

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

# The Unusual Aardvark

by Guy Belleranti

If you've ever read Marc Brown's picture books, you know about a fictional aardvark named Arthur. But have you ever wondered what a real-life aardvark is like? They're found in Africa, and they really don't look much like the characters in Marc Brown's books.



The name aardvark actually means *earth pig*. Why give the animal a name like this? Well, the aardvark has a talent for digging in earth. Its

In ad  
long antea  
related to p



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anteaters. Like an anteater it uses the strong claws on its feet to dig into termite mounds and anthills. Then it slurps up the insects with its long sticky tongue. The aardvark can even shut its nostrils to keep both the biting insects and dust out. The animal's thick skin also provides protection from insect bites.

Unlike anteaters, the adult aardvark does have some teeth. But they're not the teeth of most mammals. They have no canines or incisors, only molar cheek-teeth.

While the aardvark does occasionally warm itself in the sun, it is primarily nocturnal. When night falls it comes out of its burrow using its great sense of smell to find an insect dinner.

The aardvark digs many burrows in its home range, using them as places to sleep and hide. When it abandons a burrow other animals such as squirrels, porcupines, hares, monitor lizards or birds often move in.

The aardvark's long tubular ears can rotate to help it listen for predators like leopards, lions, cheetahs, hyenas and wild dogs. Some people also hunt the animal.

Its best defense is to quickly dig and hide in a burrow. An aardvark can also use its tail as a club and use its sharp claws to fight back. And this is not a small animal. Adults usually weigh over 100 pounds, with males reaching as much as 170 pounds.

The aardvark is a solitary animal, coming together with other aardvarks only for mating. Usually a mother aardvark has only one baby at a time. The baby remains in the burrow for about two weeks. Then it begins searching for food with its mother. Young males go off on their own when they're six months old. Young females often stay near until the next baby is born.

### About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes mainly from his own research.



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1. On which continent do aardvarks live?

\_\_\_\_\_



2. Complete the graphic organizer.

Three Ways a Pig's Body and an Aardvark's Body Are Similar <small>(According to the Information in the Article)</small>		
1.	2.	3.



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3. An aardvark can store its food. Explain how this helps it survive.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Why do aardvarks dig burrows?

- a. so they can find water
- b. so they can find food underground
- c. so they have a safe place to hide from predators
- d. all of the above

5. Name five predators of the aardvark.

\_\_\_\_\_

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.



\_\_\_\_\_ 1. fictional

a. long and round

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. nostrils

b. rabbit-like animals

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. occasionally

c. animals known for their sharp quills

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. c



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\_\_\_\_\_ 5. p

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. hares

f. not real; made-up

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. tubular

g. leaves

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. club

h. not often, but sometimes

◆ Now try this: On a sheet of lined paper, use each vocabulary word from above in a sentence.

# ANSWER KEY

## The Unusual Aardvark

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1. On which continent do aardvarks live? **Africa**
2. Complete the graphic organizer.

<b>Three Ways a Pig's Body and an Aardvark's Body Are Similar</b> (According to the Information in the Article)		
1. <b>It has a snout like a pig.</b>	2. <b>It only has a small amount of hair.</b>	3. <b>It has powerful, pig-like legs.</b>

Also c



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3. An a  
**It kee**

4. Why do aardvarks dig burrows? **c**
  - a. so they can find water
  - b. so they can find food underground
  - c. **so they have a safe place to hide from predators**
  - d. all of the above

5. Name five predators of the aardvark.

**leopards, lions, cheetahs, hyenas, and wild dogs**

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