Shark facts for kids: the biggest, the oldest, and the one that's gone

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Shark facts for kids from NOAA and the Park Service: no bones, skin like sandpaper, 35,000 teeth, the biggest fish alive, and why megalodon is extinct.

Sharks are fish with no bones at all: their skeletons are cartilage, the bendy stuff in your nose and ears. That's the fact that surprises children most, and it's the first of twelve on a NOAA Fisheries page I used for this post, read on 31 October 2026. Every number below comes from NOAA or the National Park Service, and each one is on Peabody's animal pages with its source and the day it was checked.

If your child has caught shark fever, from a summer week of shark shows on TV or from a trip to an aquarium, this is a gentle place to start. Peabody says what each shark eats and never shows how. There are no bites and no scary music here.

Three sharks on Peabody

- Shark: Whale shark · How long: 12.2 m (40 ft) · How heavy: 36,000 kg (about 40 tons) · The note: the most, by some estimates · Source: NOAA National Ocean Service
- Shark: Great white shark · How long: 6.1 m (20 ft) · How heavy: 1,810 kg (3,990 lb) · The note: · Source: NOAA Fisheries
- Shark: Megalodon · How long: 15 to 18 m (49 to 59 ft) · How heavy: no checked number · The note: extinct; estimates from fossil teeth · Source: National Park Service

The whale shark is the biggest fish alive, and it eats some of the smallest food in the sea: plankton, krill and tiny fish. NOAA says each one's spots are as unique as a fingerprint, which is how scientists tell them apart in divers' photos.

The great white is big, but it's not the biggest. NOAA gives it a top speed of 56 km/h (35 mph) and a lifespan of 30 to 70 years in the wild. It eats seals, sea lions, fish and dead whales, and it keeps growing new teeth its whole life.

Megalodon is gone. It lived between 23 million and 3.6 million years ago, says a National Science Foundation report, long before there were people. Peabody keeps it in the dinosaur wing as a shark, with a line at the top that says it is extinct, and the guide is megalodon still alive? answers the question children ask about it most.

Twelve things NOAA says sharks do

I've put these in kid words. The page they come from is NOAA Fisheries' "12 shark facts that may surprise you".

1. No bones. A shark's skeleton is cartilage. It's lighter than bone, which helps a shark float.
2. Fossils anyway. Sharks still leave fossils, because their teeth have enamel, like ours.
3. Good eyes. Most sharks see well in dim light and can see colors.
4. A sixth sense. Little dark spots near a shark's nose and mouth feel the tiny electric signals living things make.
5. Sandpaper skin. Shark skin is covered in tiny tooth-like scales that point toward the tail.
6. Very old. Fossil scales suggest sharks first appeared about 455 million years ago, long before the dinosaurs.
7. Rings like a tree. Scientists can estimate a shark's age by counting rings in its backbone, though they're careful to check it for each kind.
8. Blue sharks are blue. Most sharks are brown, olive or gray.
9. Whale shark spots are as unique as a fingerprint.
10. Resting is possible. Most sharks keep swimming to move water over their gills, but some, like nurse sharks, can breathe while resting on the sea floor.
11. So many teeth. A sandbar shark goes through about 35,000 teeth in its life.
12. Eggs or babies. Some sharks lay eggs, and some give birth to live pups.

Is a shark dangerous?

This is the question behind a lot of shark worry, so here's the plain answer from NOAA's Ocean Service: people are not part of any shark's natural food, and most kinds of shark are no danger to us at all. Peabody's myth or true? game has that card and sixteen more, each with its federal source.

Things to do with it

- Stand next to one. On Compare Two, put the great white beside megalodon, drawn to scale next to a child. It's a size comparison, never a fight.
- Read it aloud. Every animal page has three reading levels and a read-to-me button that lights each word.
- Ask the kind question. Is a shark a fish? Is a whale? The fish, bird or mammal quiz has eight tricky ones.

Questions grown-ups ask

Is a whale shark a whale?

No. It's a shark, which makes it a fish: it breathes through gills. The name comes from its size. The blue whale, a mammal, is bigger still.

Why doesn't Peabody give megalodon a weight?

Because none of the pages Peabody uses gives one. Its length is a range from two Park Service pages, and I'd rather show a gap than a guess.

Is there a shark Top 10?

Not yet: Peabody has three sharks, and I won't pad a list. The longest animals list has the whale shark and the great white.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026 and has no ads. When the facts are done, the library has stories to read together.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/shark-facts-for-kids