

BY KATHY KRANKING

NOT JELLY, NOT FISH

Nope—even though they're called "jellyfish," that name doesn't really describe these animals. For one thing, they certainly aren't made of jelly—at least not the kind you'd eat in a sandwich. Jellyfish are made mostly of water with a small amount of thick gel. Also, jellyfish aren't fish at all. They're invertebrates (animals without backbones) and are cousins to corals and sea anemones. So a better name for them is just "jellies."

NOT LOOK-ALIKES

Different kinds of jellyfish can have very different looks. They can be as small as a rice grain or wider than you are tall. And they come in a rainbow of colors, even ones that glow in the dark!

ANIMAL
Check out this
beautiful purplestriped jellyfish as it
swims along upside
down. You can see that
jellies are unusual-looking
creatures. Unlike most other
animals, a jelly has no head,

NOT YOUR

AVERAGE

face, legs, or feet. Instead, a jelly's body is made up of an umbrellalike *bell* and dangling *tentacles*. Depending on the species, a jelly can have just a few tentacles or hundreds of them (though some kinds have no tentacles at all). The jelly's mouth is at the bottom of its bell. It may be surrounded by frilly *oral arms*, which move food to the mouth when the jelly eats.

oral arm

INGO ARNDT/MINDEN PICTURES ®; ART BY JIM PAILLOT



NOT BRAINY

Jellies differ from other animals on the inside, too. A jelly has no heart, no blood, no bones—not even a brain! But jellies get along just fine without these things. They have nerves that, depending on the species, may let them sense when they are touching something, whether they are right side up or upside down, whether they are in light or darkness, or even what odors are in the water around them.

NOT HUGGABLE

Imagine how hard it would be to catch food if you were a soft, squishy blob with no teeth or claws. That's how it is for jellies, so they have a secret weapon. Along their tentacles and sometimes also on their oral arms, they have tiny stinging cells called *nematocysts* (nuh-MATuh-sists). These contain even tinier harpoons full of venom. The venom can stun or kill prey. Though some kinds of jellies are harmless to people, others can give a nasty sting, and a few are even deadly.

The egg yolk jelly (left) eats other jellyfish. So it has sticky tentacles to help it hang on to its slippery, squishy prey. The bluefire jellyfish at right has used its stinging cells to catch an unlucky fish.



NOT GOOD SWIMMERS

With no fins or flippers, jellies are weak in the swimming department. A jelly swims by squeezing muscles at the bottom of its bell. This pushes water away, gently moving the jelly in the opposite direction. Another way jellies get around is by simply drifting along with the ocean currents.

Jellies don't stalk or chase their prey. Instead, they swim or drift with their tentacles dangling beneath them. When a fish or other small creature bumps into the tentacles, it gets zapped by the jelly's stingers. Then the oral arms move the prey to the jelly's mouth.



Some kinds of jellies, such as the barrel jelly at right, have no tentacles or central mouth. Instead they have hundreds of tiny mouths along their oral arms. The mouths take in tiny creatures floating in the water.



Check out this colorful *crown jelly*. Like many other jellies, it has glowing lights that it can flash. The flashing lights might protect the jelly by confusing or startling an enemy.

NOT A GOOD MEAL Thanks to their stingers, jellies have few predators. Most animals don't want to tangle with them. But there are some, including sea turtles (**right**) and certain fish, that can eat jellyfish. Somehow, they're not bothered by the stingers.







For example, wearing a stinging can keep the crab at **right** safe from enemies. Other tagalongs stay close to a jelly or even ride inside its bell.

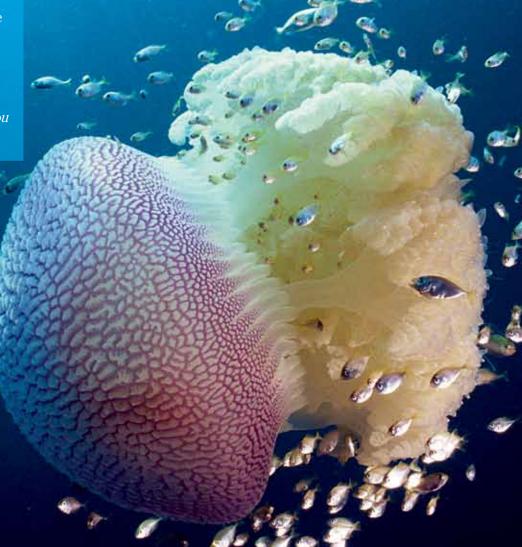
There are different ideas about why the tagalongs aren't harmed by the jelly. For example, they may be covered with mucus that keeps the stingers from firing, or perhaps they are just careful not to touch the jelly's tentacles.

So now that you've learned all the things that jellies are not, you know exactly what they are! 👼

The spotted jelly (left) is a "gardener." It grows tiny plants under its skin! The plants make food that the jelly absorbs.

The jelly at right has a fishy fan club—small fish that stick close to it to stay safe from enemies.





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they are grown up.

If you saw a jelly baby, or *larva*,

you might not know it's a jelly. Baby jellies change shape several

times as they grow. The typical