

# Elephant Tales



NOAA

Scientists are trying to find out how elephants communicate.

Shirley, a 4-ton elephant, has something to say. She opens her mouth and gurgles. The nearby elephants understand the sound, but it's just noise to me.

What exactly is Shirley saying? Scientists are not sure, but they are trying to find out how elephants like Shirley communicate. I visited Shirley at the Elephant Sanctuary in Hohenwald, Tennessee. A **sanctuary** is an area in nature where wildlife is protected. The sanctuary is home to Shirley and five other elephants—Bunny, Jenny, Sissy, Tarra, and Winkie. All six animals were once in zoos or circuses. Now they roam freely on 2,700 acres of grassland and woods.

## A Noisy Group

Not all the elephants at the sanctuary gurgle like Shirley. Tarra barks like a sea lion when she is happy. Bunny speaks in squeaks. I soon got used to hearing the different "voices" of the elephants. When one gray giant came close to me, I wondered which elephant it was. Then I heard the thwap sound of her trunk slapping the floor. "Aha!" I said to myself. "That's Sissy clapping." I also learned that the elephants share a special language of screeches, rumbles, and trumpet-like sounds.

Elephants also communicate in a way that people cannot hear. **Infrasound** is a sound that is too low in pitch for the human ear to pick up. Scientists believe that elephant infrasound can travel for miles. Elephants in a herd use it to keep in touch when they become separated.

## Old Friends



*U.S. Fish and  
Wildlife Service*  
Asian elephants  
are endangered.

The elephants speak to one another for the same reasons people talk. Sometimes they even shout with excitement. When Shirley first came to the sanctuary, Jenny looked at her and began to roar. Shirley roared back. At first, the animal keepers had no idea what the fuss was about. Later, they discovered that Shirley and Jenny had crossed paths 20 years earlier in a circus. The elephants' roars meant they still recognized each other. They had a lot of catching up to do!

## Elephants at Risk

There are two species, or kinds, of elephants—Asian and African. In the wild, both species are endangered. Animals are endangered when so few exist that the species may die out. In 1970, almost 2 million Asian elephants lived in the wild in Southeast Asia. Now only 25,600 to 32,750 live there. Their habitat, or home, is being gradually destroyed. As the population grows, humans are building on more of the land. In Africa, only half as many wild elephants exist today as lived there 20 years ago. Humans have illegally killed the animals for their tusks. Tusks are the long, curved front teeth of elephants.

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

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How are humans making things hard for elephants in the world?

- A Humans are studying the different noises that elephants make.
- B Humans are preventing them from communicating with sounds.
- C Humans are setting up sanctuaries where they can live.
- D Humans are moving into the elephants' land.

2. Which of the following does the author describe in the passage?

- A different sounds made by elephants
- B what it is like to be a circus elephant
- C how to plan a visit to an elephant sanctuary
- D ways to save the elephants' habitats

3. The passage suggests that

- A some elephants have excellent memories
- B many elephants become separated from their herds
- C some elephants like to eat grass
- D many elephants are very excited to see each other

4. Read the following sentences and answer the question below: "A sanctuary is an area in nature where wildlife is protected. The sanctuary is home to Shirley and five other elephants—Bunny, Jenny, Sissy, Tarra, and Winkie."

In this sentence, the word **wildlife** means

- A wild elephants
- B wild animals
- C wild circuses
- D wild noises

5. The primary purpose of this passage is to describe

- A Shirley the elephant and the noises she makes
- B how to save endangered elephants from dying out
- C ways that elephants communicate with each other
- D what it is like at an elephant sanctuary

6. How is infrasound helpful to elephants?

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7. How did the keepers probably feel when they realized that the elephants Shirley and Jenny recognized each other? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

All six animals were once in zoos or circuses, \_\_\_\_\_ now they roam freely on 2,700 acres of grassland and woods.

- A since
- B so
- C but
- D after

9. Answer the questions based on the sentence below.

Jenny and Shirley roared when Shirley first came to the sanctuary because they recognized each other.

Who? Jenny and Shirley

(did) What? \_\_\_\_\_

When? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

**10.** Read the vocabulary word and definition below, and complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

**Vocabulary Word:** communicate (com · mun · i · cate): to give information about something to someone else.

**10a.** Read the five sentences below, and underline the word **communicate** in each sentence.

1. The students put their pencils down to communicate that they had finished the spelling test.
2. I was sad that my friend did not communicate with me after she moved away.
3. The firefighters used walkie-talkies to communicate when they were in the burning building.
4. While swimming, I waved my hands in the air to communicate to the lifeguard that I needed help!
5. I tried to communicate with my dog by barking, but it seemed that my dog had no idea what I was saying.

**10b.** Which image shows people communicating?



**11.** If you make a face at someone, is that an example of communicating? Why or why not?

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## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

**Passage Reading Level:** 730 Lexile

**Featured Text Structure:** Descriptive – the writer explains, defines, or illustrates a concept or topic

**Passage Summary:** The passage talks about how elephants communicate by describing different elephants that live in an elephant sanctuary in Tennessee. The author also discusses the reasons that elephants are endangered.

1. How are humans making things hard for elephants in the world?

- A Humans are studying the different noises that elephants make.
- B Humans are preventing them from communicating with sounds.
- C Humans are setting up sanctuaries where they can live.
- D **Humans are moving into the elephants' land.**

2. Which of the following does the author describe in the passage?

- A **different sounds made by elephants**
- B what it is like to be a circus elephant
- C how to plan a visit to an elephant sanctuary
- D ways to save the elephants' habitats

3. The passage suggests that

- A **some elephants have excellent memories**
- B many elephants become separated from their herds
- C some elephants like to eat grass
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4. Read the following sentences and answer the question below: "A sanctuary is an area in nature where wildlife is protected. The sanctuary is home to Shirley and five other elephants—Bunny, Jenny, Sissy, Tarra, and Winkie."

In this sentence, the word **wildlife** means

- A wild elephants
- B **wild animals**
- C wild circuses
- D wild noises

5. The primary purpose of this passage is to describe

- A Shirley the elephant and the noises she makes
- B how to save endangered elephants from dying out
- C **ways that elephants communicate with each other**
- D what it is like at an elephant sanctuary

6. How is infrasound helpful to elephants?

**Suggested answer:** Infrasound (sound too low for humans to hear) is helpful to elephants because they can use it to connect with each other if they become separated from the herd. [paragraph #4]

7. How did the keepers probably feel when they realized that the elephants Shirley and Jenny recognized each other? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

**Suggested answer:** The keepers were probably amazed that the elephants still remembered each other after 20 years and that they were able to communicate that recognition to each other. [paragraph #5]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

All six animals were once in zoos or circuses, \_\_\_\_\_ now they roam freely on 2,700 acres of grassland and woods.

- A since
- B so
- C **but**
- D after

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Jenny and Shirley roared when Shirley first came to the sanctuary because they recognized each other.

Who? Jenny and Shirley

(did) What? **roared**

When? **when Shirley first came to the sanctuary**

Why? **because they recognized each other**

10. ReadWorks recommends that you teach this vocabulary word to the whole class out loud using the four steps listed below.

**Vocabulary Word:** communicate

**Step 1:** Introduce the word

- a. Teacher writes the word on the board and divides it into syllables: (com · mun · i · cate)
- b. Teacher says: "This word is communicate. What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "communicate."]

**Step 2:** Provide a child-friendly definition

- a. Teacher says: "Communicate means to give information about something to someone else."
- b. Teacher says: "In the text, scientists are working to find out how elephants communicate. This means the scientists are trying to find out how elephants give information to each other. In general, animals can communicate with sounds or with movements. People communicate with sounds, words, movements, and so on."
- c. Teacher says: "What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "communicate."]

**Step 3:** Practice the word

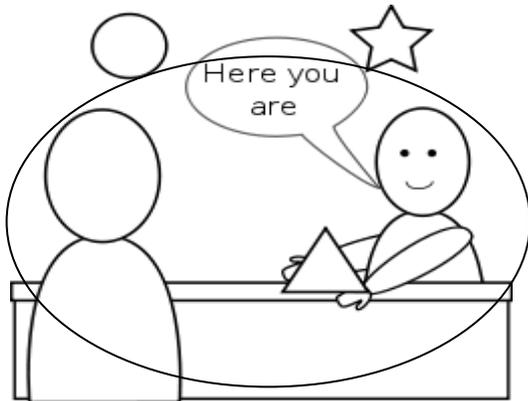
Teacher provides examples and additional opportunities to repeat the word. Read the first sentence out loud to your students. Begin reading it again and when you come to the vocabulary word, prompt students to say the vocabulary word out loud. Then, finish reading the sentence out loud to your students.

- 10a.**
1. The students put their pencils down to communicate that they had finished the spelling test.
  2. I was sad that my friend did not communicate with me after she moved away.
  3. The firefighters used walkie-talkies to communicate when they were in the burning building.
  4. While swimming, I waved my hands in the air to communicate to the lifeguard that I needed help!
  5. I tried to communicate with my dog by barking, but it seemed that my dog had no idea what I was saying.

**Step 4:** Check for student understanding

This step can be completed as a whole class activity or as an independent practice.

- 10b.** Which image shows people communicating?



- 11.** If you make a face at someone, is that an example of communicating? Why or why not?

**Suggested answer:** Making a face at someone would be communicating because you can communicate something to someone using facial expressions. If I frown, I communicate that I am sad. If I smile, I communicate that I am happy.

*Suggested Additional Vocabulary:* wildlife, gurgle, sanctuary, screech, rumble, illegally