

Informational Performance Task

Task:

Your class has been learning about animals and how amazing they are. Now your class is going to create a website to share what they have learned. Each student will write something for the website.

Before you decide what you will write about animals, you do some research and find two articles that provide information about how animals communicate, or “talk” to each other. After you have looked at these sources, you will answer some questions about them. Briefly scan the sources and the three questions that follow. Then, go back and read the sources carefully to gain the information you will need to answer the questions and write an informational article for the class website.

In Part 2, you will write your article using information from the two sources.

Directions for Part 1

You will now look at two sources. You can look at either of the sources as often as you like.

Research Questions:

After looking at the sources, use the rest of the time in Part 1 to answer three questions about them. Your answers to these questions will be scored. Also, your answers will help you think about the information you have read, which should help you write your informational article. You may refer to the sources when you think it would be helpful. You may also look at your notes.

Source 1: Can Animals Talk?

People share thoughts and feelings using words. How about animals? Many people think that animals cannot communicate with each other. After all, only humans use words. However, we can also tell each other things without words. We wave our hands to ‘say’ hello and goodbye. We smile, frown and raise our eyebrows to share how we feel and what we think. Believe it or not, some animals can also tell each other many things without using words. Here are a few examples.

Animal Sounds

Animals do not use words or language, but they do make many kinds of sounds. These sounds tell other animals things they need to know. Robins find each other using chirps and songs. Cobras hiss warnings. Blue whales sing low, loud notes to call out to other whales. Scientists now understand that animal songs can vary depending on where each animal lives. So animals can have different accents!

Vervet monkeys warn other monkeys using special sounds. A “cough call” means danger overhead. When the monkeys hear the cough call, they take cover under bushes and look to the skies and hide from flying predators like eagles. But Vervet monkeys give a completely different warning sound if danger comes on land, such as an oncoming leopard.

Peacocks use their tail feathers to make special sounds, which are so low that human ears cannot hear them! But peahens (female peacocks) can hear them. When they hear tail feathers rustle, they come to see what all the noise is about.

Animal Gestures

Many animals communicate using body language. In Rwanda’s Volcanoes National Park, gorillas beat their chests. Are they angry? No, they are happy and letting the other gorillas know how they feel. Dogs let people and other animals know they are happy by wagging their tails. Animals can also send warnings with body language. When cats arch their backs, they are saying, “Stay away!”

Many animals also reach out to express themselves. Chimpanzees help groom their friends. Using their hands, they pat their friends on the back and help keep their fur clean. Grooming leads to cooperation and sharing in the group. This sends the message that they are friends.

Even animals in the seas use touch to tell how they are feeling. Sea otters rub noses with each other. They may even touch noses with other animals like seals and sea lions! This “nosing around” signals play and trust.

So, can animals actually talk? The short answer is ‘no.’ Only humans can use words as language. However, animals communicate in many ways. The more we study animals, the more we learn about other methods of communication.

Source 2: Sneaky Animal Signals

Many animals communicate with sights and sounds. Dogs wag their tails. Chickens strut. Pigs grunt. Cats meow. But did you know that some animals can give and receive messages in ways we cannot? Some animals use their powers of touch, taste, and smell to send and receive signals that we can’t even sense. How sneaky!

Charged with Feeling

Did you know that some types of fish use electricity to communicate? Some fish send electrical pulses that bounce back to them and tell them where good food is. Other fish, like sharks, for example, can feel the electrical signals of their prey. This way, they can “feel” where their food is. The electrical pulses are not dangerous. They are weak electrical signals that cannot hurt other animals or people. We can’t even feel them. Electrical signaling is an ideal type of communication for animals that live in dark, unclear waters.

Chemical Tastes and Smells

Some animals can detect chemical cues that we can’t sense at all. Snakes can use their special forked tongues to “taste” the scent of animals in the air. Snakes can tell which chemical cues belong to dangerous animals and which come from animals that would make a good dinner. Snakes have receptors in the roofs of their mouths that help them sense the chemical cues of animals nearby.

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Have you ever smelled skunk spray? Skunks spray a stinky odor to protect themselves from predators like bears that otherwise would try to eat them! Some animals have scents they use to communicate that we can't detect at all. Have you ever seen a cat rub its head against something? It is marking its territory. Cats have scent glands near their mouths, on their foreheads, and at the base of their tails. They use these organs to mark territory and tell other cats to stay away. Insects communicate with scents, too. Some moths make special chemicals that other moths can sense to find them.

Many animals say things through songs, growls, and whistles. But it is amazing to know that some animals send signals that no one can hear. They can send these signals in daylight or the dark of night. They learn things this way. Animals have a lot to say. We just don't always understand how they say it. Scientists are working to learn more about animals and the incredible signals they use.

Name: _____ Date: _____

- 1 Match each detail to the source or sources in which the detail is given. Draw a line from **each** detail to its source.

Source 1: Can Animals Talk?

Pulses of electricity can help in finding food.

Source 2: Sneaky Animal Signals

Senses help animals communicate.

Both Source 1 and Source 2

Sounds can warn of danger.

- 2 Read the sentence from "Sneaky Animal Signals."

But it is amazing to know that some animals send signals that no one can hear.

What details from each source support this sentence? Use **one** detail from **each** source to support your explanation. Be sure to give the source number or title for each detail.

Name: _____ Date: _____

- 3** Both “Can Animals Talk?” and “Sneaky Animal Signals” give information about how animals send messages.

Explain what you have learned about how animals send messages. Use **one** detail from **each** source to support your explanation. Be sure to give the source number or title for each detail.

Directions for Part 2

You will now look at your sources, take notes, and plan, draft, revise, and edit your article for the website. First read your assignment and the information about how your informational article will be scored. Then begin your work.

Your Assignment:

Your class is creating a website about amazing things animals can do. For your part of the website, you will write an informational article about how animals “talk” to other animals. Your article will be read by other students, teachers, parents, and other people who visit the website.

Using information from the two sources, “Can Animals Talk?” and “Sneaky Animal Signals,” develop a main idea about how animals communicate. Choose the most important information from more than one source to support your main idea. Then, write an informational article several paragraphs long. Clearly organize your article and support your main idea with details from the sources.

Use your own words except when quoting directly from the sources. Be sure to give the source title when using details from the sources.

REMEMBER: A well-written informational article

- has a clear main idea
- is well-organized and stays on the topic
- has an introduction and conclusion
- uses transitions
- uses details from the sources to support the main idea
- develops ideas fully
- uses clear language
- follows rules of writing (spelling, punctuation, and grammar)

Now begin work on your informational article. Manage your time carefully so that you can plan, write, revise, and edit the final draft of your article. Write your response on a separate sheet of paper.

