

Reading Mini-Assessment Grade 7
Cluster 1 Form A

Bears

by Dorothy Hinshaw Patent

Bears put smiles on our faces when we see them in zoos, and they live in our imaginations as characters from stories like *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and *Winnie-the-Pooh*. But zoo bears and storybook bears don't tell us much about what bears are really like. Bears show their real selves only when living wild.

All bears are large and stocky with short, thick legs. They have short tails, small ears, pointed muzzles, and eyes that look straight ahead. Each bear has five toes. Bears walk the way we do, on the flat of the foot. When a bear stands up on its hind legs, it looks a lot like a furry person.



American black bear cubs

Bears are usually born in the winter den of the mother. They are tiny at birth; a newborn black bear cub, for example, weighs less than a pound. But the cubs grow fast on their mother's rich milk and are ready to explore when the time comes to leave the den. Young bears depend on their mother to teach what they need to know to survive. They learn from her how to avoid danger and where to find food. Although we think of bears as meat eaters, most eat several different kinds of food. Grizzly bears, for instance, eat more grass and berries than meat. Bears can see and hear quite well. But their best sense is their sense of smell.

A polar bear can smell a seal, its favorite prey, from miles away.

Most northern bears spend the long winters in dens. They enter a special condition called hibernation. When hibernating, a bear sleeps most of the time, but it may wake up and leave the den for a few hours at a time.

There are just eight kinds of bears in the world. Four of these kinds live in Asia. The Malayan sun bear, with its wrinkled forehead and handsome yellow necklace, is popular in zoos. It is the smallest bear, just about the size of an adult person.



Malayan sun bear



Sloth bear

The shaggy sloth bear from India and Sri Lanka is twice the size of the sun bear. It feeds mostly on termites, using its long snout and flexible lips to suck up the insects after digging apart their nest with its sharp claws.

The charming black-and-white panda lives in the high mountains of China. Its front paw has an extra thumb-like toe for holding on to the bamboo it eats. The Asiatic black bear is found in many parts of Asia and is similar to our American black bear.



Panda bear

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The American black bear lives in woods throughout most of North America, from Alaska to Mexico and from Washington to Maine. Because it spends most of its life among trees, few people ever see a wild black bear. Black bears can actually be any number of colors, from almost white through many shades of brown to gleaming black.



American black bear



Brown bear

The brown bear can also be almost any color from blond to black. Brown bears once lived all across the Northern Hemisphere and throughout most of what is now the western United States. But now these magnificent animals have disappeared from most states and are rare in western Europe. In North America, we call brown bears “grizzlies.” The largest brown bears live on Kodiak Island in Alaska. A big Kodiak bear may stand 10 feet tall on its hind legs and weigh 1,700 pounds, as much as ten large people put together.

The giant polar bear is nearly as big as the Kodiak bear. Polar bears are designed for life in the cold northern polar regions. Their thick white fur soaks up the sunlight, and their huge paws act like snowshoes when they walk and like oars when they swim. A polar bear is a patient hunter. It may sit for hours beside a seal’s breathing hole in the ice, waiting for the seal to surface for air.



Polar bear



Spectacled bear

The spectacled bear is the only South American species. Its light-colored face has dark spots and often dark patches that look like eyeglasses, giving it its name. Spectacled bears are mountain dwellers that often climb trees to feed on fruit.

Most kinds of bears are quickly losing their habitats—the places where they can live in the wild—as humans take over more and more land. Asian bears, especially the giant panda, are the most threatened. Grizzly bears are found in only a few of the lower forty-eight states. But polar bears seem to be holding their own, American black bears are increasing in number, and grizzly bears are still plentiful in parts of Canada and Alaska. Scientists and conservationists are working with governments to find ways to help.

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Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Read the passage “Bears,” then circle the letter of the correct answer.

1. Read the following sentence.

All bears are large and stocky with short, thick legs.

What does the word *stocky* mean?

- A. slender
- B. solid
- C. strong
- D. weak

2. Which two words from the article are most nearly opposite?

- A. charming, magnificent
- B. rare, plentiful
- C. sense, smell
- D. survive, danger

3. Read the following sentence.

Polar bears are designed for life in the cold northern polar regions.

This sentence means that polar bears

- A. prefer the cold weather of the polar region.
- B. have thick white fur that blends in with the snow.
- C. are patient hunters who can sit on the ice for hours waiting to catch their prey.
- D. have characteristics allowing them to live comfortably in cold weather.

4. When the author states that polar bears are “holding their own” she means that they are

- A. maintaining their numbers.
- B. threatened with extinction.
- C. increasing in number.
- D. only found in a few states.

5. How does the author organize the information in this passage?

- A. She compares bears living in the wild to storybook bears.
- B. She includes a series of paragraphs giving details about each kind of bear.
- C. She arranges the details about the bears in order of their importance to humans.
- D. She presents a detailed argument describing how we can help bears survive.

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ANSWER KEY – Bears – LA.A.1.3.2

LA.A.1.3.2: word structure, context clues, inferences, conclusions, organizational patterns

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