

# Don't Just Pack It, Wear Your Jacket

## KEY TERMS

**Buoyant:** Tending to float; capable of keeping an object afloat.

**Device:** Something made for a particular working purpose.

**Flotation:** Material that aids in floating.

**Life jacket:** A type of personal flotation device (PFD) approved by the U.S. Coast Guard for use during activities in, on or around water.

**Personal:** Pertaining to one's self.

**PFD:** Personal flotation device.

**Throwable device:** An object that can be thrown to a person in the water to help him or her float.

**Watercraft:** A vessel used for water transportation.

## OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Explain the importance of wearing a life jacket.
- Define PFD.
- Understand how to check the label to see if a life jacket is approved by the U.S. Coast Guard.
- Explain how to select a life jacket.
- Understand why a life jacket should fit properly.
- Demonstrate how to put on a life jacket.

## MATERIALS, EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

- Poster: Don't Just Pack It, Wear Your Jacket
- *Longfellow's WHALE Tales* video
- DVD player and monitor or computer with Internet access, projector and screen
- One of each of the five types of U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices
- Several Type II and/or Type III life jackets (in the various sizes that would fit the students)
- A ripped, tattered life jacket with missing snaps or ties
- Crayons, markers or pencils
- Fact Sheet 7: Longfellow's Guidelines on Life Jackets
- Student Handouts (one for each student):
  - Activity Sheet 6-1: What Color Is Your Life Jacket?
  - Activity Sheet 6-2: Where's Your Life Jacket?
  - Activity Sheet 6-3: Don't Just Pack It
  - Activity Sheet 6-4: Life Jackets
  - Activity Sheet 6-5: Read the Label

## Leader's Note

Display the poster, *Don't Just Pack It, Wear Your Jacket*, at the front of the classroom. Begin a discussion about the poster by asking students questions such as, "What are the people in this picture doing to stay safe while boating? When should you put on your life jacket? When should you take it off?" Refer to the poster throughout the lesson. As an option, you may use a projector to display the electronic version of the poster. Show the Longfellow's WHALE Tales video segment, "Don't Just Pack It, Wear Your Jacket," to support this topic.

---

## TOPIC: INTRODUCTION

### Key Points

- A life jacket is a personal flotation device (PFD) approved by the United States Coast Guard for use during activities in, on or around water.
- A life jacket should always be worn while boating.
- But life jackets are not just for boating.
  - Children and inexperienced swimmers should wear life jackets whenever they are in or around water.
- Certain types of life jackets are designed to keep your head above water and help you remain in a position that allows you to breathe.
- You should always wear the type that is recommended for the activity you will be doing and the place you will be swimming or boating.

---

## TOPIC: WHAT IS A LIFE JACKET?

### Key Points and Discussion

- How many of you have ever worn a life jacket? Raise your hand.
- What were you doing when you had the life jacket on?  
*Answer: Responses will vary. Allow time for responses.*
- What might happen if you fell off a boat without a life jacket on and became too tired to keep your head above water?  
*Answer: You might drown.*
- A life jacket is a type of personal flotation device.
  - The reason it is called a *device* is because it is a piece of equipment that has a special purpose.
  - The reason it is called a *personal* device is because it must be the right one for each person. A life jacket should fit snugly so that a person does not slip out of it. It should have the right amount of "float" for the weight of the person.
  - The next important word in the phrase, personal flotation device, is the word *flotation*. A personal flotation device is designed to help a person float and keep them on top of the water. It helps a person keep his or her head out of the water, even if he or she is very tired.

- A personal flotation device, also called a PFD, should be approved by the U.S. Coast Guard. This means a laboratory approved by the U.S. Coast Guard has tested the PFD and has found that it works the way it is supposed to work.

*Leader's Note: Have students complete Activity Sheet 6-1: What Color Is Your Life Jacket?*

---

## TOPIC: WHY SHOULD YOU WEAR A LIFE JACKET?

### Discussion

- Most drownings occur way out in the ocean, right? Or because there weren't enough life jackets, right? Wrong! Most drownings occur in inland waters, within a few feet of safety. Most of the victims had access to a life jacket, but did not have it on.
- When you don't wear your life jacket, you are taking a chance with your life.

*Leader's Note: Have students complete Activity Sheet 6-2: Where's Your Life Jacket?*

---

## TOPIC: WHEN SHOULD YOU WEAR A LIFE JACKET?

### Key Points and Discussion

- You should always wear a life jacket when you are on a boat or any watercraft (vessel for water transportation). You never know when something unexpected might happen.
  - The boat or watercraft could capsize (turn over) if there are waves or currents.
  - You could be thrown from the boat or watercraft if it hits something.
  - You could lose your balance while fishing.
- Inexperienced swimmers and young children should wear life jackets any time they are around water.
- Life jackets are also commonly worn at waterparks on various attractions.
- Everyone should wear a life jacket in open water (oceans, large lakes) or in any challenging water environment.
- Life jackets should always be worn around cold water.
  - Life jackets help conserve body heat and help you keep your head out of water.
- Can you think of any other time you should wear a life jacket?

**Answer:** Responses will vary. Tell students, "The best answer is to always wear a life jacket when you are in, on or around water."

*Leader's Note: Have students complete Activity Sheet 6-3: Don't Just Pack It.*

---

---

## TOPIC: TYPES OF PFDs

### Key Points

**Leader's Note:** Hold up each type of PFD as you explain the features of it. Emphasize the name and use for each type, rather than the type number. The U.S. Coast Guard may soon remove the type number from PFD labels.

- There are five types of U.S. Coast Guard-approved PFDs.
  - Offshore Life Jacket (Type I)—Designed for boating or sailing on the open ocean, rough seas or on remote waters where a rescue could be delayed. Offshore life jackets turn most unconscious wearers in the water from a face-down position to a vertical or slightly tipped-back position.
  - Near-Shore Buoyant Vest (Type II)—Designed for general recreational boating on calm, inland waters where a rescue would likely occur quickly. Near-shore buoyant vests may help turn an unconscious person in the water from a face-down position to a vertical or slightly tipped-back position.
  - Flotation Aid (Type III)—Often used for general boating in calm, inland waters or for the specialized activity that is marked on the device, such as water skiing. A person may have to tilt his or her head back to keep his or her face out of the water.
  - Throwable Device (Type IV)—Designed to be thrown to a person in the water in an emergency. Throwable devices include buoyant seat cushions or ring buoys. They are not worn. These devices do not take the place of wearing a life jacket.
  - Special-Use Device (Type V)—A special purpose device approved only for a specific activity such as canoeing, kayaking, commercial whitewater rafting or other commercial activities. The label shows its approved use.

**Leader's Note:** See Fact Sheet 7, *Longfellow's Guidelines on Life Jackets*, for more information about life jackets and other personal flotation devices (PFDs). You can provide this information to students, depending on the level of the group.

**Leader's Note:** Have students complete Activity Sheet 6-4: *Life Jackets*.

- Some life jackets are made differently for different activities. For example, life jackets for fishermen might have larger armholes, while life jackets for whitewater rafting might be less bulky.
- Life jackets for activities such as water skiing are tested for impact, to make sure they will not be damaged by hitting the water at a high speed.
- Waterparks and swimming pools may have policies about the use of life jackets.
  - Type II and III life jackets are most commonly used in these settings.
  - For some waterpark attractions, such as water slides, life jackets may not be permitted.
  - For other attractions, such as fast-moving winding rivers, life jackets may be required.

---

## TOPIC: HOW TO SELECT A LIFE JACKET

### Key Points

- All of the information about which activity a life jacket can be used for and the weight and size of the person the life jacket is made for can be found on the label.
- Life jacket labels contain the following information:
  - Type of life jacket
  - Intended use
  - Size
  - User weight
  - Chest size
  - U.S. Coast Guard approval number
- Make sure to wear the right type of life jacket for the activity you are doing.
- Make sure it is approved by the U.S. Coast Guard.
  - If it doesn't have a label, it is not U.S. Coast Guard-approved!

**Leader's Note:** Have students complete Activity Sheet 6-5: Read the Label.

---

## TOPIC: HOW TO WEAR A LIFE JACKET

### Key Points

- Make sure the life jacket is in good condition. Check buckles and straps for proper function.
- Make sure the life jacket is properly fastened. To work best, life jackets must be worn with all straps, zippers and ties fastened. Tuck in any loose strap ends to avoid getting caught on something.
- To check the fit:
  - Hold your arms straight up over your head.
  - Ask a friend to grasp the tops of the arm openings and gently pull up.
  - Make sure there is no excess room above the openings and that the jacket does not ride up over your chin or face.

### Activity

- Demonstrate wearing a too-small and a too-large life jacket or use a student to demonstrate. Talk about the problems of each as you show it. Tell students, "If a life jacket does not fit properly, it will not save your life."
- Have each student select and properly put on a life jacket from the Type II and Type III life jackets you have on hand.
- Make sure students check that all straps and snaps are secured.

---

## TOPIC: CARING FOR A LIFE JACKET

### Activity

- Ask students, “How many of you have your own life jackets?”  
*Answer: Students will raise their hands. Note how many there are. If no one has their own life jacket, you can skip over the Key Points below.*
- Hold up a life jacket that is ripped or worn out for all to see. Ask students, “Would you wear this life jacket?”  
*Answer: No*
- Ask students, “Why?”  
*Answer: It may not be buoyant enough to support a person because it is not in good condition.*

### Key Points

- To ensure that your life jacket will be in good shape when you need it, you must take care of it.
- Do not make any changes to your life jacket. If yours does not fit, get one that does. A life jacket that has been changed may not save your life.
- From time to time, check to see if your life jacket is in good condition and if it provides adequate support. Check it often for rips, tears and holes. Also check to see that seams, fabric straps and hardware are okay.
- Give your life jacket belts, ties and straps a quick, hard pull to make sure they are secure.
- You should find no signs of water logging, mildew odor or shrinkage of the buoyant materials.

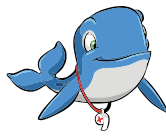
---

## TOPIC: WRAP-UP

*Leader’s Note: Refer back to the poster, Don’t Just Pack It, Wear Your Jacket, as you review the lesson.*

### Discussion

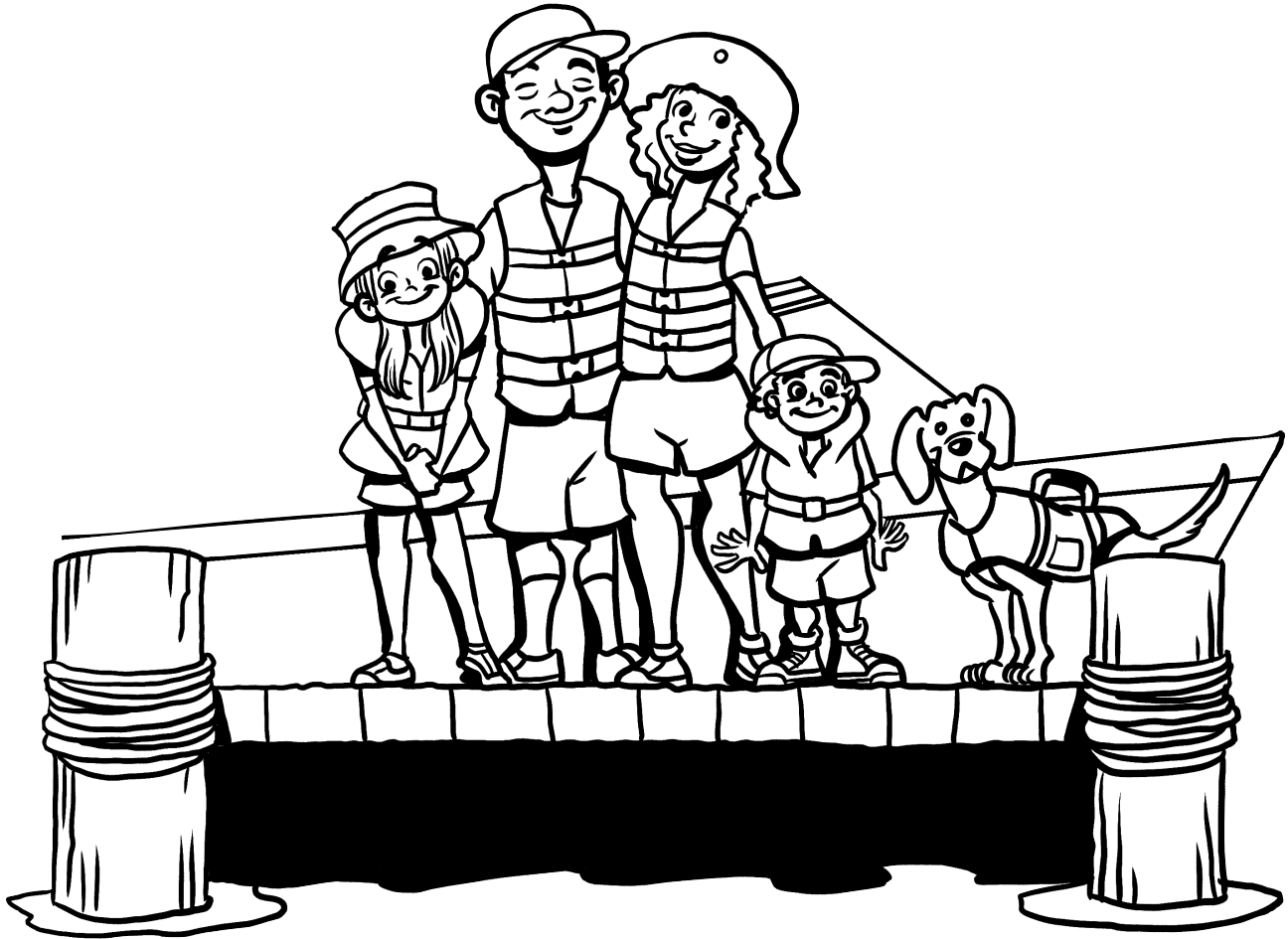
- How can a life jacket be most effective?  
*Answer: A life jacket is most effective when it is worn.*
- A life jacket is for putting on, not for sitting on.
- Always wear a life jacket:
  - On a boat or watercraft.
  - Around cold water.
  - Around deep water.
- Always make sure you wear a life jacket that is approved by the U.S. Coast Guard and that is the right type for the activity.
- Make sure a life jacket fits properly.
- Remember: Don’t just pack it, wear your jacket!

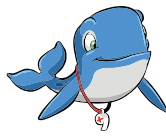


# What Color Is Your Life Jacket?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Color the life jackets in the picture.

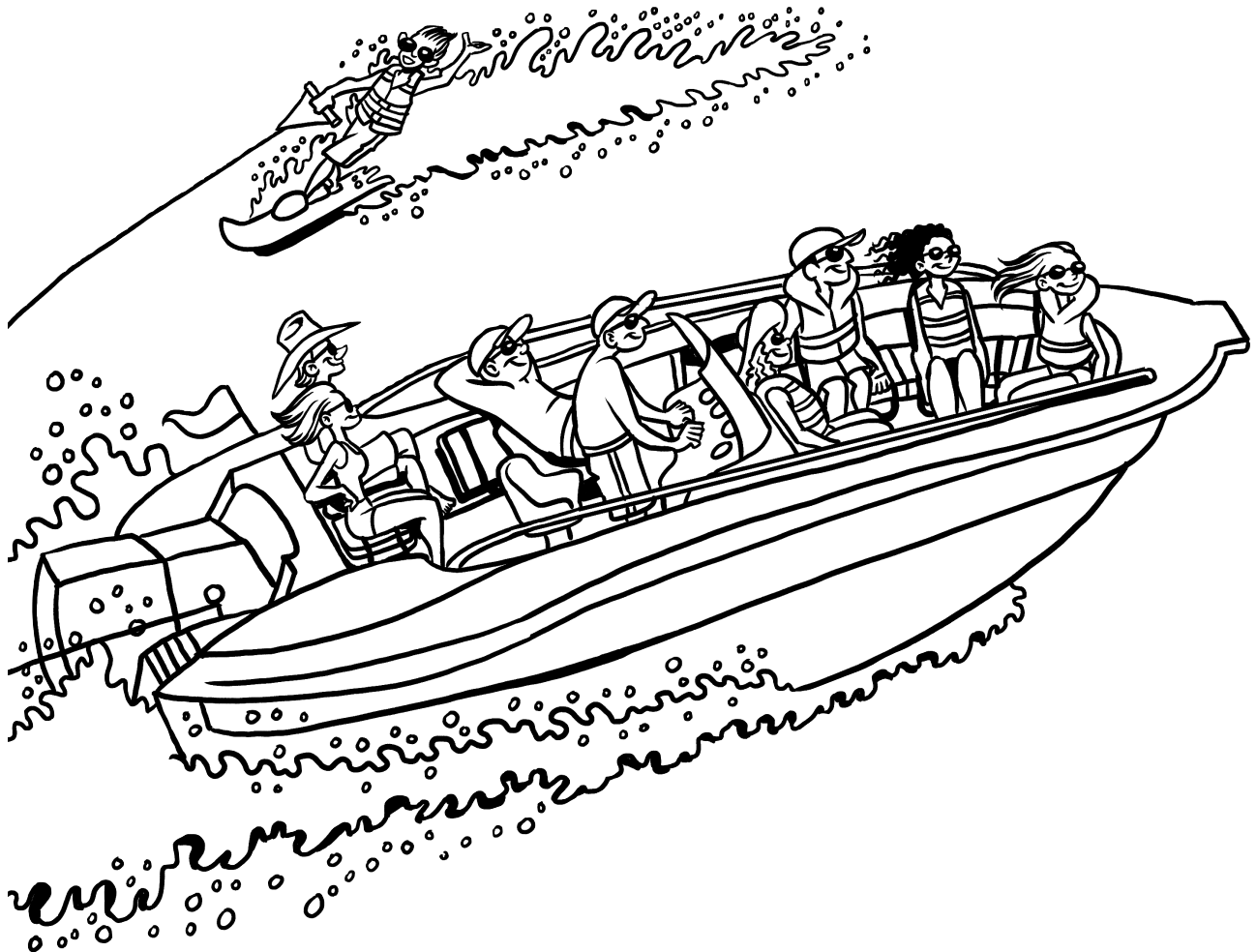




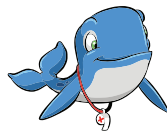
# Where's Your Life Jacket?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle all the life jackets or personal flotation devices in the picture. Put an X on the people who are not doing the safe thing.







---

# Don't Just Pack It

---

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Read each scenario below and think about if you agree or disagree with the decision. Write why you agree or disagree.**

1. After boating all morning, Jim and Elaine decide to put the anchor down. They see an island that is a short distance away. They decide to swim over to explore. They leave their life jackets on the boat.

---

---

---

---

2. Kaitlyn and Ashley are kayaking on a river with their scout troop. They both have life jackets in the kayak, but they are not wearing them. Both are very strong kayakers and very good swimmers.

---

---

---

---

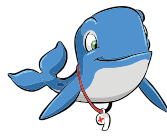
3. Jesse and Mark want to fish from the end of the dock. The water is deep—over the boys' heads, but there are more fish there than at the shoreline. Neither boy can swim very well. They agree that they won't go in the water; they will just fish from the dock. They leave their life jackets at the shoreline.

---

---

---

---



# Life Jackets

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Find the hidden words listed below. They describe things about life jackets and flotation devices. The words can run across or down.

s s v b s a f l o t a t i o n a i d p w  
y p e u h k d z j c i t s g e t t l t o  
o e c o d n s o b i z p w s p h c u k f  
w c i y f l e l k w a i e x k r u m e f  
r i v a k b a y s n x i p c c o n c g s  
x a e n i o t f s l t b a p n w i u v h  
r l d t c r c g e m z j e b e a p o f o  
o u e r x l u j f p e e w l e b x r b r  
s s s L x i s n j f r v f d t l s m h e  
m e u v y k h q i k c e e z q e h s r l  
x z d b b w i l e f z l s e x r b g u u  
p o e c l n o l o g b y q e m a g s w l  
n s t e p u n m l i f e j a c k e t y w  
d t c m f u o u w g v l w z s v k h g h  
v d i h j n x o r x i w f x l n e b u p  
v e r y v l r f e n w u w s x r l r s g  
z v t r i n g b u o y a c o y k w r n j  
r i s b t x e t b n u t d y n v e s t n  
o c e g a q m f u n d t f i p l j g h y  
g e r c j d n e a r s h o r e z b w f u

## Word List

buoyant

life jacket

ring buoy

throwable

device

near shore

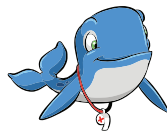
seat cushion

vest

flotation aid

off shore

special use

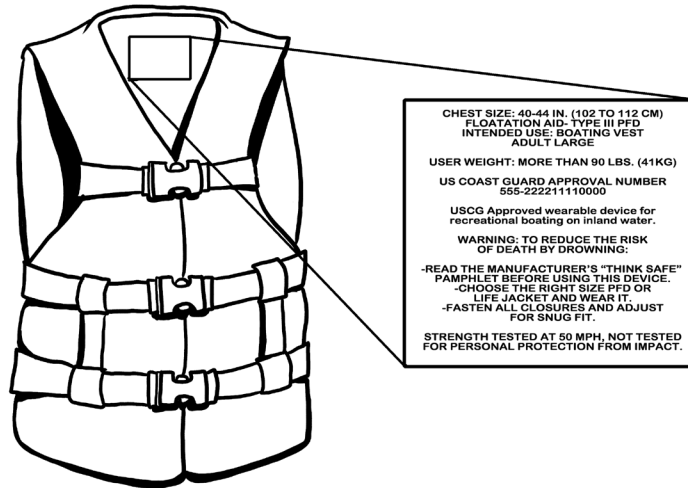


# Read the Label

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

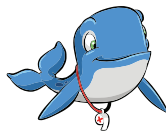
Read the label in the life jacket and read the description of the life jacket. The important things to note are the type of life jacket, the intended use, whether it is approved by the U.S. Coast Guard, and the weight and chest size of the user.

Answer the questions that follow by circling Yes or No for each question.



Flotation Aid (Type III): Used for general boating in calm, inland waters and for the special activity that is marked on the label, such as water skiing. A person may have to tilt his or her head back to keep his or her face out of the water.

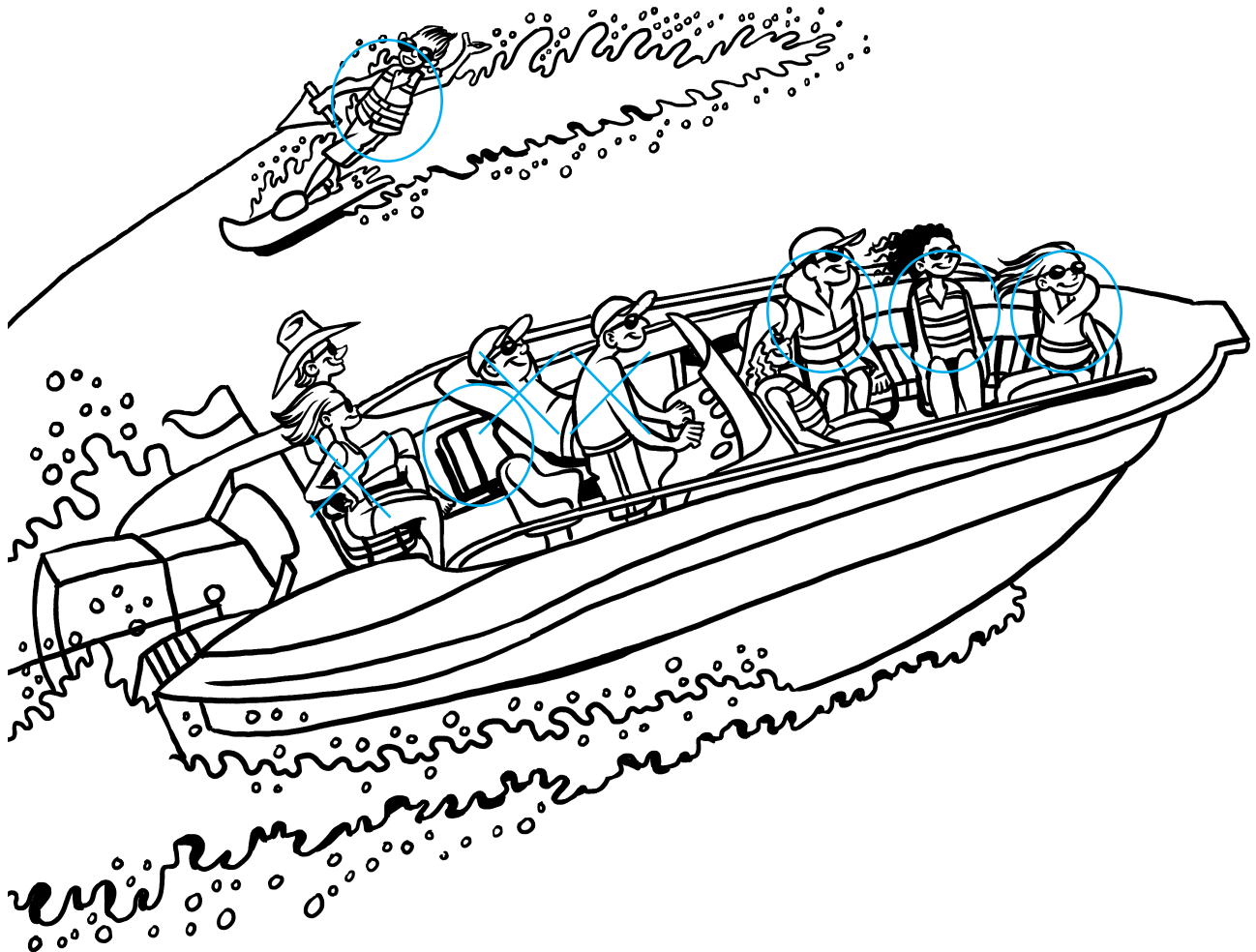
- |   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Is this life jacket approved by the U.S. Coast Guard?              | Yes | No |
| 2. Should an adult who weighs 120 pounds wear this life jacket?       | Yes | No |
| 3. Should this life jacket be worn for deep-sea fishing?              | Yes | No |
| 4. Should this life jacket be used for whitewater rafting on a river? | Yes | No |
| 5. Would this life jacket be acceptable on a motorboat on a lake?     | Yes | No |
| 6. Should a child who weighs 50 pounds wear this life jacket?         | Yes | No |
| 7. Would this life jacket be acceptable for canoeing on a lake?       | Yes | No |
| 8. Would this life jacket be acceptable for water skiing?             | Yes | No |
| 9. Would this life jacket be acceptable for sailing in the ocean?     | Yes | No |
| 10. Would this life jacket be acceptable for use at a community pool? | Yes | No |

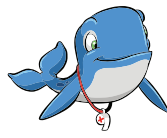


# Where's Your Life Jacket?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle all the life jackets or personal flotation devices in the picture. Put an X on the people who are not doing the safe thing.





---

# Don't Just Pack It

---

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Read each scenario below and think about if you agree or disagree with the decision. Write why you agree or disagree.**

1. After boating all morning, Jim and Elaine decide to put the anchor down. They see an island that is a short distance away. They decide to swim over to explore. They leave their life jackets on the boat.

*Jim and Elaine should wear their life jackets. They do not know how cold or how deep the water is. They do not know if there is a current.*

---

---

---

2. Kaitlyn and Ashley are kayaking on a river with their scout troop. They both have life jackets in the kayak, but they are not wearing them. Both are very strong kayakers and very good swimmers.

*Kaitlyn and Ashley should wear their life jackets. If something unexpected happens and they fall out of the kayak, the life jackets will not do them any good.*

---

---

---

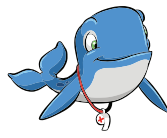
3. Jesse and Mark want to fish from the end of the dock. The water is deep—over the boys' heads, but there are more fish there than at the shoreline. Neither boy can swim very well. They agree that they won't go in the water; they will just fish from the dock. They leave their life jackets at the shoreline.

*Jesse and Mark should wear their life jackets. They could lose their balance and fall into the water while fishing.*

---

---

---



# Life Jackets

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Find the hidden words listed below. They describe things about life jackets and flotation devices. The words can run across or down.

s s v b s a f l o t a t i o n a i d p w  
y p e u h k d z j c i t s g e t t l t o  
o e c o d n s o b i z p w s p h c u k f  
w c i y f l e l k w a i e x k r u m e f  
r i v a k b a y s n x i p c c o n c g s  
x a e n i o t f s l t b a p n w i u v h  
r l d t c r c g e m z j e b e a p o f o  
o u e r x l u j f p e e w l e b x r b r  
s s s L x i s n j f r v f d t l s m h e  
m e u v y k h q i k c e e z q e h s r l  
x z d b b w i l e f z l s e x r b g u u  
p o e c l n o l o g b y q e m a g s w l  
n s t e p u n m l i f e j a c k e t y w  
d t c m f u o u w g v l w z s v k h g h  
v d i h j n x o r x i w f x l n e b u p  
v e r y v l r f e n w u w s x r l r s g  
z v t r i n g b u o y a c o y k w r n j  
r i s b t x e t b n u t d y n v e s t n  
o c e g a q m f u n d t f i p l j g h y  
g e r c j d n e a r s h o r e z b w f u

## Word List

buoyant

life jacket

ring buoy

throwable

device

near shore

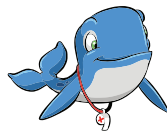
seat cushion

vest

flotation aid

off shore

special use

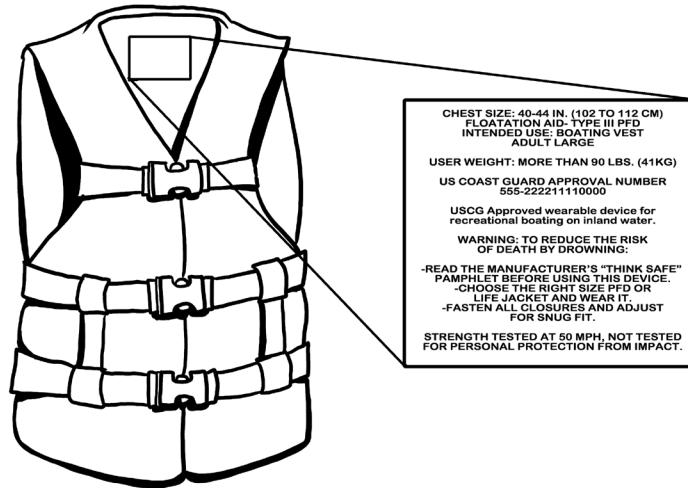


# Read the Label

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

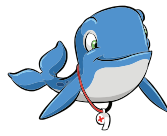
Read the label in the life jacket and read the description of the life jacket. The important things to note are the type of life jacket, the intended use, whether it is approved by the U.S. Coast Guard, and the weight and chest size of the user.

Answer the questions that follow by circling Yes or No for each question.



Flotation Aid (Type III): Used for general boating in calm, inland waters and for the special activity that is marked on the label, such as water skiing. A person may have to tilt his or her head back to keep his or her face out of the water.

1. Is this life jacket approved by the U.S. Coast Guard?      Yes    No
2. Should an adult who weighs 120 pounds wear this life jacket?      Yes    No
3. Should this life jacket be worn for deep-sea fishing?      Yes    No
4. Should this life jacket be used for whitewater rafting on a river?      Yes    No
5. Would this life jacket be acceptable on a motorboat on a lake?      Yes    No
6. Should a child who weighs 50 pounds wear this life jacket?      Yes    No
7. Would this life jacket be acceptable for canoeing on a lake?      Yes    No
8. Would this life jacket be acceptable for water skiing?      Yes    No
9. Would this life jacket be acceptable for sailing in the ocean?      Yes    No
10. Would this life jacket be acceptable for use at a community pool?      Yes    No



# Longfellow's Guidelines on Life Jackets

## Offshore Life Jacket (Type I)

Designed for boating or sailing on the open ocean, rough seas or on remote waters where a rescue could take a while. Offshore life jackets turn most unconscious people in the water from a face-down position to a vertical (upright) or slightly tipped-back position.



### Advantages

- Has the most buoyancy (floats the best)
- Comes in bright colors
- Has reflective material to help rescuers find a person in the water

### Disadvantage

- Bulky

## Near-Shore Buoyant Vest (Type II)

Designed for general, recreational boating activities. Good for calm, inland waters where there is a good chance for a fast rescue. Near-shore buoyant vests may help turn an unconscious person in the water from a face-down position to a vertical (upright) or slightly tipped-back position.



### Advantages

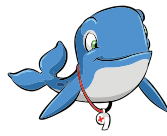
- Approved for multiple sizes for children and adults
- Not as bulky as an offshore life jacket

### Disadvantages

- Not recommended for rough water
- Has less buoyancy than an offshore life jacket

*Continued on next page*





# Longfellow's Guidelines on Life Jackets

## Flotation Aid (Type III)

Used for general, recreational boating in calm inland waters or for the specialized activity that is marked on the device, such as water skiing. Flotation aids are designed to keep a person in a vertical position.



### Advantages

- Considered more comfortable than offshore life jackets or near-shore buoyant vests
- Available in many styles
- Approved for multiples sizes for children and adults

### Disadvantages

- Person may have to tilt head back to keep face out of water
- May not keep an unconscious person's face out of the water
- Not as buoyant as offshore life jackets or near-shore buoyant vests
- Not recommended for rough water
- Must be water-tested by inexperienced swimmers before being used for boating activities

## Throwable Device (Type IV)

Flotation devices (such as a buoyant cushion or ring buoy) that are not worn but can be thrown to a person in the water in an emergency. A buoyant cushion may also be used as a seat cushion. These devices do not take the place of wearing a life jacket.



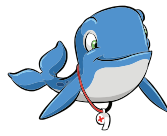
### Advantages

- May be thrown from boat or land
- Provides backup to wearable life jackets
- Some styles may be used as seat cushions

### Disadvantages

- Not for unconscious persons
- Does not take the place of a life jacket
- Not suitable for inexperienced swimmers or children
- Not safe for rough water

*Continued on next page*



# Longfellow's Guidelines on Life Jackets

## Special Use Life Jacket (Type V)

A special-use device is approved only for a specific activity, such as kayaking, water skiing, commercial whitewater rafting or other commercial activities. Some special-use devices provide protection from hypothermia while others are intended for freedom of movement. Special-use devices include boardsailing vests, deck suits, commercial whitewater vests and work vests.



### Advantage

- Designed for specific activities, therefore may be more comfortable for the activity

### Disadvantage

- Less safe than other life jackets if used for activities other than those marked on the label

*Note: The U.S. Coast Guard is currently working to revise the classification and labeling of life jackets and flotation devices.*

## How to Choose a Life Jacket

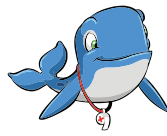
When choosing a life jacket:

- Make sure it is the right type for the activity.
- Make sure it is approved by the U.S. Coast Guard.
- Make sure it fits properly. Check the label on the life jacket for weight limits.
- Make sure it is in good condition. Check buckles and straps for proper function.
- Throw out any life jacket with torn fabric or straps that have pulled loose.
- Practice putting it on in water and swimming with it on. When you practice, have a person with you who can help if you have difficulty.

## How to Use Your Life Jacket

- Try on your life jacket to see if it fits snugly. Then test it in shallow water to see how it handles. A life jacket is designed not to ride up on the body in the water.
- To check your life jacket's buoyancy, relax your body and tilt your head back. Make sure your life jacket keeps your chin above water and you can breathe easily.
- If your mouth is not well above the water, you may need a life jacket with more buoyancy.

*Continued on next page*



---

# Longfellow's Guidelines on Life Jackets

---

## How to Care for a Life Jacket

To be sure that your life jacket will be in good shape when you need it, you must take care of it.

- Do not make changes to your life jacket. If yours does not fit, get one that does. An altered life jacket may not work properly.
- Periodically check to see if your life jacket is in good repair and if it provides adequate support. Check it often for rips, tears and holes. Also check to see that seams, fabric straps and hardware are okay. Give your life jacket belts, ties and straps a quick, hard pull to make sure they are secure. You should find no signs of water logging, mildew odor or shrinkage of the buoyant materials.
- Make sure that the snaps, belts, ties, straps and zippers are working properly.
- Do not use your life jacket as a kneeling pad or to sit on. Life jackets lose buoyancy when crushed.
- Hang your wet life jacket to dry in open air or in a well-ventilated area. Do not dry your life jacket in front of a radiator or other heat source.
- Do not leave your life jacket on board for long periods when the boat is not in use.
- Clean your life jacket only as the label instructs.