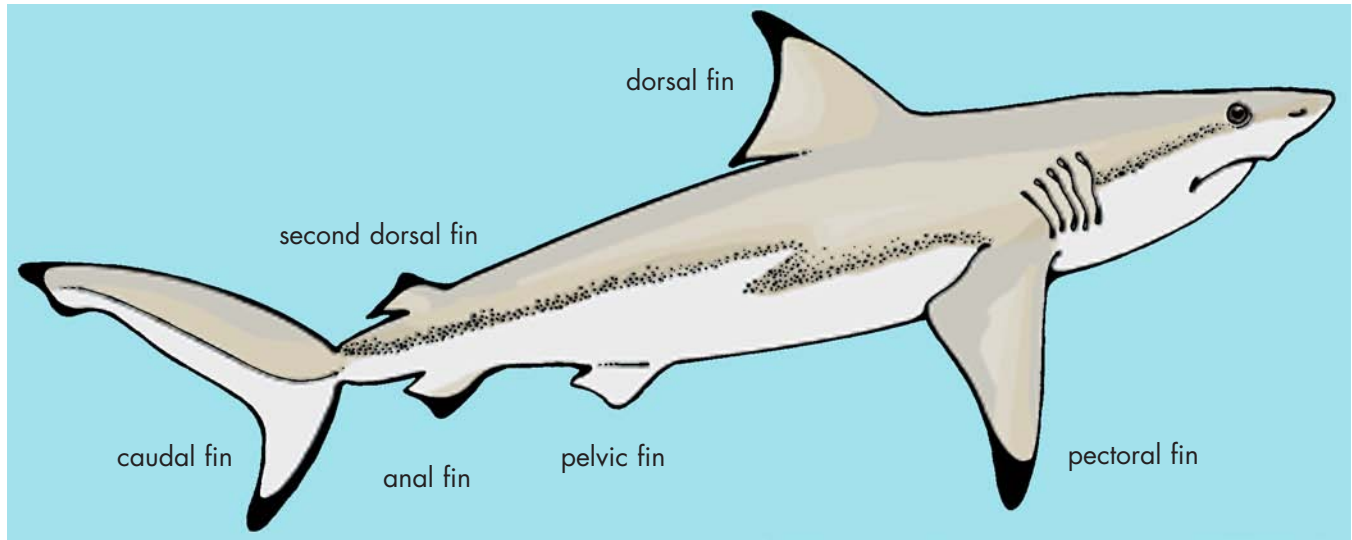
Sharks come in many sizes. Some dogfish sharks are only a few inches long. The whale shark is the largest fish in the world. Most sharks have powerful, streamlined bodies to help them catch their prey.

Camouflage patterns help sharks sneak up on their prey.



Most large sharks have few natural enemies. Many sharks are protected by **camouflage** patterns that help them blend in with their surroundings. They are dark on the top and pale on the bottom. Some sharks, called swell sharks, protect themselves from attack by puffing up their bodies with air or water. This behavior makes them appear larger and helps to keep predators away.





Sharks swim by swinging their tails from side to side. Sharks use their fins to steer, turn, and keep their balance. The **dorsal fin**, which sharks use to keep upright, sometimes sticks out above the water. Catching sight of a shark's dorsal fin is often the first warning people have that a shark is nearby.

Lemon shark



## **Do You Know?**

A shark may wear out and regrow a thousand teeth during its lifetime.

## **Eating**

The shape of a shark's teeth depends on the kind of food it eats. Most sharks have many rows of teeth. When one tooth breaks off, another one moves up to take its place. Sharks' teeth break off easily.

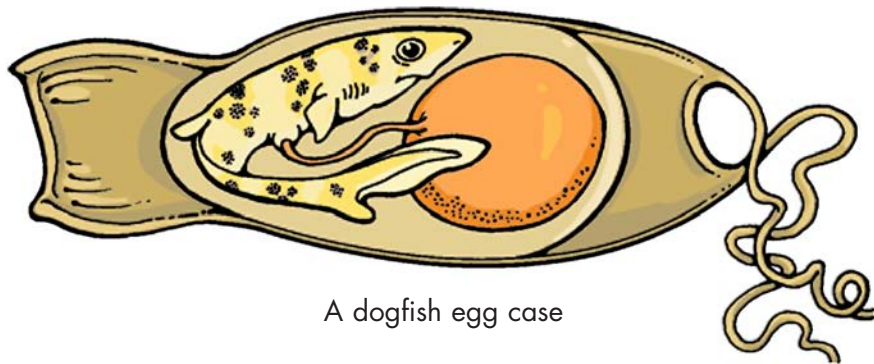
Great white shark



Most sharks are fish eaters. Many of the largest sharks eat sea lions, dolphins, and other sharks. These large sharks have triangular teeth with edges as sharp as knives. The teeth help the shark catch and hold onto its prey. The sharp teeth also help the shark tear its prey into chunks that it can swallow.



Other sharks, such as catsharks, eat clams, crabs, and lobsters. These sharks have flat teeth for crushing and grinding shells. The huge whale shark has tiny teeth but doesn't use them when eating. It swallows very small ocean plants and animals, called **plankton**, that float on or near the ocean's surface. It swims with its enormous mouth open. Special filters in its gills catch the plankton and let the water flow through.



A dogfish egg case

## **Do You Know?**

Unlike humans, baby sharks are not helpless when they are born. They are able to hunt for food right away.

## **Reproduction**

Most kinds of sharks bear live young. Baby sharks are called pups. Few pups survive to become adult sharks. A few kinds of sharks, including the dogfish, lay eggs that hatch a few months later. Each egg is protected by a leathery egg case. The cases are rectangular, and many have string-shaped ends that attach to seaweed. Some people call shark egg cases “mermaids’ purses.”

Whitetip reef sharks are normally not dangerous to humans.

## **Do You Know?**

A great white shark can swallow a whole seal in one gulp.

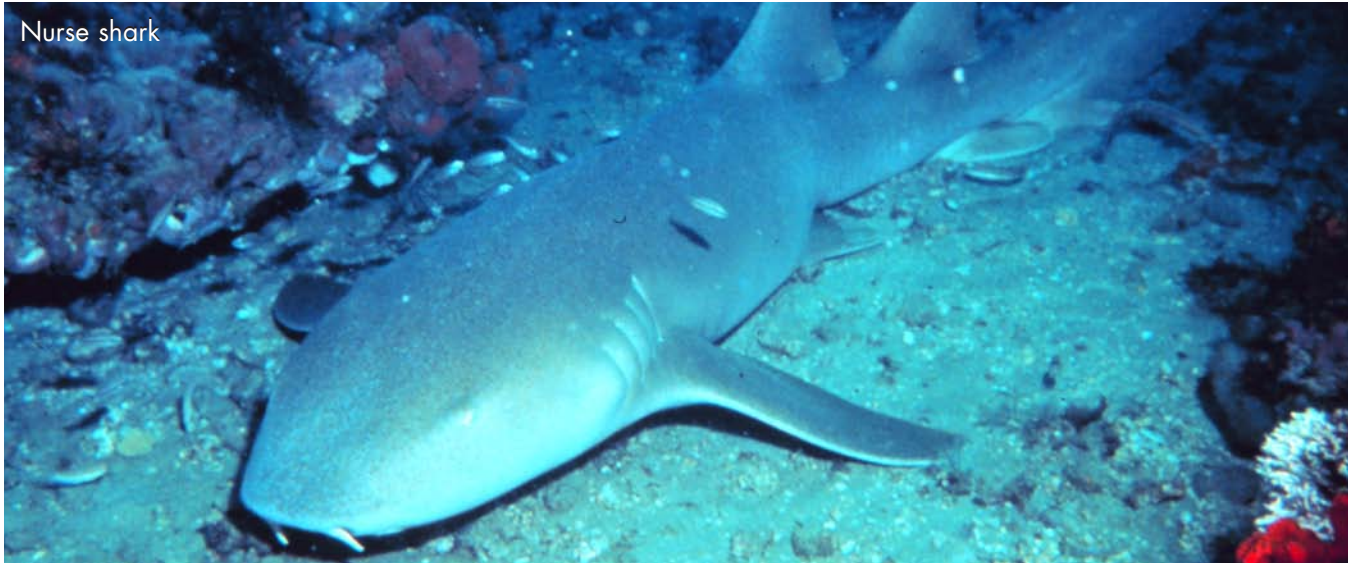


## **Shark Attacks**

Many people are afraid of sharks, but most sharks do not attack humans. In fact, bees kill more people each year than sharks do. Only a few kinds of sharks are known to attack humans regularly. One of these is the great white shark. Great white sharks usually eat large animals, such as sea lions and other sharks.



Nurse shark



Even small sharks may bite if disturbed or surprised. Shark attacks are usually the result of people swimming in shark territory. Sharks also confuse humans with their prey. Many shark attacks involve the shark taking one “test bite” and then swimming away when it realizes that the human is not its prey.



## **Strange Sharks**

One of the strangest looking sharks is the hammerhead shark. It has a flat head with a large lobe on each side. The eyes and nostrils are positioned on the ends of these lobes. Its strange head shape helps the hammerhead see around and behind it.





## **Shark Survival**

People hunt sharks for many reasons. Sharkskin is used to make shoes, belts, and wallets. Shark oil is used in many cosmetics. Shark teeth are used for jewelry. Many people eat shark meat. Chefs use shark fins to make a popular soup, and the sharks usually die when their fins are removed.



Many kinds of sharks are now in danger of **extinction** (being completely wiped out). People often do not protest when sharks are killed because sharks are thought to be mean and dangerous. However, most sharks are not dangerous to humans.

Gray reef shark



Sharks do not reproduce nearly as quickly as other fish. When they are killed, it takes much longer for their numbers to increase again. Sharks are an important part of the balance of life in the world's oceans. They have as much right to exist as any other animal.

## **Glossary**

<b>camouflage</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	relating to a pattern that helps something blend in with its surroundings (p. 8)
<b>cartilage</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an elastic tissue that makes up the skeletons of sharks, rays, and skates (p. 5)
<b>dorsal fin</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a fin on the back of fish and some marine mammals (p. 9)
<b>extinction</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the process by which an entire group of animals or plants dies out (p. 18)
<b>plankton</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	tiny plants and animals that live on or near the ocean's surface (p. 12)

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