Blue Crab
Coloring and Activity Book

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Marsh scene - Robin McCall
The Blue Crab

Blue crabs are good to eat. "Blue crab" is their common name. *Callinectes sapidus*, which is Latin for "beautiful swimmer," is their scientific name. Blue crabs have a wide shell called a carapace that covers their bodies. This carapace has a long "tooth" or spine on each side. Their front legs are developed into claws and their back legs are flat and shaped like paddles to help them swim and dig better.

This is a dorsal picture of a blue crab. Blue crabs are common from New Jersey to Texas. We also have them here in Mississippi.
Male or Female?

There are boy crabs and girl crabs. Males (boy crabs) have a t-shaped structure on their underside. Young female (girl) crabs have a triangular-shaped structure on their underside. Label one of these crabs a boy and one a young girl crab.
Female crabs do not molt all their lives. Male crabs do molt all their lives, so they often get bigger than females.
Molting

Crabs don’t have bones to support them. Instead they have a hard, outer shell. A crab can only grow by shedding its shell. This shedding of the shell is called molting. Before it can molt, it must form a new, soft shell beneath the old shell. The crab takes calcium from the water so that its new shell can become hard.

Before a crab can molt, the back of the shell must split open.

The crab with its new, soft shell backs out of its old, hard shell.
Mating

The female mates just once in her life. This happens right after she molts for the last time, while she is still soft. The male stays with her and protects her soft body until her shell hardens and she can defend herself. She carries her eggs on her body in a structure called a "sponge." Each sponge may hold about two million eggs! The eggs are yellow when they are first laid but turn black just before they are ready to hatch. They turn black because the baby crabs are absorbing their egg yolks and because their eyes are large and black.
Larval Crabs

Baby crabs go through a lot of changes in their lives. Each change is called a “molt” because the young crab must shed its shell each time.

Zoea

The first stage baby crabs go through is called the zoeal stage. Zoea are about as big as a pin head. They eat tiny plants and live in very salty water.

Megalopa

When a baby crab has molted seven times as a zoea, it becomes a megalopa. At this stage it has well-developed claws that it uses to capture its food. It can live closer to the shore in fresher water.
The crab gains weight as its muscles and organs keep growing. When its hard, outer shell becomes too tight, it molts. Blue crabs molt about 25 times during their lives. Small crabs molt every few days. Adults molt much less frequently. Put the crabs below in order from smallest to largest by numbering them in the spaces.
Did you know that a crab can grow back a missing leg? It can! This growing back of its missing part is called *regeneration*.

The crab uses its claw or pincher to catch food and defend itself.

The second, third and fourth legs are pointed. The crab uses them for walking.

The fifth pair of legs is flattened. The crab uses these legs for swimming and burrowing.

Draw the missing pieces on the crab below.
Habitat

A *habitat* is where an organism lives and gets everything it needs. The waters between our coastline and the barrier islands are a good habitat for blue crabs. They live in different places at different times of their lives. The eggs hatch in very salty waters near the barrier islands. The zoeal larvae live out in the Gulf. The megalopae move back into the waters between the barrier islands and the coastline. Young crabs grow up close to shore.

Can you draw the different stages of the blue crabs life cycle on the map?
Fishing for Crabs

Blue crabs are delicious. Catching blue crabs is fun, whether you use a net, a string with bait, or a crab trap. Everyone cannot go down to the shore and catch their own dinner, so commercial fishermen catch crabs to sell. Color the picture of you and your family catching crabs off a local pier.
Crab Crosswords

Across
3. What you say when you are bitten
5. Orderly
6. Claw color
8. Uses these to catch food
10. Marsh ________

Down
1. To shed
2. First larval stage
4. Blue ______
7. Early life history stage
8. Crab catcher
9. Constructed with meshes
Blue Crab Word Search

Find the words in the puzzle below. Look up, down, across, and diagonal.

blue crab  zoea  spawn  sponge  shell
ecdysis  megalopa  abdomen  eggs  pincher
walking leg  larvae  male  berried  crab trap
molting  plankton  female  spine  salinity

E R B L W F T J U K I L B E R R I E D S
G D L O N L M O R T D H Y J U M G F W P
G N U H P M I L A S A L A N I T Y I P A
S H E C R A B T R A P P O L R D F H N G
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L A B D O M E N A K F X F D E T E U M G
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I E G L U W L N H J K Z S M I P R Y E A
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“Hand-y Crabs”

What you need: Blue and orange tempra paints
Construction paper
Black marker

What to do: 1) Spread newspaper or cloth over your work area.
2) Paint the inside of both hands, including fingers and thumbs, with blue paint.
3) Make two hand prints on the construction paper. The bottoms of the palms should overlap each other. Point the thumbs down.
4) Use orange paint to draw two stalks coming out from the palm areas between your “pinkie fingers.” Draw a circle with a dot inside on the end of each stalk for the eyes.
5) Make orange thumb prints at the tips of the blue thumb prints for claws.
“Trace-a-Crab”

What you need: Scissors
Blue construction paper
Tape
Marker

What to do: 1) Trace both hands with fingers spread out on blue construction paper.
2) Cut out the traced hands.
3) Tape the bottom of the palms together so that they slightly overlap.
4) Bend the three “walking legs” so the crab will stand up. Make two bends in each leg where your knuckles are.
5) Cut out eye stalks and tape them to the front of the crab between the claws (your pinkie fingers).

Thumbs at the bottom
An *acrostic* is a poem without rhyme in which the first letters of each line spell a word up and down: for example,

- **M** oist
- **A** ir
- **R** ising grasses
- **S** ediment
- **H** olding the Earth together,

spells MARSH and describes a marsh as well. Now you write one about CRABS.

- **C**
- **R**
- **A**
- **B**
- **S**
Draw a picture of something you have learned about the blue crab.
Blue Crab Glossary

Common name = non-scientific name of an organism (can vary by region)

Dorsal = top side

Larva = very young crab

Juvenile = young crab; a “teen-ager”

Scientific name = derived from Latin, each animal has two names, the Genus + species

Megalopa = second larval stage of a blue crab

Molt = shed the outer covering; a new, bigger covering replaces it.

Spawn = lay eggs

Ventral = underside

Zoea = first larval stage of a blue crab after it hatches
## Scrambled Words - KEY

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