

Reading Comprehension — The Koala

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The Koala

With its round, fluffy ears, large black nose and sleepy expression, the koala is one of Australia's best-loved animals. Many people call it a 'koala bear' — but the koala is not a bear at all. It is a marsupial, carrying its young in a pouch.

Koalas live in the tall eucalyptus, or gum, trees of eastern Australia. They are wonderfully suited to life in the treetops. Their strong claws and rough-padded paws grip the bark tightly, and they have two thumbs on each front paw to help them climb and cling on.

The koala has a very unusual diet: it eats almost nothing but eucalyptus leaves. These leaves are tough and not very nourishing, and they would even be poisonous to most animals. The koala's special stomach lets it cope with them. Because the leaves give so little energy, koalas save their strength by sleeping for up to twenty hours a day!

A baby koala, called a joey, is born tiny and stays safe in its mother's pouch for about six months. Later, it rides on her back as it grows.

Sadly, koalas are now in trouble. Bushfires, disease and the clearing of their forests have reduced their numbers. Many Australians are working hard to protect koalas and the gum trees they depend on, so that this much-loved animal has a future.

Questions

1. Is the koala really a bear? What is it? (2 marks)
2. What kind of trees do koalas live in? (1 mark)
3. How many hours a day can a koala sleep? (1 mark)
4. Find and copy a word in paragraph 3 meaning "giving goodness or nutrition." (1 mark)
5. How are a koala's paws suited to life in the trees? (2 marks)
6. Why do koalas sleep for so much of the day? (2 marks)
7. Why are koalas "now in trouble"? (2 marks)
8. Summarise three facts about how koalas are suited to their life. (3 marks)

Answer Key / Mark Scheme

1. No, it is not a bear; it is a marsupial.
2. Eucalyptus (gum) trees.
3. Up to twenty hours a day.
4. "nourishing."

- 5.** Strong claws and rough-padded paws grip the bark, and two thumbs on each front paw help them climb and cling.
- 6.** Eucalyptus leaves give very little energy, so koalas sleep to save their strength.
- 7.** Bushfires, disease and the clearing of their forests have reduced their numbers.
- 8.** Any three: paws and claws for gripping; two thumbs for climbing; special stomach for eucalyptus; sleeps to save energy; pouch for the joey.