

A Talent Contest

Words you'll need to know...

transform change

Imagine for a moment that one day, near the end of a hot summer, hundreds of animals from all parts of the world held a competition. Many animals sent applications, but the selection committee chose only ten finalists. Those ten finalists were: the donkey, the cockroach, the katydid, the giraffe, the penguin, the deer botfly, the flounder, the digger wasp, the owl, and the honeybee. Each contestant demonstrated its cleverest stunt.

1. The donkey showed how the placement of its eyes allowed it to see all four of its feet at the same time. It explained that this is why it can climb up and down the steep sides the Grand Canyon without falling. The other animals all agreed that this was quite clever. The donkey was given a good score.

2. The cockroach explained that it could live for several weeks after its head has been cut off. The other animals did not ask it to demonstrate its trick. They wanted it to be available to receive its prize if it won. After a cockroach loses its head, it can still breathe, but the body starves to death. The cockroach was given a score even though nobody could figure out why the skill was useful.

3. The katydid surprised many of the animals by showing how it hears through holes in its hind legs. This makes it possible for it to hear predators that are creeping up behind it. The katydid was awarded a fair score.

4. The giraffe was next. The animals all thought it would be showing off its long neck. Instead, it demonstrated how it could

clean its ears with its 21-inch tongue. This is an important skill for a giraffe because it cannot scratch its ears like a dog or cat. The giraffe was given a lower score.

5. The penguin explained that it is completely surrounded by saltwater and ice. It needs a way to get freshwater for drinking. The penguin then explained that it has a special organ above its eyes that allows it to **transform** saltwater into freshwater. Without this special organ, the penguin could not live in the Antarctic. The penguin was given a very, very high score.

6. The deer botfly was the next contestant. It showed how it could fly faster than a jet plane. When it flies, it is almost invisible to the human eye. It has been clocked at speeds of more than 818 miles an hour. Its speed gives it excellent protection against birds. The deer botfly was given a score just below that of the penguin.

7. The flounder was the seventh contestant. It was a large gray and white fish with two eyes on one side of its head. It explained how it was born with one eye on each side of its head. As it grew older, one eye moved across its head to the other side. This allows it to swim flat against the ocean floor with two eyes facing up. It is a good protection against enemies. The flounder was given a score just below that of the deer botfly.

8. The digger wasp was eager to demonstrate its sleeping habits. It bit into the stem

of a plant. It locked its jaws into position; then it stretched its body straight out from the stem and fell asleep. Its legs dangled in the air. Only its jaws held it in place. It said that this allows hundreds of wasps to sleep close together. The wasp was awarded a low score.

9. The owl was next. It flew down silently and caught a mouse. It swallowed the mouse whole. A few hours later, it spit out the bones and fur of the mouse that it had swallowed. It had digested the meat of the mouse. The owl

explained that without teeth, it couldn't chew its food. This is a way of digesting food without chewing it. The owl was provided a score just below that of the flounder.

10. Finally, the bee took its turn. It explained that it makes honey, and it is the only food on Earth that does not spoil. Honey has been found in the tombs of Egyptian kings. Scientists have tested it and found it completely safe to eat, thousands of years after it was made. The bee was given a low score.

Questions and Discussion

1. Mark the actions below 1, 2, 3 and 4 to show the order in which they happened. Put 1 before the first happening, 2 beside the second, and so on.

- _____ a. The owl spit out the fur and bones.
- _____ b. The owl flew down silently.
- _____ c. The owl swallowed the mouse.
- _____ d. The owl digested the meat of the mouse.

2. Mark the actions below as they were presented. Put 1 before the first happening, 2 beside the second, and so on.

- _____ a. The digger wasp fell asleep.
- _____ b. The digger wasp bit into the stem.
- _____ c. The digger wasp stretched out his body.
- _____ d. The digger wasp locked his jaws.

3. Which two animals do you think have the most spectacular skills?

Why did you choose these?
