

Name: _____

Quills and Thrills

By Kelly Hashway



Forests are homes to many animals. But there's one forest creature that gives off an odor and makes a rattling sound when it feels threatened. No, it's not a cross between a skunk and a rattlesnake. It's a porcupine.

Porcupines are covered with quills—about 30,000 on average. The quills cover most of the porcupine's body with the exception of the face, stomach, and the inside of the animal's legs. You probably know that rattlesnakes shake their tails to scare off predators. It's like a warning signal. Well, porcupines do something similar. When a porcupine is approached by a predator or is feeling threatened, it rustles its quills. This creates a rattling sound as a warning sign, telling other animals or even humans to back off. But the sound isn't the only warning. When a porcupine raises its quills like this, it produces an odor. So the animal uses both sound and smell to ward off enemies.

If a porcupine is attacked, its quills act as protection. You may have heard rumors that porcupines can shoot their quills at attackers. This isn't true. What actually happens is when a porcupine tenses the muscles around their quills and makes them stand up, the quills become loose. If an animal gets too close to the porcupine and brushes up against it, the quills will detach and stick into the attacker.

The quills aren't poisonous, but they have multiple layers of barbs like barbed wire, which makes them painful and sometimes difficult to remove because they embed themselves into the attacker's skin. But the interesting thing about quills is that they are coated with antibiotic fatty acids that help speed up the healing process. Why? To protect the porcupine in case it accidentally pierces its own skin. A porcupine's quills will grow back after losing them, but it does take several months.

So if you ever find yourself in a forest, and you hear a rattling sound followed by a strange odor, beware. Finding yourself on the other end of a porcupine's quills may be more thrills than you're looking for.

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1. Which parts of a porcupine's body are not covered with quills?

2. When a porcupine is feeling threatened by a predator, what does it do?
- a. shoots quills at the predator
 - b. makes a rattling sound with its quills
 - c. curls up in a ball
 - d. thumps its tail on the ground
3. A porcupine's quills are barbed. What does this mean?
- a. They are poisonous to people and animals.
 - b. They are coated with antibiotic fatty acids.
 - c. They grow back when the porcupine loses them.
 - d. They get stuck in an enemy's skin.
4. What is the author's purpose for writing this article?
- a. to explain how porcupines eat, live, and play
 - b. to teach readers how porcupines defend themselves
 - c. to describe the life cycle of a porcupine
 - d. to entertain readers with a story about porcupines
5. According to the information in the article, which fact about porcupines is *not* true?
- a. When a porcupine's quills stand up, they become loose.
 - b. When a porcupine raises its quills, it produces an odor.
 - c. Porcupines have about thirty thousand quills.
 - d. It takes several years for a porcupine to regrow lost quills.

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. _____

r o d o

hint: smell

2. _____

s o r r u m

hint: facts that haven't been proven true; gossip

3. _____

s t e e n s

hint: tightens muscles because of nervousness

4. _____

c i t a i n o t i b

hint: type of medicine that kills germs

5. _____

p u n a l i f

hint: causing discomfort

6. _____

e n i d a y c t a c l l

hint: not on purpose

7. _____

k e s t e t r a n a l

hint: reptile that makes a rattling sound by shaking its tail

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In the article, "Quills and Thrills," you learned about how a porcupine protects itself from enemies in the wild. Think of another animal that has a special way of protecting itself from predators. Describe the animal and explain how it protects itself.

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1. Which parts of a porcupine's body are not covered with quills?

The face, stomach, and inside of a porcupine's legs are not covered with quills.

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ANSWER KEY

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r o d o

hint: smell

2. rumors

s o r r u m

hint: facts that haven't been proven true; gossip

3. tenses

s t e e n s

hint: tightens muscles because of nervousness

4. antibiotic

c i t a i n o t i b

hint: type of medicine that kills germs

5. painful

p u n a l i f

hint: causing discomfort

6. accidentally

e n i d a y c t a c l l

hint: not on purpose

7. rattlesnake

k e s t e t r a n a l

hint: reptile that makes a rattling sound by shaking its tail