

# Turtle Shell Mosaic



VIRGINIA  
**AQUARIUM**  
& MARINE SCIENCE CENTER

Explore the sea turtles' specialized scale called scutes.

## Duration

Activity: 30-40 minutes

## Supplies

- Paper Plates
- Green Construction Paper
- Colored Construction Paper or Tissue Paper
  - Preferably green, brown, tan, and grey
- Recycled Materials (Clean cardboard boxes or paper scrapes when possible)
- Glue



## Background

Turtles are reptiles and like all reptiles, they have scales. The scales on their shell are specialized plates called scutes (pronounced "scoots"). When the turtle grows, the scutes shed or peel way, and the new scute that grows underneath is larger than the old scute. This process is similar to a snake shedding. Different species of sea turtle can be distinguished by the number of scutes on their carapace (top of shell).

## Instructions

1. Print the included template onto green construction paper for the turtle's head, flippers, and tail or have students draw and cut out their own.
2. Have students glue the turtle parts to the underside of the paper plate. The head and tail should be opposite of each other, then glue on the flippers.
3. Tear up the other construction paper or tissue paper. Be sure to include the green scraps from the body parts. The pieces will vary in size. Pieces that are about one inch in diameter will work well.
4. Glue the pieces to the top of the paper plate. Emphasize that the individual pieces of paper represent the scales on the turtle's shell.
5. Display the turtles!

## Vocabulary

**Carapace**- The top portion of a shell or covering, like a turtle's shell.

**Scute**-Specialized scale located on a turtle's scale. Scutes must be shed as the turtle grows and develops.

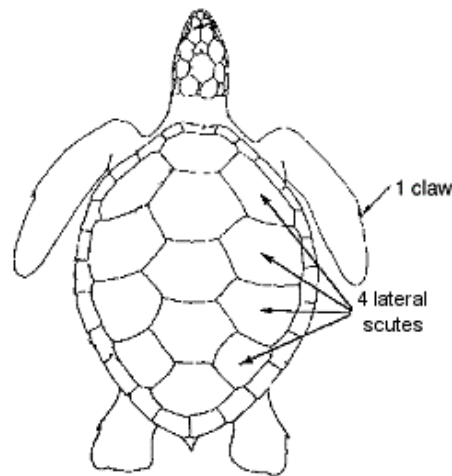
## Alternative Method

After studying sea turtle scutes, have students pick a species to model their turtle mosaic after. Encourage them to pay close attention to the number of scutes they must glue onto their carapace to create an accurate model of the species they selected.

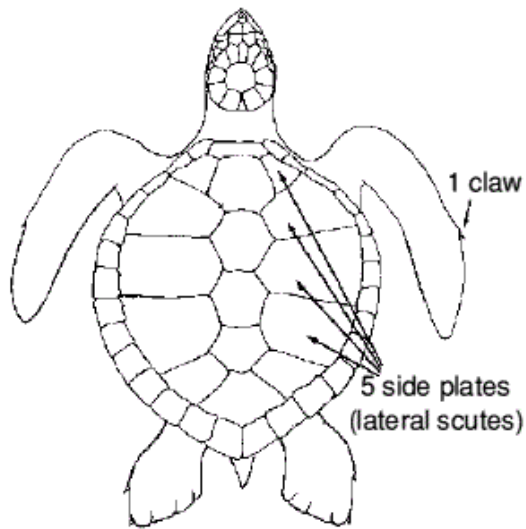
### Sea Turtle Scutes

One way to tell different species of sea turtle apart is to count the number of their scutes. Look at the sea turtles below and count the number of side plates, also known as lateral scutes. Pick one species of sea turtle from below and model your turtle after it.

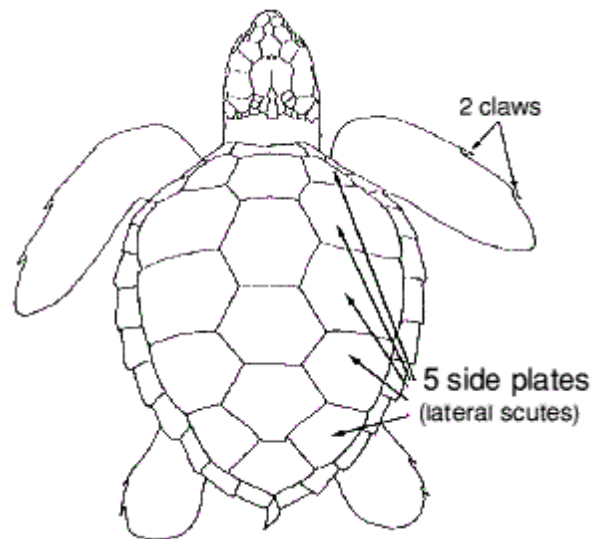
#### Green Sea Turtle



#### Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle



#### Loggerhead Sea Turtle



FAO Species Catalog- Vol. 11-Sea Turtles

