ANIMAL LEARNING CENTER · NOT CURRENTLY AT THE ZOO

POLAR BEAR

Ursus maritimus

Teacher & Student Fact Sheet · © **2026 Plumpton Park Zoological Gardens Inc.**
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Fast facts

ANIMAL GROUP	Mammal — bear family (Ursidae)
NATIVE REGION	The Arctic: Canada, Alaska, Greenland, Russia, Norway
HABITAT	Sea ice over shallow coastal waters
DIET	Carnivore — mainly ringed seals
SIZE	Males about 8.2 ft long; up to about 5.2 ft at the shoulder
WEIGHT	Males 660–1,540 lb; females 330–770 lb
LIFESPAN	Typically 15–25 years in the wild
STATUS	Vulnerable (IUCN)



A young polar bear on sea ice. Photo: Hans-Jurgen Mager on Unsplash.

Did you know?

- Under its fur, a polar bear's skin is black.
- Its guard hairs are hollow and up to about 6 inches long.
- One female polar bear swam 427 miles over nine days.
- In one study, only 6 of 62 attacks on seals succeeded.
- A newborn cub weighs only about 1 pound 5 ounces to 1 pound 9 ounces.

Words to know

Carnivore: an animal that eats other animals.
Sea ice: frozen ocean water. Polar bears hunt seals from it.
Den: a sheltered hollow where a mother bear gives birth and cares for her cubs.
Vulnerable: a conservation status meaning a species faces a high risk of dying out in the wild.

Think about it

1. Why does a polar bear look white when its skin is black?
2. How do fur and fat keep a polar bear warm?
3. Why do polar bears wait at seal breathing holes instead of chasing seals?
4. How does a mother polar bear survive months in her den without eating?
5. Why is shrinking sea ice a problem for polar bears?

Draw it

In the box below, draw a polar bear hunting on the sea ice. Show the bear waiting by a seal's breathing hole, the ice, and the water below. Label each part.

Where it lives in the wild



Lives in the wild ★ Plumpton Park Zoo, Rising Sun, MD

STANDARDS · GRADES 3–4 **WRITTEN FOR GRADES 3–5**

Maryland and Delaware (NGSS): **4-LS1-1 · 3-LS4-3**
Pennsylvania (STEELS): **3.1.4.A · 3.1.3.G**

Draw here

Learn more: plumptonparkzoo.org/mammals/polar-bear/ · **Sources:** Canadian Wildlife Service; COSEWIC (2018); Norwegian Polar Institute; IUCN Red List; Mammalian Species 145; Durner et al. (2011); Gjertz & Lydersen (1986); Polar Bears International.
Supports Maryland and Delaware (NGSS) and Pennsylvania (STEELS) standards: 4-LS1-1 (3.1.4.A) · 3-LS4-3 (3.1.3.G)
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POLAR BEAR

Before and after your research

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Before you research · 5 minutes

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Predict: where in the wild does the polar bear live?
Circle one (or more if it lives on more than one):

Africa | Asia | Australia | Europe | North America | South America

2. Predict: what does it eat?
☐ plants ☐ other animals ☐ both

3. Word hunt: find these words on page 1. Put a check by each one you already know.
☐ Carnivore ☐ Sea ice ☐ Den ☐ Vulnerable

Pick one word and write what it means in your own words:

4. My question: one thing I want to find out about the polar bear.

While you research

Read the animal page:
plumptonparkzoo.org/mammals/polar-bear/

Write two facts you did not know before.

Draw or describe one body part that helps it survive, and say how it helps.

Draw here

After your research · talk it over

1. Check your prediction. Native region: The Arctic: Canada, Alaska, Greenland, Russia, Norway. Was your guess right?
☐ yes ☐ no ☐ partly

2. Diet check. The fact sheet says: Carnivore — mainly ringed seals. What did you learn about how it finds or eats food?

3. Discuss with a partner, then write your best answer.

- How do fur and fat keep a polar bear warm?
- Why do polar bears wait at seal breathing holes instead of chasing seals?

4. Exit ticket.

One thing I learned: _____

One thing I still wonder: _____

ADJUST IT
Grades K–2: talk and draw instead of writing; read the questions aloud. **Grades 6–8:** add evidence from the fact sheet and the animal page to every answer.

Learn more: plumptonparkzoo.org/mammals/polar-bear/ · Fact sheet page 1 has the fast facts, map and vocabulary this page refers to.
Grades 3–4 · Maryland and Delaware (NGSS): **4-LS1-1 · 3-LS4-3** · Pennsylvania (STEELS): **3.1.4.A · 3.1.3.G**

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