New highways threaten giant pandas

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6 December, 2005

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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.
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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.

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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

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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.

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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.

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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
   • rapid
   • loveable
   • cars
   • newspaper
   • tunnels
   • dividing
   • growth
   • principles
   • point
   • fertile
   • 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?

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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.

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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?
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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:

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