

China Today The Giant Panda

Deep in a forest, a black-and-white bear sits peacefully. It chews the green leaves of a plant. The bear is alone, but there are others not too far away. Later, it might amble over to find them. They may play together. This is the giant panda in nature.



The giant panda is a bear native to China. It is unusual for a bear to be found only in one place. For over a hundred years, scientists thought that giant pandas might belong to the raccoon family. Then research in the 1980s showed that giant pandas are bears after all. These bears are black and white, with black patches of fur around their eyes.

Giant pandas live in bamboo forests, high in the mountains in the western part of China. This is their habitat. Here they eat bamboo. Bamboo is a grass that can grow 100 feet high. It has hollow green **stalks**.¹ Giant pandas peel off the leaves and stems to eat. Their paws are well adapted to this task. They have a special thumb that helps them grasp the bamboo. Giant pandas spend about 10-15 hours a day eating this plant.

Giant pandas are an **endangered species**.² Why are so few left? One reason is that they have less bamboo to eat. More and more of the bamboo forests where giant pandas live are being cut down. China has more people than any country in the world, and these people need food, clothing, and homes. Farmers want to use the land where the forests are to plant food. Loggers want to cut down the forests and sell the bamboo to make money.

As the forests disappear, giant pandas are having a harder time finding food. Sometimes they starve. Today, there are about 1,600 pandas left in the wild.

¹ **stalk** – the stem of a plant

² **endangered species** – a type of animal that is disappearing from the world

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. According to the passage, what helps pandas eat bamboo?

- a. sharp teeth
- b. long arms and legs
- c. a tail that can wrap around the stalks
- d. a special thumb

2. What is the purpose of the first paragraph in this passage?

- a. to introduce the reader to giant pandas by describing one
- b. to prove to the reader that giant pandas are in danger of dying out
- c. to explain why bamboo is so important to giant pandas
- d. to argue that giant pandas actually belong to the raccoon family

3. Where would you be most likely to find a giant panda?

- a. a swamp or marsh in Japan
- b. a swamp or marsh in China
- c. a bamboo forest in Japan
- d. a bamboo forest in China

4. Read the following sentences: "Giant pandas live in bamboo forests, high in the mountains in the western part of China. This is their habitat."

In the passage, the word **habitat** means

- a. mountains in western China
- b. an activity or behavior done over and over
- c. an animal's natural home
- d. daily life

5. The main purpose of this passage is to

- a. list the reasons that giant pandas have become an endangered species
- b. show that giant pandas and black bears are closely related
- c. convince people that they should take action to protect giant pandas
- d. describe giant pandas and the dangers facing them

6. Why are so few giant pandas left?

7. As the population in China increases, will the number of giant pandas most likely increase or decrease? Why?

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

Some bears have more than one natural habitat, _____ giant pandas living in the wild are found only in China.

- a. or
- b. but
- c. so
- d. and

9. Read the following sentence.

Because they need bamboo to eat, giant pandas live in forests high in the mountains of western China.

Answer the questions below based on the information provided in the sentence you just read. Two of the questions have already been answered for you.

1. What is the main subject of the sentence? giant pandas

2. What is the main verb of the sentence? live

3. Where do giant pandas live? _____

4. Why? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** endangered: threatened.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 630

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

Passage Summary: This passage describes the characteristics of giant pandas, their habitat, their diet, and the reasons they have become endangered.

1. According to the passage, what helps pandas eat bamboo?
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 - d) a special thumb**

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6. Why are so few giant pandas left?

Suggested answer: Pandas have less to eat because bamboo forests are being cut down.

7. As the population in China increases, will the number of giant pandas most likely increase or decrease? Why?

Suggested answer: As the population in China increases, the number of pandas will most likely decrease because more bamboo forests will most likely be cut down to meet the food, clothing and housing needs of the Chinese people. These bamboo forests provide homes and food to the pandas which will most likely die as their natural habitats become threatened and their food supply is reduced.

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

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1. What is the main subject of the sentence? giant pandas
2. What is the main verb of the sentence? live
3. Where do giant pandas live? **in forests high in the mountains of western China**
4. Why? **because they need bamboo to eat**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** endangered: threatened.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.