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New highways threaten giant pandas

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Contents

The Article	2
Warm-ups	3
Before Reading / Listening	4
While Reading / Listening	5
Listening Gap Fill	6
After Reading	7
Discussion	8
Speaking	9
Homework	10
Answers	11

6 December, 2005

THE ARTICLE

New highways threaten giant pandas

There is a new threat to the survival of the giant panda. The rapid construction of China's national highway network is cutting the pandas' natural habitat into many small pieces. This is destroying the bamboo forests that the loveable animals need to survive. It is also adding a new danger of being run over by cars and trucks. The *China Daily* newspaper reported the biggest threat to the animal is in the northwest province of Gansu. There are now fewer than fifty pandas there. Conservationists are battling to preserve them. They are building special panda crossings and tunnels to help them survive.

The biggest problem is the dividing of the pandas' habitat into smaller areas. The growth of the highways now makes breeding even more difficult. The *China Daily* reports that: "According to basic principles of genetics and the pandas' reproduction habits, a group of less than 50 giant pandas are predicted to become extinct at some point as a result of a weakening reproductive ability caused by inbreeding." There are only two days of the year when the female panda is fertile. This problem is made worse because of the males' lack of interest in sex and the females' being too picky in choosing her Mr. Right.

WARM-UPS

1. I'M A PANDA: Write down three things about your new life as a panda. Walk around the class and meet with the other "pandas". Tell each other about and comment on what you wrote down. How is life at the moment? What are your plans for the weekend? What do you think of the new superhighway that is destroying your forest?

2. NEW ROADS: What do you think of the building of new highways? Put a scale of 1 to 10 next to these opinions. One means you strongly agree, ten means you strongly disagree. Compare and talk about your scoring with your partner(s).

- Great! New highways make life easier for everyone.
- Soon the whole country will be one giant highway system. This is not good.
- The answer is not new highways, it's better public transportation.
- New highways should never threaten animals that live on the land.
- New highways are essential for economic progress.
- New highways mean more pollution. All construction should stop immediately.
- Building new roads is ten times more important than protecting wildlife.
- New highways and animals can live happily, side by side.

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Pandas / threats / survival / highways / bamboo / forests / trucks / conservationists / battles / tunnels / genetics / extinction / choosing things / the perfect partner

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. THREATS: What kind of "progress" in our modern world makes you feel bad? Talk with your partner(s) about whether we really need these things and what damage they do or will do to the world:

- Superhighways
- Nuclear power
- Computer games
- Globalization
- English as a world language
- The Internet
- Plastic
- Microwave ovens
- Mobile phones
- The french fry

5. PANDA: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with pandas. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

6. QUICK DEBATE: Have a quick debate with your partner about new roads. Students A think more new roads are needed, Students B think a different transportation system is more important.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. China's road development is putting giant pandas in danger. | T / F |
| b. Pandas depend on eucalyptus shoots for their survival. | T / F |
| c. In China's Gansu province, 50 pandas were run over by trucks. | T / F |
| d. Conservationists want to build special panda crossings on roads. | T / F |
| e. A group of less than 50 pandas may automatically become extinct. | T / F |
| f. Pandas are famous for their love of sex. | T / F |
| g. A female panda is fertile for just two days a month. | T / F |
| h. A conservationist named Mr. Right says female pandas are too picky. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| a. threat | knocked down |
| b. rapid | choosy |
| c. habitat | splitting |
| d. run over | mating |
| e. battling | home |
| f. dividing | danger |
| g. breeding | rules |
| h. principles | fighting |
| i. as a result of | speedy |
| j. picky | because of |

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

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| a. There is a new threat | choosing her Mr. Right |
| b. cutting the pandas' natural habitat | the loveable animals need to survive |
| c. destroying the bamboo forests that | to preserve them |
| d. There are now fewer | breeding even more difficult |
| e. Conservationists are battling | some point |
| f. the highways now makes | to the survival of the giant panda |
| g. basic principles | reproductive ability |
| h. predicted to become extinct at | than fifty pandas there |
| i. a weakening | of genetics |
| j. being too picky in | into many small pieces |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

New highways threaten giant pandas

There is a new threat to the _____ of the giant panda. The _____ construction of China's national highway network is _____ the pandas' natural habitat into many small pieces. This is destroying the bamboo forests that the _____ animals need to survive. It is also adding a new danger of being _____ over by cars and trucks. The *China Daily* newspaper reported the biggest threat to the animal is in the northwest province of Gansu. There are now _____ than fifty pandas there. Conservationists are battling to _____ them. They are building special panda _____ and tunnels to help them survive.

The biggest problem is the _____ of the pandas' habitat into smaller areas. The _____ of the highways now makes breeding even more difficult. The *China Daily* reports that: "According to _____ principles of genetics and the pandas' reproduction habits, a _____ of less than 50 giant pandas are predicted to become extinct at some _____ as a result of a weakening reproductive _____ caused by inbreeding." There are only two days of the year when the female panda is _____. This problem is made worse because of the males' lack of interest in sex and the females' being too picky in _____ her Mr. Right.

run
preserve
rapid
survival
loveable
crossings
cutting
fewer

fertile
growth
group
dividing
choosing
point
basic
ability

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

New highways threaten giant pandas

There is a new _____ to the survival of the giant panda. The rapid construction of China's national highway network is _____ the pandas' natural habitat into many small pieces. This is destroying the bamboo forests that the _____ animals need to survive. It is also adding a new danger of being _____ by cars and trucks. The *China Daily* newspaper reported the biggest threat to the animal is in the northwest province of Gansu. There are now _____ than fifty pandas there. Conservationists are _____ to preserve them. They are building special panda crossings and tunnels to help them _____.

The biggest problem is the dividing of the pandas' _____ into smaller areas. The growth of the highways now makes _____ even more difficult. The *China Daily* reports that: "According to basic principles of _____ and the pandas' reproduction habits, a group of less than 50 giant pandas are predicted to become _____ at some point as a result of a weakening reproductive ability caused by inbreeding." There are only two days of the year when the female panda is _____. This problem is made worse because of the males' _____ interest in sex and the females' being too picky in choosing her Mr. Right.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'natural' and 'habitat'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "PANDA" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about pandas, conservation and progress in the modern world.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| • threat | • dividing |
| • rapid | • growth |
| • loveable | • principles |
| • cars | • point |
| • newspaper | • fertile |
| • tunnels | • picky |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What do you think of the giant panda?
- c. Do you think the giant panda is the best animal for the World Wildlife Fund's logo?
- d. Do you think it's right that new highways should endanger the giant panda?
- e. Do you think the people who make the road-building decisions care about pandas?
- f. Who will be blamed when a truck knocks down the last panda and they become extinct?
- g. What alternatives can you think of to building superhighways?
- h. It costs over \$600,000 a year to protect just one giant panda in the wild. Is this right?
- i. What else can we do to help the pandas survive the road building?
- j. When was the last time you faced a battle?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you think all road building should stop in and around the giant pandas' natural habitat?
- d. What would you do if a giant highway was built right outside your front door?
- e. Do you think the giant pandas can survive?
- f. What do you think news reporters will be saying in the future, when pandas are extinct?
- g. What animal will replace the panda on the WWF logo?
- h. How can humans encourage pandas to breed more successfully?
- i. Are you overly picky in choosing your Mr. or Ms. Right?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

PANDA ROLE PLAY: Should pandas be threatened by road building?

Team up with classmates who have the same role. Develop your roles and discuss ideas and “strategies” before the role play begins. Introduce yourself to the other role players.

Role A – ECONOMIST

You think the future of your country is much more important than the survival of pandas. A basic economic fact is that roads are needed to increase our standard of living. Without roads, we become poorer. Many animals will become extinct for economic reasons. People should accept this.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY ROADS ARE VERY IMPORTANT.

Role B – CONSERVATIONIST

You are horrified the pandas’ natural habitat is being destroyed to make roads. It’s criminal. Pandas are already endangered – they don’t need more threats to their survival. The roads are unnecessary. The future of the planet is more important than the roads. If pandas become extinct, the whole world is in trouble. You hate greedy construction company CEOs.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY THE ROADS ARE WRONG.

Role C – ROAD CONSTRUCTION COMPANY CEO

Roads are the heart of a country and its economy. Pandas are cute but they cost \$600,000 each a year to protect. We could use that money on children’s education and helping poor people. The roads will improve living standards. Pandas can stay in zoos, where they can be protected forever. People are more important.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY MORE ROADS ARE NECESSARY.

Role D – A GIANT PANDA

You are shocked that roads are destroying your home. You’ve lost a lot of good bamboo trees. You’ve heard it’s becoming more difficult to mate and have kids. You also have many cousins who have been killed on the roads. And you heard that strange things called money and greed are responsible for the roads. You want people to respect nature and leave it alone.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY THE ROAD BUILDING SHOULD STOP.

Change roles and repeat the role play. Comment in groups about the differences between the two role plays.

Discuss whether or not the road building should stop immediately.

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 more information on giant pandas. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. PROGRESS: Make a poster describing the advantages and disadvantages of building roads through forests and jungles. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all think of similar things?

4. LETTER TO A PANDA: Write a letter to a Gansu panda. Tell him / her what you think of the new roads. Give him advice on how to stop the road building. Also, give him / her some advice on how to breed more successfully. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all think of similar things / advice?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. T b. F c. F d. T e. T f. F g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

a. threat	danger
b. rapid	speedy
c. habitat	home
d. run over	knocked down
e. battling	fighting
f. dividing	splitting
g. breeding	mating
h. principles	rules
i. as a result of	because of
j. picky	choosy

PHRASE MATCH:

a. There is a new threat	to the survival of the giant panda
b. cutting the pandas' natural habitat	into many small pieces
c. destroying the bamboo forests that	the loveable animals need to survive
d. There are now fewer	than fifty pandas there
e. Conservationists are battling	to preserve them
f. the highways now make	breeding even more difficult
g. basic principles	of genetics
h. predicted to become extinct at	some point
i. a weakening	reproductive ability
j. being too picky in	choosing her Mr. Right

GAP FILL:

New highways threaten giant pandas

There is a new threat to the **survival** of the giant panda. The **rapid** construction of China's national highway network is **cutting** the pandas' natural habitat into many small pieces. This is destroying the bamboo forests that the **loveable** animals need to survive. It is also adding a new danger of being **run** over by cars and trucks. The *China Daily* newspaper reported the biggest threat to the animal is in the northwest province of Gansu. There are now **fewer** than fifty pandas there. Conservationists are battling to **preserve** them. They are building special panda **crossings** and tunnels to help them survive.

The biggest problem is the **dividing** of the pandas' habitat into smaller areas. The **growth** of the highways now makes breeding even more difficult. The *China Daily* reports that: "According to **basic** principles of genetics and the pandas' reproduction habits, a **group** of less than 50 giant pandas are predicted to become extinct at some **point** as a result of a weakening reproductive **ability** caused by inbreeding." There are only two days of the year when the female panda is **fertile**. This problem is made worse because of the males' lack of interest in sex and the females' being too picky in **choosing** her Mr. Right.