

Name: _____

A Mob of Meerkats

By Guy Belleranti

On a large rock in the dry grasslands of southern Africa, a few slender, foot-tall meerkats stand upright on their rear legs. Their statue-like stances, along with their small pointed faces and large eyes, make a cute picture. However, these meerkats aren't posing for photos. They're acting as guards, watching for predators while others in their group, or mob, search for food.



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safety of their extensive underground burrows and tunnels. Sometimes, however, they stand together, hissing, until the predator leaves.

Inside the burrows, other mob members watch over newborns and juvenile meerkats. The burrows have many entrances and exits. The deeper tunnels have comfortable year-round temperatures.

A meerkat mob has several burrow systems. The meerkats move from one system to another every few months. They often occupy burrows previously dug by ground squirrels or other animals. However, meerkats are also well adapted for creating or extending burrows. They have long claws for digging. They also have a clear membrane covering their eyes, and ears that close to keep out dirt.

More fun meerkat facts:

- Meerkats are diurnal. This means they are active during the day. When they emerge from their burrows each morning they like to stretch out on their backs and warm up in the sun.
- Although the name “meerkat” might make you think they’re related to cats, the meerkat is actually related to the mongoose.
- The dark fur around a meerkat’s eyes diminishes



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About the Author

Guy Belleranti is an author of fiction, poetry, articles, puzzles, and humor for children and adults. He also works as a docent at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences teaching children about the wild animals at the zoo.

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1. According to the article, which of the following is **not** a way meerkats would react to a predator?

- a. Meerkats might run to the safety of their burrow.
- b. Meerkats might climb a tree to escape a predator.
- c. A guard meerkat might call out an alarm.
- d. Meerkats might stand in a group, hissing, until the predator leaves.



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animals. What are two physical traits that help meerkats do this?

1. _____
2. _____

4. If you see a group of meerkats standing very straight on their hind legs, what are they most likely doing?

- a. sunbathing
- b. sniffing out prey to eat
- c. watching for predators
- d. socializing with each other

5. According to the information in the article, how are the internal clocks, or active and resting times, of meerkats similar to those of humans?

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Match each vocabulary word from the reading passage with the correct definition.

_____ 1. diminishes

a. a young animal

_____ 2. slender

b. a small carnivorous mammal related to the meerkat

_____ 3. vicious

c. most powerful



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_____ 7. occupy

g. a thin structure that acts as a boundary in an organism

_____ 8. mongoose

h. a wild dog that lives in Africa

_____ 9. diurnal

i. gracefully thin; slight

_____ 10. membrane

j. reside in a certain place

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In the article, "A Mob of Meerkats," you learned that meerkats use teamwork to protect the mob from predators, take care of young, and dig extensive burrows.



Choose another animal species that demonstrates teamwork in its everyday living. How does that animal species work together with others of its kind? Give examples of teamwork based on your knowledge of the animal species you chose.



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ANSWER KEY

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Match each vocabulary word from the reading passage with the correct definition.

d. 1. diminishes

a. a young animal

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g. 10. membrane

j. reside in a certain place