

## Mollusks in Our World

Charts are used to present data or information in a clear and orderly way. In this activity you will organize information about the economic importance of mollusks.

Mollusks have had a significant impact on humans and human societies throughout history. The most important use of mollusks has been as a source of food. Mollusks are a rich source of protein, vitamins, and minerals.

Bivalves are among the most popular mollusks used for food in the United States. They are usually steamed, baked, or fried, but clams and oysters are sometimes eaten raw. Gastropods are also used for food. Escargot—land snails—are considered a delicacy in many places. Conch and abalone are also eaten in many areas. Of the cephalopods, squid and octopus are popular foods. Calamari, for example, is squid cooked in a variety of ways.

In addition to their use as food, mollusks have been used as money and as decoration. Tusk shells, beads cut from clam shells, and cowrie shells have all been used as money in different societies. In addition, many rare and beautiful shells are collector's items that are worth a great deal of money. The pearls produced by certain bivalves are valuable gems.

1. Use the information in the passage to construct a chart that lists some of the mollusks and their uses.

Class of Mollusk	Used for	
	Food	Trade/decoration
Bivalve		
Gastropod		
Cephalopod		

Most of the uses that you listed in your chart are probably not new or unfamiliar to you. However, people working in biology, medicine, and genetic engineering are suggesting additional uses for some of these mollusks.

Mussels, for example, produce a protein that acts like glue and works in salt water. Doctors are interested in this sticky protein because they think it could be used as a glue inside the wet, salty environment of the human body. Scientists also realize that since bivalves are filter feeders, they concentrate pollutants and microorganisms in their tissues.

2. What uses might the mussel protein have for the United States Navy?

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3. Only very small amounts of mussel protein can be extracted from mussels. How might scientists use these small amounts to produce more of it in the laboratory?

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4. How can bivalves be used as environmental monitors?

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