

Exploding toad mystery (Mon 25 Apr, 2005)

WARM-UPS

CHAT: Talk in pairs or groups about: mysteries / Hamburg / toads / balloons / ponds / being baffled / mystery viruses / strange phenomena / breaking wind... For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

TOAD: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with toads or frogs. Share your words with your partner / group and talk about them.

MYSTERY SOLVERS: Think of as many reasons as you can why toads might swell to bursting point and then explode. Swap partners and share your reasons. Agree on the most likely reason.

~ **TO DEATH:** Swelling or expanding to death must be a terrible and painful way to meet your end. Look at these other "to death" causes for dying. Talk about the circumstances which might lead to each death:

freeze to death / starve to death / choke to death / crushed to death / worked to death /

clubbed to death / kicked to death / scared to death / bleed to death / strangled to death /

tortured to death / stabbed to death / mauled to death / stoned to death

Rank each according to the following scale:

- 5 – That must be the worst way to go.
- 4 – I'd hate to die like that.
- 3 – That's a really bad way to die.
- 2 – It doesn't seem too bad.
- 1 – This one seems pretty painless.

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PRE-READING

WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... of the words 'mystery' and 'virus'.

TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true or false:

- a. An amphibian mystery has befallen a city in Germany. T / F
- b. Toads are ballooning to ten times their normal sizes and then bursting. T / F
- c. Local veterinarians are sure they know why the toads are exploding. T / F
- d. There were scenes of carnage at a pond. T / F
- e. A toad expert said the whole toad population might disappear. T / F
- f. The toads are thin when they are on ground. T / F
- g. An expert said aliens from space are causing the toads to explode. T / F
- h. The toads may not be able to fart quickly enough to release intestinal gas. T / F

SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------|---------------|
| (a) | befallen | flabbergasted |
| (b) | demise | discharge |
| (c) | tranquil | sparse |
| (d) | dumbfounded | bewildered |
| (e) | carnage | taken place |
| (f) | baffled | farting |
| (g) | goes bang | sedate |
| (h) | thin on the ground | end |
| (i) | expel | blood bath |
| (j) | breaking wind | dies out |

PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| (a) | ... mystery has befallen | baffled |
| (b) | triple | goes bang |
| (c) | violent | their normal sizes |
| (d) | scenes | there was to know |
| (e) | an authority | of carnage |
| (f) | was left completely | on the ground |
| (g) | I knew everything | the city of Hamburg |
| (h) | before the whole population | on German toads |
| (i) | Explanations are a little thin | wind |
| (j) | breaking | demise |

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READING:

SYNONYM FILL: There are six gaps in the article. There are six groups of synonyms below the article. Place the number of the synonym group in the correct gap (It is not important to guess a correct word - any of the synonyms from each group could be put into the relevant gap).

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BNE: An amphibian mystery has befallen the city of Hamburg in Germany, where hundreds of exploding toads are literally swelling to their deaths. The toads are ballooning to triple their normal sizes and then bursting, throwing their entrails up to a metre away. Such a violent demise for these normally _____ creatures has left local veterinarians quite _____ .

Animal welfare experts have arrived at the pond to investigate the exploding toad phenomenon and have been met with scenes of _____. Olga Henke, an _____ on German toads and witness to three explosions, was left completely baffled by the pondside events. She said: "I thought I knew everything there was to know about these toads. We have to get answers quickly before the whole population goes bang."

Explanations are a little thin on the ground as to why the toads are becoming bloated and then exploding. Some people say the swelling is caused by a mystery virus that has suddenly infected the pond or that _____ waste has entered the waters. An expert from an amphibian research centre reckons an alien fungus is producing gas inside the stomachs of the toads at such a rate that the creatures cannot expel it through the normal means of _____ .

1
dumbfounded
flabbergasted
bewildered
stumped

2
breaking wind
farting
passing gas
blowing off (UK)

3
authority
expert
specialist
scholar

4
carnage
a blood bath
massacre
annihilation

5
tranquil
peaceful
serene
placid

6
toxic
poisonous
hazardous
contaminated

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DISCUSSION

- a. How did reading this article make you feel?
- b. Did you like reading the article?
- c. What do you think about the exploding toad mystery?
- d. Do you like toads?
- e. What's the difference between toads and frogs?
- f. Do you think the experts will find the answer to this mystery?
- g. Would you like to go to the pond and witness the toads exploding?
- h. Are there any toads or frogs near where you live?
- i. What other amphibian creatures do you know of?
- j. What do you think of eating frogs' legs?
- k. Have you heard of the English food called "toad in the hole"? Does it sound tasty?
- l. Do you think frogs and toads are cute?
- m. What would you do if you found exploding toads near your house?
- n. What kinds of mysteries have befallen your town or city?
- o. When was the last time you were dumfounded or baffled?
- p. What would you like to be an authority on?
- q. How is breaking wind, or farting, regarded in your country?
- r. Did you like this discussion?
- s. Teacher / Student additional questions.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find information on toads. Share your findings with your class next lesson.

3. EYE WITNESS: Imagine you were at the scene of the exploding toads. Write an eyewitness account and report it to your classmates in your next class.

4. TOAD IN THE HOLE: Find the recipe for the British dish toad in the hole. Write a review of the dish for a restaurant guide. Share your reviews with your classmates in your next class.

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SPEAKING:

MYSTERIES: In pairs / groups, choose one of the imaginary mysteries below and develop the story to tell news reporters. Once you have decided on your story, change partners and take turns being reporters and mystery explainers.

- The talking bus stop
- Ten thousand pairs of jeans go missing in Russian town
- Lions and zebras become good friends in Kenya
- It's raining pens and pencils in Japan
- The pregnant Mickey Mouse
- The remote control baby
- Ten-fold increase in marriage proposals in Brazilian city
- World's PCs lose space bar function

TEXT:

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Explanations are a little thin on the ground as to why the toads are becoming bloated and then exploding. Some people say the swelling is caused by a mystery virus that has suddenly infected the pond or that toxic waste has entered the waters. An expert from an amphibian research centre reckons an alien fungus is producing gas inside the stomachs of the toads at such a rate that the creatures cannot expel it through the normal means of breaking wind.