

Giraffes: fact or idea?

Suggested ages 8-12, with adult guidance. Allow about 15-20 minutes.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Read these notes

A giraffe usually has **seven neck bones**, just like a human. Its long neck does not contain a huge extra supply of bones. A baby giraffe is called a **calf**. Its tongue is **prehensile**, which means it can grasp. The **okapi** has striped legs but belongs to the giraffe family, not the zebra family.

Researchers recorded giraffes **humming at night** at three European zoos. They could not identify which animal made each hum or establish exactly what the sound meant. A recording is evidence that a sound happened. An idea about its purpose still needs investigation.

1. Find the facts

a. How many neck bones does a giraffe usually have?

b. What is a baby giraffe called?

c. What does prehensile mean?

d. Which giraffe relative has striped legs?

2. Sort the evidence

Write **O** for an observation, **E** for a possible explanation, or **Q** for an unanswered question.

_____ Researchers recorded a humming sound.

_____ Humming might help giraffes communicate.

_____ Which giraffe made the sound, and why?

3. Improve the headline

Rewrite this so it fits the evidence: "**Scientists know exactly why giraffes hum.**"

Answers, with reasons

A short reading-and-discussion activity. Adapt the vocabulary to your learners.

1. Fact check

- a. Seven. The bones are called cervical vertebrae.
- b. A calf.
- c. Able to grasp.
- d. The okapi. Stripes alone do not establish a family relationship.

2. Evidence sort

O: The recording is an observation.

E: Communication is a possible explanation for the hum.

Q: The identity of the caller and the sound's meaning remain questions in the study described here.

An explanation can be sensible without being established. Ask learners what additional observations might help distinguish between explanations.

3. A more accurate headline

Example: "Researchers recorded giraffes humming at night, but the reason is still uncertain."

Accept other wording that preserves the finding and removes the claim of certainty. Do not replace it with 'giraffes never communicate': that also goes beyond the evidence.

Extend the discussion

Could a recording from three zoos tell us what every wild giraffe does? Ask learners to explain why the animals, setting, and observation period matter. Then choose a different animal fact and look for its original evidence.

Sources and further reading

Neck bones: University of Minnesota veterinary anatomy specimen
<https://vanat.ahc.umn.edu/museum/pages/GiraffeCerVert1a.html>

Calves and gripping tongues: San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, Giraffe
<https://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/giraffe>

Family relationship: San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, Okapi
<https://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/okapi>

Humming: Baotic, Sicks and Stoeger (2015), original zoo study
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s13104-015-1394-3>

Full reading guide: thelastgiraffe.org/articles/giraffe-facts-for-kids/

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