

Those Amazing Lemmings

by Todd Zelinski

Blue 1c
Power Builder

11



1 If you live in one of the northern parts
of the world, you may have seen large
herds of lemmings moving across the
landscape. Nothing stops them. If the
lemmings come to a river or stream, they
try to swim across. If they come to a thick
forest, they will go through it. If they
come to a large body of water, such as
an ocean, they try to swim across.

2 Lemmings are one of the oddest
creatures on the planet. They are small
animals with thick pale gray fur, small
ears, and stumpy tails. They look like fat
hamsters. They eat mosses, herbs, and soft
twigs. Most of the lemmings live in the
hills and mountains of Norway and
Sweden. Yet every few years, the
lemmings leave their homes and march
across the land.

3 Why do lemmings do this? No one
seems to know for sure. The lemming
population will stay the same for about
three to four years. Then more babies are
born. The lemmings grow in number. In a
few years, the arctic foxes and snow owls
that eat the lemmings cannot stop the
lemmings from growing in large numbers.

4 Soon the hills are covered with
lemmings. Their lairs are too crowded.
Food becomes scarce. Then large herds
of lemmings will suddenly leave their lairs
and migrate. They could be looking for
food. They could be looking for new
homes. Again, no one knows for sure
why they do this.

5 The lemmings move slowly. They move
at night and feed and rest by day. More
babies are born, and the herd grows
larger. Arctic foxes and snow owls that
feed on lemmings follow them. They eat
the lemmings. Other lemmings die of
disease. The remainder of the lemmings
keep moving.

6 Finally, after the lemmings have escaped
all other dangers, they come to the sea.
However, the lemmings continue on. They
leap into the sea and start to swim. No
one knows why they do this. Maybe they
think there is food on the other side.
Maybe they think they can find a place to
build a new lair. Soon, the lemmings that
jumped into the sea drown.

7 It may take two or three months for
the lemmings to finish their march.
Sometimes it takes longer. Sometimes it
can happen more quickly. However, the
march always ends the same way.

8 What about the lemmings that stayed
behind? What happens to them? The
lemmings that stayed home will have
babies. Those babies will have more
babies. In a few years, the hills and
mountains will once again be covered
with lemmings. Then the process will
start again. Thousands of lemmings will
leave their homes to begin their march
toward the sea.

COMPREHENSION

A Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

1 This story is mostly about

- a** how lemming herds grow too crowded.
- b** why lemmings make their long journey.
- c** the strange migration of the lemmings.

2 One thing people know for sure about lemmings is that they

- a** will march to the sea no matter what.
- b** travel from their homes in search of food.
- c** are trying to find new land across the sea.

3 When animals migrate, it means that they

- a** make a trip to end their lives.
- b** move from one place to a new place.
- c** become so crowded they die off.

4 Lemmings can cause problems for

- a** farmers.
- b** snow owls.
- c** scientists.

5 The lemmings that march to their death are

- a** helping the lemmings that stay behind.
- b** hurting the lemmings that stay behind.
- c** marching to find other lemmings.

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

B Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words in the story give you clues.

Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.)

Write the word.

- 1** groups; flocks (1)
- 2** strangest (2)
- 3** short and thick (2)
- 4** the number of people or animals that live in one place (3)
- 5** difficult to find (4)
- 6** a place where a wild animal lives (6)

7 an organized forward movement (7)

8 a series of actions (8)

C A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning will depend on how it is used.

The *fly* buzzed around the room.
The bird will *fly* to its nest.

Look at each word in **bold type**.
Note the paragraph number. Look back at the paragraph. Which meaning does the word have there?
Write *a* or *b*.



LEARN ABOUT WORDS (continued)

9 rest (5)

- a stopping to relax
- b remainder

10 keep (5)

- a last; stay fresh
- b continue; don't stop

THINK ABOUT IT

D Most verbs add *-ed* to show that something happened in the past.

ask + **ed** = asked

When a word ends in *e*, you drop that *e* before adding *-ed*.

lik~~e~~ + **ed** = liked

When a word ends in *y*, you usually change the *y* to *i* before adding *-ed*.

carry + **ed** = carried

Each sentence below has a verb that is in the past tense. Rewrite the underlined verb in the present tense by dropping the *-ed* ending. If you read *shared*, you would write *share*.

- 1 Lemmings have always lived in Norway.
- 2 The snow owls looked for more lemmings to eat.
- 3 The little animals tried to stay in groups.
- 4 They marched right into the sea.
- 5 None of the lemmings escaped.

E Suppose that you are going to write a report called "Why There Aren't Too Many Lemmings." Read each item. If it fits your main topic, write *Yes*. If it does not, write *No*.

- 6 What lemming fur looks like
- 7 How disease kills many lemmings
- 8 How more and more lemming babies are born
- 9 What hawks like to eat
- 10 Why crowds of lemmings leave home