

## Sharks!

Sharks are amazing fish that have been around more than 300 million years. That's before the dinosaurs! Unlike most fish, sharks have no bones. Their skeleton is made of cartilage, like your nose and ears. Sharks also have no swim bladder and do not have scales. Their skin is made of hard, sharp teeth called denticles which help to protect the shark from injury.

There are about 350 different types of sharks that live in waters all over the world, in every ocean, and even in some rivers and lakes. Some sharks even travel many miles up into the fresh water of rivers like the Mississippi River. Some sharks live near the surface, some live deep in the water, and others live on or near the ocean floor.

Sharks range in size from the size of a person's hand to bigger than a bus. Most sharks have streamlined, torpedo-shaped bodies that glide easily through the water. Some bottom-dwelling sharks have flattened bodies that allow them to hide in the sand of the ocean bed. Most types of sharks have to keep moving in order to breathe.

Baby sharks are called pups. Most sharks lay eggs but some actually give birth like humans. Sharks do not care for their babies after they are born, but they do search for a safe place where they can lay their eggs or give birth.

Sharks vary greatly in their diets, but they are all carnivores, which means flesh-eater. Some eat fish, squid, other sharks, and marine mammals like birds, turtles, penguins and porpoises. Others crush and eat shellfish (crabs and clams) from the ocean floor. The largest sharks are filter feeders that sieve tiny bits of plankton and small animals from the water as they swim with open mouths. They eat huge amounts of these tiny animals and plants.

Sharks have the most powerful jaws on the planet. Unlike most animals' jaws, both the sharks' upper and lower jaws move. A shark bites with its lower jaw first and then its upper. They don't use their teeth for chewing food, they use them to help rip off the meat which they swallow whole. These teeth are arranged in rows; when one tooth is damaged or lost, it is replaced by another. Most sharks have about 5 rows of teeth at any time. The front set is the largest and does most of the work. A shark can go through as many as 30,000 teeth in its lifetime!

Strange things have been found in the bellies of sharks. Scientists have found six hens and a rooster; 25 quart bottles of Vichy Water bound together with a wire hoop; a nearly whole reindeer; a ship's scraper; a handbag containing three shillings and a full-grown spaniel dog. In 1833, fishermen caught a 22 foot long shark, in whose stomach, was the headless body of a man, encased in complete armor.

Sharks do not normally attack people, despite what the movies would tell you. Sharks attack fewer than 100 people each year. Many more people are killed by bees or lightning. Some people believe that sharks mistake people swimming or on surf boards for seals and sea lions, some of their favorite foods.

## Homework

Do you think that sharks with sleek bodies swim fast or slow?

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What do you think those sharks eat?

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Do you think sharks with flat bodies that swim near the bottom of the ocean are fast or slow?

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What do you think those shark eat?

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Do most sharks eat people?

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