



The Jellyfish — An Ancient Drifter of the Ocean

Reading Worksheet — Level F | tahricteaches.com

Jellyfish are ancient **creatures** that have drifted through the world's oceans for more than 500 million years, long before dinosaurs existed. Unlike fish, a jellyfish has no brain, no bones, and no heart. Its body is made almost entirely of water and a soft, **jelly**-like substance, which is how the animal earned its common name. Despite this simple structure, jellyfish have survived in nearly every **ocean** on Earth, from warm tropical bays to the frozen waters near the poles.

A jellyfish moves by contracting its bell-shaped body, pushing water out behind it in a weak form of jet propulsion. Most jellyfish, however, cannot swim strongly against moving water. Instead, they **float** near the surface and let the ocean **current** carry them for miles. Large groups, called blooms, can drift together, sometimes stretching for kilometers and overwhelming beaches or clogging the intake pipes of coastal power plants.

Trailing beneath the bell are long tentacles lined with thousands of microscopic stinging cells. When a tentacle brushes against prey, it fires a tiny barbed thread that injects **poison** into the victim. This **sting** instantly paralyzes small fish and shrimp, letting the jellyfish **protect** itself from predators while also capturing a meal. In humans, most jellyfish stings cause only mild pain, but a few species, such as the box jellyfish, produce venom powerful enough to be medically dangerous.

Although jellyfish lack a brain, many species have a simple nervous system that can **sense** light, vibration, and chemical changes in the surrounding water. Some deep-sea jellyfish can even **glow** in the dark through a chemical reaction called bioluminescence, which may confuse predators or attract prey in the lightless depths. Scientists continue to study these signals to understand how such a basic creature reacts so effectively to its environment.

Climate change and overfishing of natural predators have allowed some jellyfish populations to expand rapidly in recent decades. This worries marine biologists, but it has also encouraged research into using jellyfish venom for medical treatments and compounds that **protect** human cells. As scientists learn more, the humble jellyfish is proving far more remarkable than its simple, drifting lifestyle might suggest.

A. Vocabulary

1. creature _____

a. to give off a soft, steady light

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|-----------------|--|
| 2. jelly ____ | b. to keep someone or something safe from harm |
| 3. ocean ____ | c. a sharp wound caused by an animal's stinger or venom |
| 4. float ____ | d. to rest or move on top of water without sinking |
| 5. current ____ | e. to become aware of something through feeling or detecting it |
| 6. poison ____ | f. a living animal, especially one that seems strange or interesting |
| 7. sting ____ | g. a soft, wobbly, almost see-through substance |
| 8. protect ____ | h. a very large area of salt water |
| 9. sense ____ | i. a steady flow of water moving in one direction |
| 10. glow ____ | j. a substance that can cause injury or death |



B. True or False

1. Jellyfish have existed for more than 500 million years. ____
2. A jellyfish has a complex brain and a strong heart. ____
3. A jellyfish's body is made mostly of water and a jelly-like substance. ____
4. Jellyfish are strong swimmers that easily swim against ocean currents. ____
5. Large groups of jellyfish drifting together are called blooms. ____
6. Jellyfish tentacles use stinging cells to inject poison into prey. ____
7. Every single species of jellyfish produces venom that is dangerous to humans. ____
8. Some deep-sea jellyfish can glow through bioluminescence. ____
9. Scientists have found no possible medical uses for jellyfish venom. ____



C. Fill in the Blanks

Word Bank: current, poison, sting, sense, glow

1. Jellyfish often float near the surface and let the ocean _____ carry them for miles.
2. A stinging cell injects _____ into prey to paralyze it instantly.
3. This _____ allows the jellyfish to capture food and defend itself from predators.
4. A simple nervous system lets a jellyfish _____ light and chemical changes in the water.
5. Some deep-sea jellyfish _____ in the dark through a chemical reaction called bioluminescence.

D. Comprehension Questions

1. Why are jellyfish considered unusual among ocean creatures?
2. How does a jellyfish typically travel through the ocean?
3. Explain how a jellyfish's sting helps it survive.
4. How do jellyfish sense their environment without a brain?
5. Why are scientists interested in studying jellyfish venom?

E. Discussion Questions

1. Jellyfish populations are growing rapidly in many oceans due to climate change and overfishing of their predators. What problems might this cause for other sea life?
2. Even though jellyfish have no brain, they can sense light and chemicals and react to danger. What does this suggest about what counts as "intelligence" in the animal kingdom?
3. Scientists are researching jellyfish venom for possible medical treatments. Can you think of other "dangerous" animals whose venom or poison might also help cure diseases?



Answer Key

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A. Vocabulary: 1-f, 2-g, 3-h, 4-d, 5-i, 6-j, 7-c, 8-b, 9-e, 10-a

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

C. Fill Blanks: 1-current, 2-poison, 3-sting, 4-sense, 5-glow

D. Comprehension:

1. Jellyfish are unusual because they have no brain, bones, or heart, yet they have survived in oceans worldwide for more than 500 million years.
2. A jellyfish weakly propels itself by contracting its bell-shaped body, but mostly it floats and drifts wherever the ocean current carries it.
3. The sting injects poison through stinging cells on its tentacles, which paralyzes prey and helps protect the jellyfish from predators.
4. A simple nervous system lets jellyfish sense light, vibration, and chemical changes in the water, and some species can even glow to confuse predators or attract prey.
5. Scientists are interested because compounds in jellyfish venom may lead to new medical treatments, including ways to protect human cells.

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