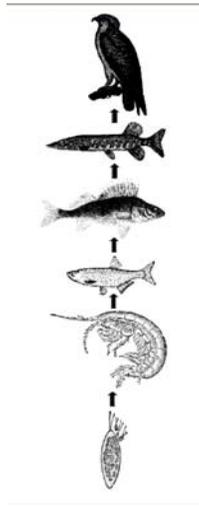


The Most Important Question

By R. Howard



In a jungle there was a large cool pond where many animals came to drink. Tall animals like giraffes, and small, jumpy animals like monkeys all came to this pond and drank from the water together. Each species had its own section at the pond: the zebras did not drink by the cranes, and the elephants did not drink by the meerkats. It was a very peaceful place.

One day a hippopotamus came to the pond and bent to drink some water right where the giraffes usually drank. None of the other animals had ever seen him before. They were frightened: he was really big and did not seem to care about the rules of the pond.

“We should tell him to go away!” a meerkat whispered to a monkey. The monkey nodded. They were both small animals, and very nervous about getting eaten by the hippopotamus.

You see, since none of the animals had ever seen the hippopotamus, they did not know what it liked to eat. It was very important that all of the animals in the jungle knew what the others’ preferred foods were, so that they could protect themselves. The zebras knew to stay away

from the lions who preyed on them; and the mice knew to stay hidden under the trees, away from the large birds who swooped down to eat them. All of the animals in the jungle grew up learning about the food chain. This food chain was a part of life: the animals who were eaten provided important nutrients for the animals that ate them, like proteins and fat that helped the eaters to grow. How do you think lions become so big and strong?

A giraffe came up to where the meerkat and monkey stood by the pond and leaned its long head down to talk to them. “Do you think he eats plants?” the giraffe asked worriedly.

Giraffes only eat plants, and because the hippopotamus was so close to the ground, this giraffe was afraid he would eat all the plants before they could grow tall enough for the giraffes to eat. The giraffe was especially worried about the plants growing far from the pond: because plants need food and light to grow tall and strong, the plants that were growing far from the pond had a better chance of getting eaten and not being able to grow back.

A zebra skipped up to the group, still in a huddle. “You have nothing to worry about, Meerkat and Monkey!” he said. “It looks like the new guy likes plants. Sorry Giraffe.”

The four animals looked over to the hippopotamus, now about a third of the way into the pond, chomping on some very green leaves with a content and happy expression on his face.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. How did the hippopotamus break the rules of the pond?

- A The hippopotamus did not drink any water at the pond.
- B The hippopotamus drank water by another species, the giraffes.
- C The hippopotamus started a fight with the giraffe.
- D The hippopotamus ate plants.

2. Where does the story take place?

- A in the jungle
- B in the desert
- C under the sea
- D in the zoo

3. The other animals in the jungle are curious about the hippopotamus. Which evidence from the text best supports this conclusion?

- A The meerkat wants to tell the hippopotamus to go away.
- B None of the other animals had ever seen the hippopotamus before.
- C Each species of animals drank at its own section of the pond.
- D The other animals ask each other questions about the hippopotamus.

4. Why does the zebra tell the meerkat and the monkey that they have nothing to worry about?

- A The hippopotamus eats plants rather than small animals like the meerkat and monkey.
- B The hippopotamus is busy drinking water so they have time to escape.
- C The zebra is trying to trick the meerkat and the monkey.
- D The meerkat and the monkey are at the top of the food chain.

5. What is this story mainly about?

- A Ponds are the center of animal life.
- B Hippopotami are mysterious animals.
- C Relationships between animals are based on the food chain.
- D Giraffes and hippopotami do not get along well.

6. Read the following sentences: "One day a hippopotamus came to the pond and bent to drink some water right where the giraffes usually drank. None of the other animals had ever seen him before. They were **frightened**: he was really big and did not seem to care about the rules of the pond."

As used in the passage, what does the word "**frightened**" mean?

- A happy
- B scared
- C thirsty
- D annoyed

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

The giraffe was worried about the hippopotamus _____ they eat the same plants.

- A because
- B although
- C but
- D so

8. Why were the animals frightened and nervous when the hippopotamus came to drink at their pond?

9. Why did the animals want to know what the hippopotamus ate?

10. Are the giraffe and the hippopotamus located on the same place in the food chain? Explain your answer using information from the story.

Teacher Guide & Answers**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 910

1. How did the hippopotamus break the rules of the pond?

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8. Why were the animals frightened and nervous when the hippopotamus came to drink at their pond?

Suggested answer: The animals were scared because none of them had ever seen the hippopotamus before and they didn't know if the hippopotamus was going to want to eat them or the food they need to survive.

9. Why did the animals want to know what the hippopotamus ate?

Suggested answer: The animals wanted to know what the hippopotamus ate because they were concerned whether he would eat them or not, or whether he would threaten their food sources by eating the same things they ate.

10. Are the giraffe and the hippopotamus located on the same place in the food chain? Explain your answer using information from the story.

Suggested answer: Students should explain that the giraffe and the hippopotamus are located on the same place in the food chain because they eat the same food and do not eat other animals.