

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 blow up like a balloon and then explode. Swap partners and share your reasons. Agree on the reason you think is most likely.

~ **TO DEATH:** “Ballooning” to death must be a terrible and painful way to die. Look at these other “to death” causes for dying. In pairs / groups, explain how people might die in these ways. You may need a dictionary to help you with vocabulary:

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 the “~ to death” vocabulary items with this 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. Many toads have suddenly and mysteriously died at a pond in Germany. T / F
- b. Toads are ballooning to ten times their normal sizes and then bursting. T / F
- c. Experts from a local zoo were not surprised when they saw the dead toads. T / F
- d. An expert said all of the toads might die if this mystery is not solved. T / F
- e. A local vet believes a monster fungus is eating the toads. T / F
- f. The toads may not be able to fart enough to release gas in their stomachs. T / F

SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| (a) mystery | exploding |
| (b) ballooning | way |
| (c) bursting | expert |
| (d) authority | puzzle |
| (e) baffled | poisonous |
| (f) manner | farting |
| (g) toxic | expanding |
| (h) breaking wind | mystified |

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

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| (a) ballooning to three | are shocked at what is happening |
| (b) animal welfare workers | baffled |
| (c) They could not believe | a balloon |
| (d) completely | there was to know |
| (e) I thought I knew everything | times their normal sizes |
| (f) dying in such a violent | wind |
| (g) breaking | their eyes |
| (h) burst like | manner |

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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: Almost one thousand toads have suddenly died in a mystery at a pond in the German city of Hamburg. The toads are _____ to three times their normal sizes and then _____. Local animal welfare workers are shocked at what is happening. They have no explanations why the toads are exploding.

Experts from a local zoo arrived at the pond to _____ the strange deaths. They could not believe their eyes when they saw the hundreds of dead toads. Olga Henke, an _____ on German toads was completely baffled by this phenomenon. She said: "I thought I knew everything there was to know about toads. We have to find answers quickly before the toad population disappears."

There are a few theories about why the toads might be dying in such a violent manner. Some people say a mystery virus has suddenly infected the pond, while others think that _____ waste has poisoned the pond. A local vet believes a fungus the toads are eating is producing too much gas inside their stomachs: "The toads cannot release this gas by _____, so they get bigger and bigger and eventually burst like a balloon."

1
investigate
look into
check into
research

2
breaking wind
farting
passing gas
blowing off

3
authority
expert
specialist
scholar

4
bursting
exploding
blowing up
rupturing

5
ballooning
expanding
inflating
blowing up

6
toxic
poisonous
hazardous
contaminated

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DISCUSSION

- a. How did you feel after you read this article?
- b. Did you like reading this 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 do you think of eating frogs' legs?
- j. Have you heard of the English food called "toad in the hole"? Does it sound tasty?
- k. Do you think frogs and toads are cute?
- l. What sound do frogs and toads make in your country?
- m. What would you do if you found exploding toads near your house?
- n. What kinds of mysteries have happened in your town or city?
- o. When was the last time you were baffled?
- p. What would you like to be an authority on?
- q. Is breaking wind (farting) a normal or rude thing 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 or frogs. 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.
- Marriage proposals increase 300% in Brazilian city.
- The world's computers' space bars suddenly break.

TEXT:

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Experts from a local zoo arrived at the pond to investigate the strange deaths. They could not believe their eyes when they saw the hundreds of dead toads. Olga Henke, an authority on German toads was completely baffled by this phenomenon. She said: "I thought I knew everything there was to know about toads. We have to find answers quickly before the toad population disappears."

There are a few theories about why the toads might be dying in such a violent manner. Some people say a mystery virus has suddenly infected the pond, while others think that toxic waste has poisoned the pond. A local vet believes a fungus the toads are eating is producing too much gas inside their stomachs: "The toads cannot release this gas by breaking wind, so they get bigger and bigger and eventually burst like a balloon."