

The Underappreciated Donkey

(November 2016)

Donkeys do not get the credit they should. In fact, some donkey fans think there are too many people who snub these amazing animals. We all know what donkeys look like—long ears and big eyes. And we have heard about their stubborn side when they often refuse to move if they feel unsafe. But what else do we know? First, donkeys work hard. In some parts of the globe, they are kept as pets, but in other places they are work animals. However, there is more to donkeys than just working at tasks or being our pals. Learning about them is a perfect way to find out more about them. It is also the best way to let others know how fantastic donkeys are.

When you think of a donkey, do you think of those big ears? Sure, they might be funny, but they are so much more than that. A donkey's extra-long ears let it hear even the smallest sounds. Wild donkeys live

mostly in hot, dry, expansive lands in Africa and Asia. Wild donkeys do not stick close together in these kinds of hot, dry lands. Their long ears let them pick up on the calls of distant herd mates who have trotted off. Big ears may also help donkeys stay cool, which is important when living under the hot sun.

Donkeys were made tame just about 5,000 years ago. From that time, humans have bred some interesting kinds of donkey. One of the most interesting is the Poitou donkey. It has a distinct, long coat which drapes down in thick ropes of fur. In the past, the Poitou had a lot of fans who were quick to adore its amazing coat and leave it as is was. Today, Poitou donkeys are given a shave to help keep them fit and well. There are not a lot of Poitou donkeys left, but they are not quite at risk of vanishing. As of 2011, there were about 400 Poitou donkeys living on the planet.

The Poitou donkey is safe from going extinct, but wild donkeys are not so lucky. Donkeys were domesticated long ago from African wild donkeys. Sadly, since that time, wild donkeys have been on the decline. There are two main kinds of wild donkey: the African wild donkey and the Asiatic wild donkey. The African wild donkey is at risk of vanishing. There are just 200 adults left in the wild. That is because it is hunted for food and for medicine. Its habitat is now used for livestock. The Asiatic wild donkey is hunted and it also has to compete with livestock for food and water. Gates, fences, and railways also cut the Asiatic wild donkeys off from the path it travels. Sadly, this habitat loss makes it difficult for wild donkeys to live.

Although things do not look good for wild donkeys, there are lots of people who care and work to protect them. There is a wild donkey safe haven in Gujarat, India, that was constructed in 1972. It is the biggest wildlife sanctuary in India. In 2015, the population of wild donkeys went up by 454 donkeys!

This proves that when people protect animals, such as donkeys, those animals can make it.

Here is one last fun fact: donkeys are sometimes used to protect livestock animals. That is because donkeys do not like dogs much, so they are pretty good at getting rid of the dogs, coyotes, and foxes that hang around and try to hunt sheep, goats, and calves. The livestock animals think the donkey is there to keep them safe. This often works well, but sometimes the donkeys do not want to protect the animals. They just want to hang out and be donkeys! At other times, they fall victim to the predators that go after the herd of animals. One thing is for sure: a donkey can bray at the top of its lungs, so help can come to the rescue. A bray is a donkey's call and it is sometimes called a hee-haw!

These are some fantastic and interesting facts about a wonderful and often underappreciated animal.

There are plenty more fun facts to be found about donkeys if you take the time to look.

Teacher Resources

This text passage is archived under *Animals*.

Text Easability Scores

If you would like to measure the text easability scores of this passage, please follow the directions below.

1. Visit the Coh-Metrix Text Easability Assessor website at <http://tea.cohmetrix.com/>. If you do not already have a login and password, create one. It is free and easy to sign up for access to the website.
2. Once you have created an account and sign in, you will be taken to a page with an empty, white text box. Copy and paste the text from this passage into the empty, white text box. Make sure you are only copying and pasting the body of the passage. Do not include the title, date, or any of the resources present in the passage.
3. When you have pasted the passage into the text box, click on the red button beneath the text box that says "Analyze." There will be a short delay and after a few seconds, you will see a bar graph appear to the right of the screen.
4. The bar graph will give you the percentages for several text characteristics including: narrativity, syntactic simplicity, word concreteness, referential cohesion, and deep cohesion.
5. Below the bar graph, the Flesch Kincaid Grade Level is also included for your benefit.
6. Lastly, a paragraph is provided that explains the meaning of the measurements of the text characteristics for your particular passage.
7. Once you have completed measuring your passage, you can click on the "Clear" button below the text box and measure another passage, if you wish.