

Introduction

Download the LearnEnglish Themes podcast. You'll find more information on this page:
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- The article that you can listen to in the podcast
- An optional comprehension activity based on the article
- Links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (animals).

Read the article: Wild animal trivia

Bears

At the end of last century, every tenth house in St Petersburg would have at least one pet bear cub during the season. Lord Byron kept a pet bear when he was at Cambridge University. Bears have been observed to climb telegraph poles in their search for honey, mistaking the buzzing sound for that of bees. Bears have been taught to play basketball. Dr Leon Smith, their coach, commented: "Food is now secondary to the thrill of making a score". According to Mexican folklore, it is dangerous for a woman to catch sight of a bear in a zoo while she is pregnant, because her baby could take the form of the bear. Eskimo women never comb their hair on the day a polar bear is to be killed. All polar bears are left-handed.

Elephants

The elephant may be distinguished from other animals by its knee joints, which are much lower down than in most hoofed creatures. It is thus able to bend its hind legs in the fashion of a kneeling man. Ivan the Terrible put an elephant to death because it bowed down before him. The African elephant sleeps in a standing position. The elephant needs only two hours sleep a day. The elephant cannot jump, but is the only animal apart from man that has been taught to stand on its head. It is forbidden to lead an elephant through the approach tunnels of London's Heathrow Airport. In Milwaukee, pet elephants must be kept on a lead when taken for a walk on public streets.

Giraffes

Giraffes' milk is seven times richer in protein than cow's milk. Their hearts weigh about 25 lb. (11.4 kgs.) and their blood pressure is two or three times that of man, which is quite necessary considering how high the blood must be pumped. There is a unique valve in a

giraffe's neck to stop the blood rushing to its head when it bends down. Giraffes make no noise and show affection by pressing their necks together. The giraffe gives birth standing up, which means that the first experience of each baby giraffe is a fall to earth from a height of about 6 feet (1.83 metres). The neck of the giraffe has seven vertebrae, the same number as in the human neck.

Hippopotamuses

In the Nigerian Navy, there are twenty ships all of whose names mean 'hippopotamus' in various dialects of the country. Hippos can run faster than men. They give birth underwater, and the first act of the newborn is to float to the surface for its first breath of air. Hungary exports more hippos than any other European country. Hippos cannot swim.

Monkeys and apes

Art school examiners in Pretoria, South Africa, once gave a pass mark to a chimpanzee's drawings which had been submitted as a joke by a student. According to the United States customs office at Baltimore, "paint placed on a canvas by a sub-human animal" is not a work of art and therefore cannot be allowed to enter their country free of duty. This was decided in 1950 when an attempt was made to import paintings produced at London Zoo by the chimpanzee artist Congo. They were heading for an exhibition of monkey art. A customs spokesman commented, however, "If we did not know they were produced by an animal we would have thought they were good modern art". The gorilla sleeps for fourteen hours a day, is a vegetarian, and has no hair on its chest. Gorillas never snore. Chimpanzees often greet one another by shaking hands.

(Source: The Ultimate Irrelevant Encyclopaedia by Bill Hartson and Jill Dawson).

After reading

Apart from the main reading skills (skimming, scanning, intensive and extensive reading) there are other skills that a reader must acquire. One of these is the ability to infer information, or to read between the lines. This involves making use of clues (syntactic, logical and cultural) to discover the meaning of unknown elements. The activity that follows is designed to help you develop this skill.

Exercise 1

Answer the 10 questions below by “reading between the lines” of the text.

- 1) Which animal seems best suited to praying?
- 2) Which animal would do best in the Olympic stadium?
- 3) Which animal causes people to look worse than usual?
- 4) Which animal offended a dictator?
- 5) Which animal would be most welcome in a library?
- 6) Which animal is the laziest?
- 7) Which animal could get a shock when it is hungry?
- 8) Which animal has special protection when having a drink?
- 9) Which animal seems poorly adapted to its natural habitat?
- 10) Which animal would be easiest to sleep with?

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More activities on this topic

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of animals at:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-animals.htm>

- **Magazine articles:** There are 12 articles, including **creepy crawlies**; **flea circuses**; **iguana farming** and **sea monsters**.
- **Word games:** There are 28 word games, including **animal idioms**; **animal noises**; **venomous animals** and **zoo puzzle**.
- **Stories:** There are 8 stories, including **Aesop's fables**; **Chinese zodiac**; **The Dinosaur in Jake's Garage** and **The Hunting Bird**.
- **Poems:** There are 6 poems, including **The cat that walked by himself**; **Danger in the Wet**; **The Tyger** and **Wolf poetry**.
- **Trivia:** The following trivia topics are available for this theme: **animal conservation**; **biodiversity**; **creepy crawlies**; **dinosaurs** and **pets**.
- There are also more than 30 animals-related cartoons, and the following sets of carefully selected external links: **animal conservation**; **biodiversity**; **creepy crawlies**; **dinosaurs** and **pets**.

Answers to comprehension activity: 1. elephant ("It is thus able to bend its hind legs in the fashion of a kneeling man."); 2. hippo ("Hippos can run faster than men." [It is not the bear, because basketball is not played in the Olympic stadium]); 3. (polar) bear ("Eskimo women never comb their hair on the day a polar bear is to be killed."); 4. elephant ("Ivan the Terrible put an elephant to death because it bowed down before him."); 5. giraffe ("Giraffes make no noise."); 6. gorilla ("The gorilla sleeps for fourteen hours a day."); 7. bear ("Bears have been observed to climb telegraph poles in their search for honey, mistaking the buzzing sound for that of bees."); 8. giraffe ("There is a unique valve in a giraffe's neck to stop the blood rushing to its head when it bends down."); 9. hippo ("Hippos cannot swim."); 10. gorilla ("Gorillas never snore.")