

Aidan and the Blue Whales

Aidan looked at the list of endangered animals his teacher gave the class. He leaned over to his good bud, Jacob. “Did you know there were so many animals in trouble?”

Jacob nodded. “Yeah, my sister’s studying to be a marine biologist. That’s a scientist that studies animals in the ocean. She came home one day telling us all about blue whales. She said they’re the largest animals ever known to exist on Earth.”

Aidan’s was immediately interested. “Whoa! That crazy. That would mean they’re bigger than the dinosaurs were.” The rest of the school day he couldn’t stop thinking about the blue whales.

At home, Aidan got his laptop. The first thing he looked up was blue whales. “Whoa! These are amazing creatures!” He took his laptop and raced into the kitchen and sat at the table. “Mom, you’ve got to hear about the blue whales.”

Mom turned from the stove. “Sure, honey.” She went back to her cooking.

“Well, first, they’re the biggest animals to ever be on earth. An adult weighs around 200 tons. That’s way more than the space shuttle. The largest land animal is the African elephant, and it only averages around 5 tons.” Aidan paused for a breath then read on. “It says that the blue whale’s tongue can weigh as much as an elephant. Probably a small one, but still.”

Mom stopped what she was doing and sat next to Aidan. “I had no idea. That’s incredible.”

“I know!” said Aidan as his face lit up. “And they can be as long as 100 feet. At birth, they’re around 25 feet long. The more I read about them the more awesome they are.”

Aidan kept reading. “Hey, some scientists believe some of their sounds act as sonar. It helps them map their environment. Some of their sounds can be heard underwater for hundreds of miles. That’s how they communicate.”

“What’s the sudden interest in blue whales?” asked Mom.

“We’re learning about endangered animals, and the blue whale is one of them,” said Aidan. “It’s not right for something that amazing to possibly become extinct.”

Mom shook her head. “That would be awful.”

“Yeah,” said Aidan. “People hunt them for whale oil, and the whales get tangled in fishing nets, so there are fewer of them every year. Ships even hurt them by creating noise in the ocean that interferes with the whales communicating.”

Aidan got up and paced the kitchen. “You know,” he said into the air, “Jacob’s sister is studying to be a marine biologist. I bet they can help prevent that from happening.”

“I’m sure they can,” said Mom.

Aidan stopped pacing and looked at his mother. “I haven’t really thought about what I want to be after high school. But after learning about the trouble the blue whales are in, I think I’ll go to college to be a marine biologist.”

Mom got up, smiled, and gave her son a hug. “Maybe you’ll help find a solution.”

“You bet I will,” said Aidan.

Questions

1. How many more tons does the average blue whale weigh compared to the average adult African elephant?
2. What is a marine biologist?
3. If you could compare the biggest dinosaur and a blue whale, which would be bigger?
4. What is one reason that blue whales are in trouble?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. endangered
2. exist
3. incredible
4. extinct
5. interferes

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "Aidan looked at the list of **endangered** animals his teacher gave the class"

a. threatened; in danger of dying out b. cute; endearing c. enlarged; growing d. unusual

2) "they're the largest animals ever known to **exist** on Earth"

a. swim underwater b. leave land c. live or happen d. travel or wander

3) "I had no idea. That's **incredible**."

a. terrible or awful b. awesome or astonishing c. untrue; false d. unlikely; doubtful

4) "It's not right for something that amazing to possibly become **extinct**."

a. famous or well-known b. complete or finished c. dead; wiped out d. forgotten; ignored

5) "Ships even hurt them by creating noise in the ocean that **interferes** with the whales communicating."

a. agrees or unites b. helps; assists c. returns or collects d. stops or interrupts