

Name: _____

The Long Giraffe

by Guy Belleranti

Most people know what a giraffe looks like. They're tall, spotted animals from the African savanna. They're famous for their long necks that allow them to munch on treetop leaves that other animals cannot reach.

With its 6-foot long legs and 6-foot long neck a male giraffe can grow over 18 feet in height. That's almost as tall as a two-story building! Even a baby giraffe has a long neck and legs. In fact, the calf is 6 feet tall at birth and can stand within an hour.



We humans have seven bones, or vertebrae, in our short little necks. So, how many vertebrae do you think a giraffe has in its neck? Maybe 20? Or 50? Or 100? In fact, a giraffe's neck has exactly the same number of bones in its neck as a human! However, the giraffe's vertebrae are larger and much longer.

A giraffe's heart is also long, with a male's heart being up to two feet. It takes a powerful heart to move blood up the long neck into the brain. The giraffe has special valves in their arteries. These valves prevent blood from rushing to the head when the giraffe bends low to drink. And when it drinks it takes a long drink, swallowing up to 10 gallons of water. The giraffe must spread its long legs apart so its long neck can reach the water. Since it can't protect itself when in this position it doesn't drink very often. Instead, it gets a lot of moisture from the plants it eats.

And speaking of plants, a giraffe's favorite food is the leaves of the thorny acacia tree. The giraffe wraps its long 18-inch tongue around the tree's branches and strips off the leaves. The long tongue's roughness helps protect it from the thorns.

A giraffe is a ruminant, which means it has a four chambered stomach like a cow. After they swallow leaves the first time the giraffe will bring the leaves back up their throat and chew again for long periods.

A healthy adult giraffe does not have many natural predators. Its hooves are as long and wide as a dinner plate, and it can kick its long legs any direction. The kick is so strong it can even kill a lion.

With its long neck, long heart, long tongue, long legs, and long hooves, the giraffe is surely one of the most beautiful animals on the African savanna.



About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona.

More Fascinating Giraffe Facts

The giraffe has the shortest sleep requirements of any mammal. A giraffe sleeps less than two hours per day!

Although they're usually quiet, giraffes can make sounds. Male giraffes can make loud coughs. Females can whistle to call their young. Giraffes can also grunt, snort, and hiss.

A male giraffe is called a bull. A female is a cow, and a young giraffe is a calf. A group of giraffes is a herd.

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- How many bones are in a giraffe's neck?
 - 7
 - 20
 - 50
 - 100
- Why does a giraffe need a large, powerful heart?
 - so it can pump blood down into its legs
 - so it can pump blood up to the brain
 - to help the giraffe drink water more easily
 - to help the giraffe digest plants and leaves
- The second page of the article contains many facts, but there is one sentence that is an opinion. Copy the opinion sentence on the lines below.

- Complete each sentence by writing a word or number on the line.

A giraffe's tongue is about _____ inches long.

A _____ giraffe is called a cow.

A baby giraffe is about _____ feet tall when it stands up.

A giraffe's favorite food is leaves from a _____ tree.

Artist Challenge: On a separate sheet of paper, draw a picture of a giraffe. Include as many details as possible. Below your picture, neatly write the three most interesting facts you learned from this article.

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The Long Giraffe

Vocabulary Activity



Fill in the missing letters to create a word from the article.
Then, write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1. ___ ___ o ___ e s

clue: hard coverings over the toes of horses, cattle, deer, or giraffes

1. _____

2. ___ ___ ___ ___ n ___ a

clue: a flat grassland habitat

2. _____

3. ___ ___ ___ l o ___ s

clue: units for measuring liquid capacity

3. _____

4. ___ t ___ ___ a ___ ___

clue: organ inside the body for digesting food

4. _____

5. ___ ___ ___ r ___ s

clue: sharp points on a plant's stem or branch

5. _____

6. ___ u ___ c ___

clue: to chew something in a noisy way

6. _____

7. ___ l ___ ___ d

clue: liquid that runs through an animal's body through veins and arteries

7. _____

ANSWER KEY

The Long Giraffe

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1. How many bones are in a giraffe's neck? **a**
 - a. **7**
 - b. 20
 - c. 50
 - d. 100
2. Why does a giraffe need a large, powerful heart? **b**
 - a. so it can pump blood down into its legs
 - b. **so it can pump blood up to the brain**
 - c. to help the giraffe drink water more easily
 - d. to help the giraffe digest plants and leaves
3. The second page of the article contains many facts, but there is one sentence that is an opinion. Copy the opinion sentence on the lines below.

With its long neck, long long heart, long tongue, long legs, and long hooves, the giraffe is surely one of the most beautiful animals on the African savanna.

4. Complete each sentence by writing a word or number on the line.

A giraffe's tongue is about **18** inches long.

A **female** giraffe is called a cow.

A baby giraffe is about **6** feet tall when it stands up.

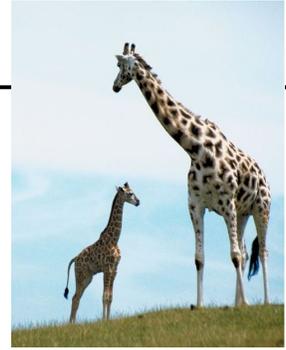
A giraffe's favorite food is leaves from a **acacia** tree.

Artist Challenge: On a separate sheet of paper, draw a picture of a giraffe. Include as many details as possible. Below your picture, neatly write the three most interesting facts you learned from this article.

ANSWER KEY

The Long Giraffe

Vocabulary Activity



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1. h o o v e s

clue: hard coverings over the toes of horses, cattle, deer, or giraffes

1. h o o v e s

2. s a v a n n a

clue: a flat grassland habitat

2. s a v a n n a

3. g a l l o n s

clue: units for measuring liquid capacity

3. g a l l o n s

4. s t o m a c h

clue: organ inside the body for digesting food

4. s t o m a c h

5. t h o r n s

clue: sharp points on a plant's stem or branch

5. t h o r n s

6. m u n c h

clue: to chew something in a noisy way

6. m u n c h

7. b l o o d

clue: liquid that runs through an animal's body through veins and arteries

7. b l o o d