


Name:


Date:


Activity 4: The Survivors!


At the Oscars, actors *compete* against each other to win awards like 'Best Actress'. Animals *compete* for resources; they have to find water, food, mates and shelter, whilst avoiding being eaten. Only the best individuals can *outcompete* the rest to get the resources they need to survive. You are invited to the 'Survivor!' awards! Check out the nominees attending the meerkat awards ceremony (and all their information) below!

Bridget	
female	
	
Sight	9
Smell	8
Speed	6
Claw Strength	2
Attractiveness	6


Monty	
male	
	
Sight	6
Smell	7
Speed	8
Claw Strength	6
Attractiveness	6


Rose	
female	
	
Sight	3
Smell	10
Speed	10
Claw Strength	5
Attractiveness	5

Springy	
male	
	
Sight	10
Smell	7
Speed	7
Claw Strength	3
Attractiveness	8

Wolfie	
male	
	
Sight	3
Smell	9
Speed	6
Claw Strength	7
Attractiveness	9

Priscilla	
female	
	
Sight	5
Smell	4
Speed	7
Claw Strength	4
Attractiveness	8

Worzel	
male	
	
Sight	5
Smell	6
Speed	9
Claw Strength	10
Attractiveness	5

Sandy	
female	
	
Sight	4
Smell	6
Speed	3
Claw Strength	8
Attractiveness	7

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You are giving the awards tonight! Of course, no two meerkats are quite the same, there is variation between them. Their ratings for 'sight', 'smell' and so on will allow you to 'compare the meerkats' and decide which meerkat deserves which award. Who is the best competitor and so a better 'Survivor'?

The first award category is all about competing for food. Meerkats often use their nose to find food. Which meerkat would win the 'Best Sniffer-Outer of Food' Survivor award? _____

Meerkats will then dig in the sand with their claws to get their food. Who will win the 'Strongest Claws' award? _____

Time for the romantic section of the evening! Meerkat groups (or 'mobs') are led by a dominant female. When a female wants to start a new mob, she will choose a male to become her mate. The males compete to win her heart. Which meerkat would win 'Most Attractive Male'? _____

Avoiding being eaten is an important part of survival! Who will go home with the 'Best at Spotting Predators' award? _____

Which of the nominees is *least likely* to win 'Fastest Escape from a Hungry Bird of Prey'? _____

Who will win 'Fastest Escape from a Hungry Bird of Prey'? _____

It's the big one, the biggest award of the night: the 'Ultimate Survivor'! This award goes to the best competitor, the best survivor, and is awarded to the winner of the most Survivor awards. Which of the winners will be given this final award? _____

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The 8 meerkat nominees come from two different meerkat mobs. While many animals live alone, some animals live in groups to help them survive. They work together to find resources and avoid predators. Competition then takes place *between groups*. The meerkats with the stripes on their cards are one mob and the spotty meerkats are the other.

The awards night was very windy in the Kalahari Desert where they live. When the two meerkat mobs get home to their burrows, they find that the wind has covered the entrances to their burrows with sand. They will need to dig the holes again so they can take shelter from the cold night.

If the meerkats in each family work to dig holes with their strong claws, combining their strength, which group will do it more quickly, the stripy mob or the spotty mob?

The _____ mob will re-dig their burrow more quickly.

The two meerkat mobs compete for food and for good spots to build their burrows (shelter). Can you think of any other resources that might be scarce/rare in their desert habitat?

It's a competitive world isn't it?! In fact, lots of our most popular games are competitions. If you like, you can use the award nominee profiles as 'Top Trumps' cards! Please feel free to make some more profiles for a longer game! If you do, please send us a picture as we would love to see them!

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Extension:

Penguins are thinking of starting their own 'Survivors' awards. Do you think they would have the same awards and the same categories on their profiles? Why? What other awards might they have? What other resources might they compete for in their polar habitat?

Luke is another meerkat who attended the awards night. He is frustrated by the winner of the 'Ultimate Survivor' award. He says that Springy should have won Ultimate Survivor because he has the best sight and that is the most important for survival.

He says: *"If you can't see a predator coming, it doesn't matter how good you are at smelling out food or digging for shelter. You'll be eaten!"*

Do you agree with him? There are no right answers here but you should explain your reasoning.

If you are feeling creative, then please do have a go at making some more meerkat nominee profiles and play 'Top Trumps', or even make some penguin ones! If you do, please send us a picture as we would love to see them!

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Answers

'Best Sniffer-Outer of Food' Survivor award winner: Rose (as her 'Smell' rating is the highest).

'Strongest Claws' award winner: Worzel (as his 'Claw Strength' rating is highest).

'Most Attractive Male' award winner: Wolfie (as his 'Attractiveness' rating is the highest of the male meerkats).

'Best at Spotting Predators' award winner: Springy (as his 'Sight' rating is the highest).

Which of the nominees is least likely to win 'Fastest Escape from a Hungry Bird of Prey': Sandy (as her 'Speed' rating is the lowest).

'Fastest Escape from a Hungry Bird of Prey' award winner: Rose (as her 'Speed' rating is the highest).

'Ultimate Survivor' award winner: Rose (as she has won two awards). This makes her the best competitor and the most likely to survive.

Which group will re-dig their burrow more quickly?

The stripy mob will re-dig their burrow more quickly. Their total 'Claw Strength' rating is 24 ($2 + 5 + 7 + 10 = 24$) compared to the spotty mob, whose total 'Claw Strength' rating is only 21 ($6 + 3 + 4 + 8 = 21$).

Can you think of any other resources that might be scarce in their desert habitat?

There are many possible answers to this. The key resource is likely to be water, which is rare in deserts. Water is one of the most important resources an animal needs, so competition for access to water will be very strong.

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Penguins are thinking of starting their own 'Survivors' awards. Do you think they would have the same awards? Why? What other awards might they have? What other resources might they compete for in their polar habitat?

Some of the awards and categories would be the same, such as 'Best at Spotting Predators' and 'Speed'. This is because, like meerkats and other animals, penguins need to keep an eye out for and escape from predators (like leopard seals) and compete for food. They also have surprisingly good senses of smell, which they use to find food. Males and females will compete with other males and females for the best mates, so attractiveness would remain a category on their profiles and 'Most Attractive Male/Female' would remain good Survivor awards. Penguins do not have claws for digging, so 'Claw Strength' would not be a useful category. Perhaps 'Agility' would replace it, with a 'Most Agile' award, as they would need to be good at twisting and turning in the water to catch fish. 'Holding their Breath' would also be a good replacement, with a 'Longest Dive' award, as penguins need to hold their breath whilst swimming. Those who can hold their breath for longest would be able to better compete for food. Instead of competing for shelter, penguins huddle together for warmth on open ice sheets and rotate who gets to be in the middle of the huddle. However, they would compete for the best nest sites, for example.

Do you agree with Luke that Springy should have won the 'Ultimate Survivor' award?

There is no right answer here. Luke has a point though: is it better to be very good at one thing, or be fairly good all round? It depends! Springy might be really good at spotting predators and avoid being eaten, but that will be no use if he starves or can't find water or shelter. On balance, it might be better to have a range of skills, although that still does not guarantee survival. This is why competition is such an important part of an animal's life, it's not enough just to find resources, you've got to find them before anyone else, if you want to survive!