



Dolphins - Intelligence in the Deep

Reading Worksheet — Level F | tahricteaches.com

Dolphins are among the most **cognitively** advanced animals on Earth, with brains remarkably similar to human brains. As marine **mammals**, they breathe through a blowhole and nurse their young — called **calves** — on milk. What sets dolphins apart is their capacity for complex social bonds, tool use, and **self-awareness**: they can recognize themselves in mirrors, a trait shared only with great apes and elephants.

Dolphins live in organized social groups called **pods**. Within a pod, they establish complex **hierarchies**, form lifelong friendships, and even mourn their dead. They cooperate to hunt by herding fish into tight balls, then take turns charging through to feed. Pods protect members from **predators** like sharks by swimming in formation and using coordinated defensive maneuvers.

Each dolphin develops a unique signature whistle — a **vocalization** that functions like a name. Beyond whistles, dolphins use rapid clicks for **echolocation**, bouncing sound waves off objects to build a precise map of their surroundings. This biological sonar is accurate enough to detect a golf ball-sized object from over 70 meters away.

Dolphin populations face serious threats from human activity. **Bycatch** — accidental capture in fishing nets — kills hundreds of thousands annually. Pollution disrupts dolphin **physiology** and reproduction, while underwater noise from shipping interferes with echolocation. Climate change shifts fish populations into increasingly **degraded** ocean environments.

Conservation efforts have shown results. Marine **sanctuaries** restrict fishing in critical habitats, and international agreements have reduced bycatch through dolphin-safe fishing practices. Scientists continue studying dolphin **cognition** — their capacity for reasoning and problem-solving — to understand what is at stake. Protecting dolphins is not merely conservation; it is a measure of our willingness to preserve intelligence itself.

A. Vocabulary

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. cognitively _____ | a. non-target animals accidentally caught in fishing nets |
| 2. self-awareness _____ | b. the biological processes and functions of a living organism |
| 3. hierarchies _____ | c. protected areas where wildlife is safe from harm |
| 4. echolocation _____ | d. the mental processes involved in gaining knowledge |
| 5. bycatch _____ | e. relating to mental processes like thinking and learning |
| 6. physiology _____ | f. the ability to recognize oneself as an individual |
| 7. sanctuaries _____ | g. systems of ranking or status within a group |
| 8. cognition _____ | h. using reflected sound waves to detect objects |

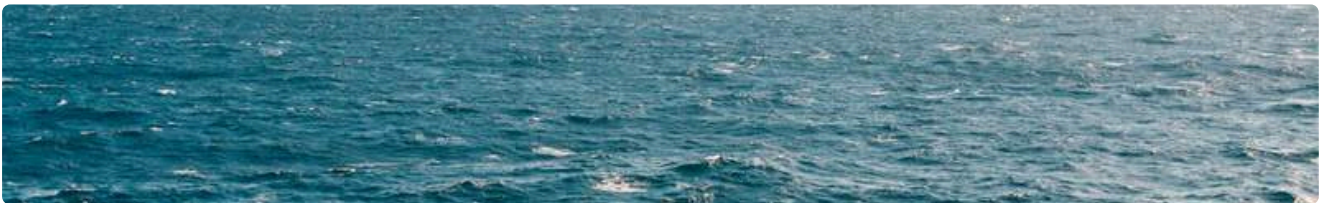
B. True or False

- ___ 1. Dolphins are classified as fish.
- ___ 2. Dolphins can recognize themselves in mirrors.
- ___ 3. Each dolphin has a unique signature whistle.
- ___ 4. Echolocation uses sound to detect objects.
- ___ 5. Pods have no social structure.
- ___ 6. Bycatch means dolphins caught accidentally in fishing nets.
- ___ 7. Climate change does not affect dolphin food sources.
- ___ 8. Marine sanctuaries help protect dolphin habitats.
- ___ 9. Dolphins can detect a golf ball from 70 meters away.
- ___ 10. Dolphins show no signs of mourning pod members.

C. Fill in the Blanks

Word Bank: cognitively, self-awareness, hierarchies, echolocation, bycatch, physiology, sanctuaries, cognition

- 1. Dolphins are _____ advanced animals with brains similar to humans.
- 2. The ability to recognize oneself in a mirror demonstrates _____.
- 3. Dolphins use _____ to build a 3D map of their surroundings.
- 4. _____ kills hundreds of thousands of dolphins annually.



D. Comprehension Questions

- 1. What evidence suggests dolphins have a high level of self-awareness?
- 2. How do pods use cooperative behavior to protect against predators?
- 3. How does echolocation work, and how precise is it?

E. Discussion Questions

- 1. Should dolphins receive legal protections given their intelligence? Why or why not?

Answer Key

Dolphins - Intelligence in the Deep — Level F

Teacher Reference Only | tahricteaches.com

A. Vocabulary: 1-e, 2-f, 3-g, 4-h, 5-a, 6-b, 7-c, 8-d

B. True/False: 1-F, 2-T, 3-T, 4-T, 5-F, 6-T, 7-F, 8-T, 9-T, 10-F

C. Fill Blanks: 1-cognitively, 2-self-awareness, 3-echolocation, 4-bycatch

D. Comprehension:

1. Mirror self-recognition — a trait shared only with great apes and elephants
2. Swim in formation, use coordinated maneuvers against sharks
3. Emit clicks that bounce off objects; can detect a golf ball from 70m

© Tahric Teaches | tahricteaches.com | Source: Educational Materials