

NOT BORING MEDIA

THE PLANT THAT EATS RATS

High-Interest Nonfiction Reading Passage

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ Reading Passage ✓ Comprehension Questions
- ✓ Answer Key ✓ Teacher Guide

GRADES 4-6 • LEXILE ~750L • DOK LEVELS 1-4

Reading they'll actually do.

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WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ High-interest nonfiction reading passage (300-400 words)
- ✓ 6 comprehension questions spanning DOK levels 1-4
- ✓ Complete answer key with explanations
- ✓ Teacher guide with standards, pacing, and extensions

Questions or feedback? Leave a review or message us through TPT!

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THE PLANT THAT EATS RATS

Deep in the jungles of the Philippines grows a plant with an appetite for meat—and not just insects. *Nepenthes attenboroughii*, named after naturalist David Attenborough, is large enough to trap and digest rats.

This giant pitcher plant was discovered in 2007 by a team of botanists who hiked for two days through remote mountains to find it. Local missionaries had reported seeing enormous carnivorous plants on Mount Victoria, but scientists were skeptical. When they finally reached the summit, they found pitcher plants with traps nearly a foot deep—the largest carnivorous plants ever documented.

Pitcher plants catch prey using a simple but deadly mechanism. Their leaves form deep, slippery tubes filled with digestive fluids. Insects—and occasionally larger animals—are attracted by nectar around the rim. When they lean in to feed, they slip on the waxy surface and tumble into the tube. The walls are too slick to climb, and the victim drowns in the liquid below. Digestive enzymes then slowly break down the body, providing nutrients the plant can't get from the poor mountain soil.

While *Nepenthes attenboroughii* can trap rats, it doesn't hunt them actively. These larger victims are accidents—curious rodents that fall in while exploring or trying to steal nectar. The plant's main diet consists of insects and other small creatures.

Why did these pitcher plants evolve to be so large? Scientists believe it's because of their harsh environment. The mountaintop where they grow has thin soil with few nutrients. Larger traps mean more potential prey, which means more nutrients for survival.

Unfortunately, this incredible plant is already endangered. It grows only on a single mountain, and collectors have begun poaching specimens for the black market. Conservationists are working to protect the remaining plants and their habitat.

The existence of rat-eating plants sounds like science fiction. But in the remote mountains of the Philippines, truth is stranger than fiction—and hungrier too.

Word Count: 317 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: BBC

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Who is the plant Nepenthes attenboroughii named after?

- A) A Filipino president
- B) The scientist who discovered it
- C) Naturalist David Attenborough
- D) A local missionary

2 How deep can the traps of this pitcher plant be?

- A) About 1 inch
- B) About 6 inches
- C) Nearly a foot
- D) Over 3 feet

3 How do pitcher plants prevent prey from escaping?

- A) They close their traps shut
- B) They have sticky surfaces that hold prey
- C) Their walls are too slippery to climb
- D) They release paralyzing chemicals

4 Why did these pitcher plants evolve to be so large according to scientists?

- A) To scare away predators
- B) To survive in nutrient-poor soil by catching more prey
- C) To attract human attention
- D) To compete with other plants for sunlight

5 What does the phrase 'truth is stranger than fiction' mean in the context of this passage?

- A) Fiction writers often lie
- B) Real nature can be more surprising than made-up stories
- C) Scientists write fiction about plants
- D) The plant is not actually real

6 Based on the passage, what conservation approach would most effectively protect *Nepenthes attenboroughii*?

- A) Moving all plants to zoos
- B) Protecting the mountain habitat while stopping poaching
- C) Encouraging collectors to grow them at home
- D) Introducing them to other mountains

ANSWER KEY

The Plant That Eats Rats

1. C) Naturalist David Attenborough

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states the plant is 'named after naturalist David Attenborough.'

2. C) Nearly a foot

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'they found pitcher plants with traps nearly a foot deep.'

3. C) Their walls are too slippery to climb

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage explains: 'The walls are too slick to climb, and the victim drowns in the liquid below.'

4. B) To survive in nutrient-poor soil by catching more prey

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage explains: 'The mountaintop where they grow has thin soil with few nutrients. Larger traps mean more potential prey, which means more nutrients for survival.'

5. B) Real nature can be more surprising than made-up stories

DOK 3 — Analysis. The author uses this phrase to emphasize that a real plant that can trap rats seems like something from a fantasy story, but actually exists in nature.

6. B) Protecting the mountain habitat while stopping poaching

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. The passage identifies two threats: limited habitat (single mountain) and poaching. Effective conservation would address both by protecting the habitat while enforcing anti-poaching measures.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Plant That Eats Rats

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1 — Refer to details and examples in a text
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4 — Determine meaning of words and phrases
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8 — Explain how author uses evidence
- NGSS — Connections to scientific practices

PACING OPTIONS

- Quick Read (10-15 min): Passage + questions 1-4
- Standard (20-25 min): Full passage + all questions
- Deep Dive (35-40 min): Add discussion + extension

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Most plants get nutrients from soil, but pitcher plants evolved to eat animals. What does this tell us about how species adapt to their environments?
- The plant is endangered because of poaching. Should rare plants be protected as strictly as rare animals? Why or why not?
- Would you want to see this plant in person, knowing it grows in a remote location that takes two days to hike to? What makes something worth the effort to experience?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Research other carnivorous plants (Venus flytraps, sundews, etc.) and create a comparison chart of their trapping mechanisms.
- Design a terrarium that could house a carnivorous plant, labeling what conditions it would need to survive.
- Write a nature documentary script describing the pitcher plant's hunting method as if narrating a wildlife film.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Struggling: Pre-teach vocabulary, partner reading
- Advanced: Add research, compare to related events
- ELL: Visual supports, pre-teach context

SOURCE

- BBC / Royal Botanic Gardens Kew