

Pigs

Pigs need an image makeover! When we think of pigs, our minds often drift to mud-covered, filthy, always hungry farm animals. These unpleasant images really give pigs a bad name and challenge their intelligence.

Also called swine or hogs, pigs have stocky, barrel-shaped bodies, four short but slender legs, and large heads. Their trademark is their long, round, cartilaginous snout. Pigs have an unusual bone, called the prenasal bone, located just below their disk-shaped snouts. Prenasal bones help strengthen pigs' snouts, making them great digging tools.



Aside from snouts that function as bulldozers, pigs also have an extremely fine sense of smell. Pigs can sniff out things hidden underground. Their diet includes fungi, fruits or other vegetation, insects, worms, mice, and other small animals. Well-recognized for their keen sense of smell, French people have used wild boars for centuries to find a French delicacy -- truffles. Truffles are edible fungi that grow deep below the surface. They give out a strong smell that wild boars can detect and unearth at ease. Just like the French who have come to rely on pigs' sensitive noses, police often bring trained pigs to airports or seaports to uncover illegal drugs that are concealed in cargos.

Pigs don't have sweat glands in their bodies, so they don't sweat. To avoid getting overheated, pigs wallow in mud. By covering their bodies with mud, pigs achieve two purposes. The first is to cool off, and the second is to keep mosquitoes or other insects from getting to their skin. Unfortunately, this natural behavior leads to the misconception that pigs are dirty. The truth is that pigs like to keep clean and tidy if they are given the opportunity.

Contrary to another popular view, pigs are not stupid. In fact, they are very smart. Their intelligence was in the headlines when a young pig named Priscilla saved a Texas boy's life. The 11-year-old boy, Anthony, went swimming in Lake Somerville one hot summer day in 1984. He ventured too far into the water and started to drown. Priscilla -- the family's pet pig -- saw the boy struggling and immediately began swimming toward Anthony. When she reached Anthony, he was in a panic. He grabbed for Priscilla's leash so hard that both of them went under. Although Anthony weighed nearly four times more than Priscilla, Priscilla managed to get to the surface and pull Anthony toward the shore. Even years after the event, Priscilla still got upset whenever she saw young children playing near the water!

Originally residing in grasslands and forested areas of Europe, Asia, and Africa, pigs are now present in all parts of the world except Antarctica. There are about fourteen different species of pigs in the world. In addition to wild boars, other famous pig species are warthogs, potbellied pigs, babirusas, pygmy hogs, and bush pigs. We often confuse peccaries with pigs, due to their similar appearances and behaviors. Nevertheless, pigs and peccaries belong to two separate families. To tell the difference between pigs and peccaries is quite easy. Pigs have long upper canines that curve upward, but peccaries have short upper canines that point downward. Furthermore, pigs have four toes on each of their back feet, whereas peccaries own just three.

Pigs live in family groups, called sounders. A sounder usually consists of several female pigs (or "sows") and their young (or "piglets"). Male pigs or boars tend to be solitary, and they only join sounders when they are ready to mate.

Humans have domesticated pigs for thousands of years. In addition to putting their tasty meats on plates, humans raise pigs for their skin to be used in luggage or other leather goods and for their bristles to be used in brushes. Today, pigs are not only kept on farms, but also as family pets, just like Priscilla. Given the right care, pigs are actually very neat, and they do not like to overeat.

So, now you have learned a thing or two about pigs, don't you think pigs really deserve an image makeover?

Name _____



Date _____

Pigs

Questions

- _____ 1. Which of the following about pigs is true?
- A. Pigs are nicknamed swine, hogs, and peccaries.
 - B. Pigs are native to Europe, Asia, and Africa.
 - C. Pigs have a special bone called postnasal that supports their cartilaginous snouts.
 - D. Pigs have four toes on their front legs, but three on their hind legs.
- _____ 2. What do the French use wild boars for?
- A. to loosen the soil
 - B. to sniff out truffles, a French delicacy
 - C. to sniff out snails, a French delicacy
 - D. to sniff out mice and other rodents
- _____ 3. Antarctica is the only continent on Earth that does not have pigs.
- A. false
 - B. true
- _____ 4. Which of the following do pigs eat? (Please choose two of the best answers.)
- A. fungi
 - B. mud
 - C. turtles
 - D. mice
- _____ 5. Which of the following animals is NOT a member of the pig family?
- A. the warthog
 - B. the wild boar
 - C. the collared peccary
 - D. the red river hog
- _____ 6. Which of the following "pig terminologies" is **incorrect**?
- A. a female pig: a sow
 - B. a baby pig: a piglet
 - C. a pig family: a sounder
 - D. a male pig: a hog
- _____ 7. Which of the following statements about pigs is correct?
- A. Pigs have a very poor sense of smell.
 - B. Pigs don't sweat.
 - C. Pigs' upper canines point downward.
 - D. Pigs are native to the Americas.
- _____ 8. Why do we raise pigs on farms?
- A. because we can eat and sell their meat
 - B. because we can sell their skin to make leather goods
 - C. because we can use their bristles to make brushes
 - D. all of the above

Name _____



Date _____

- _____ 9. Why do pigs love wallowing in mud?
- A. to have fun
 - B. to cool off
 - C. to eat
 - D. to keep warm
- _____ 10. What is the name of the pig that saved Anthony's life?
- A. Patricia
 - B. Patrick
 - C. Priscilla
 - D. Babe