

Name: _____

A Super-Slow Moving Mammal

by Guy Belleranti

What super slow-moving Central and South American rainforest mammal spends almost its entire life hanging upside down from tree branches? If you said sloth, you're right!

Sloths eat, sleep and even have babies while hanging upside-down. They hold onto the branches with their long, sharp, curved claws. They can also use these claws to defend themselves.

Thousands of years ago, there were sloths that lived on the ground. Compared to sloths that are living today, ancient ground sloths were giants. One type even weighed over 3,000 pounds. All ground sloths are extinct today, but their cousins the tree sloths can still be found in rainforests.

There are two main types of sloths: the two-toed and the three-toed. Two-toed sloths have two toes on their front feet or hands and three on their rear feet. Three-toed sloths have three toes on all feet.

Sloths are about the size of a cat or small dog. They have a short flat head, big eyes, small ears, thick fur, a small or non-existent tail and fairly long legs.

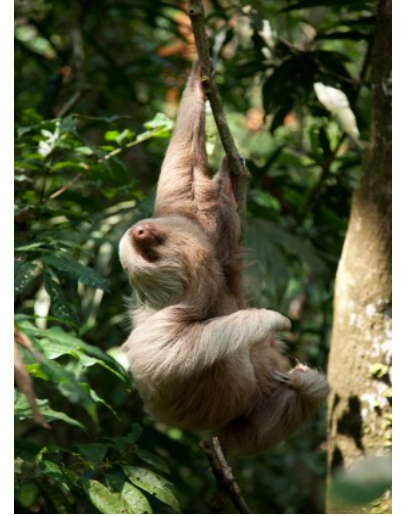
If you're in the jungle and you want to see a sloth, look up high in the trees. They rarely come to the ground because of danger from predators like jaguars and ocelots. They can stand up, but have weak back muscles and can't walk erect. To move on the ground they must lie on their bellies and pull themselves with their front claws and strong arm muscles. Sloths have also been observed swimming, and they are excellent swimmers.

Sloths move so seldom and so slowly that gray-green algae often grow in their fur. This provides both camouflage and nutrients for the sloth to lick.

Mother sloths give birth to only one baby at a time. Babies cling to their mothers until they can take care of themselves.

When sleeping, sloths tuck their heads into their chests between their front and back feet. In this ball shape they look like a part of the tree. This helps keep them hidden from predators.

Sloths use their excellent sense of smell and touch to find food. They are herbivores, eating leaves, fruit, buds and twigs. Because they don't move much they use little energy and don't need to eat or drink as much as most animals.



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1. How many toes does a two-toed sloth have on each of its rear feet?
 - a. two
 - b. three
 - c. four
 - d. six

2. Which fact about ground sloths is true?
 - a. They were smaller than tree sloths.
 - b. They are endangered today.
 - c. They were usually found in trees.
 - d. They were heavier than tree sloths.

3. Why don't sloths usually come down to the ground?

4. Describe how a sloth moves on the ground.

5. Barry tells his teacher about his vacation to Africa last year. He says he was hiking in the jungle when he spotted a mother sloth with three young sloths. They were all moving slowly through the trees. The mother sloth stopped and began feeding small birds to her babies. After that, the sloth family slowly came to the ground and swam in a nearby river.

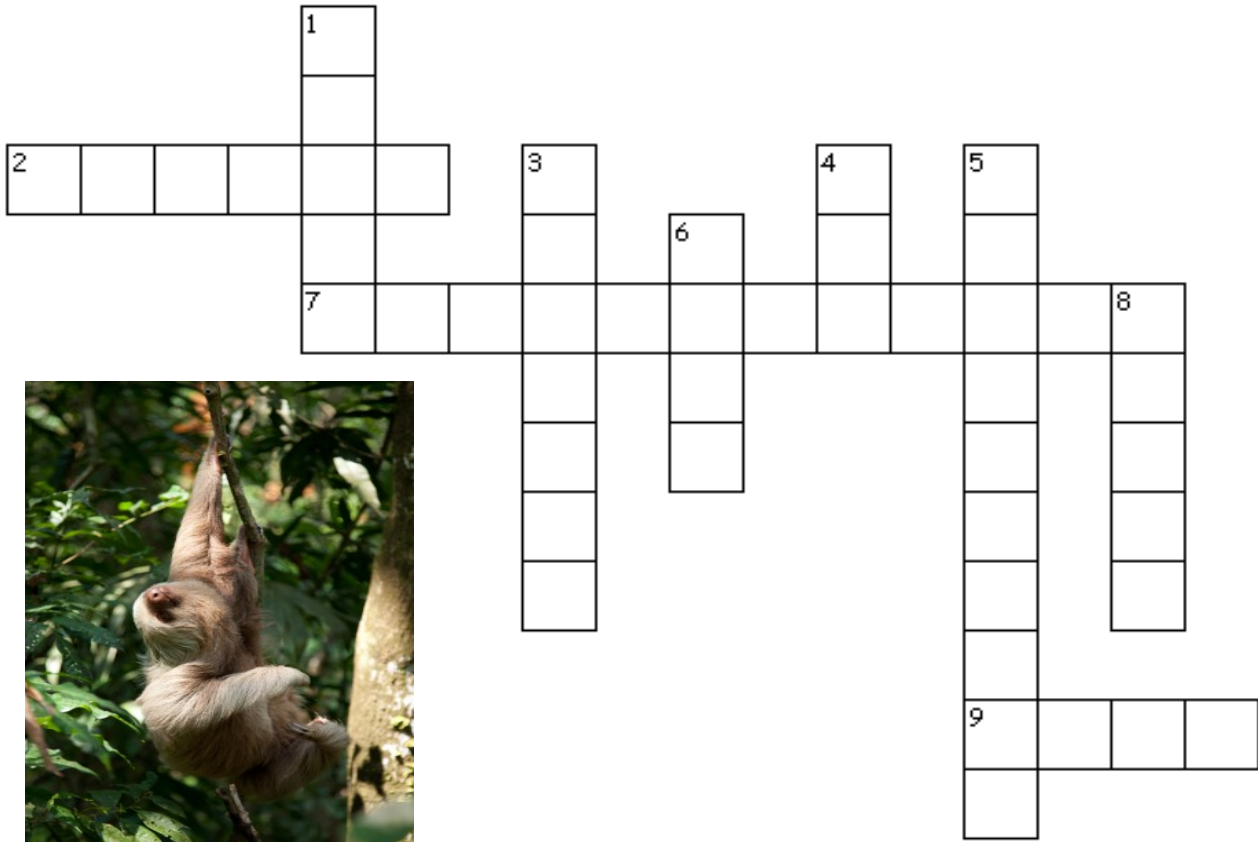
Barry's teacher doesn't believe his story. Give three reasons why his story doesn't make sense.

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Use words from the article, "A Super-Slow Moving Mammal", to complete the crossword.



Across

2. This animal is a predator of the sloth.
7. One of the continents where sloths live is...
9. When a sloth is in the water, it can...

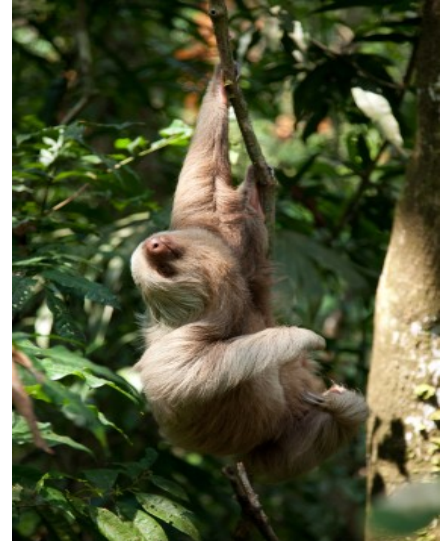
Down

1. Sloths have long, sharp, curved...
3. Today, ground sloths are...
4. The number of babies a mother sloth has at one time is...
5. Sloths live in the...
6. When they sleep, sloths are in this shape.
8. This grows on a sloth's fur and provides camouflage

ANSWER KEY

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1. How many toes does a two-toed sloth have on each of its rear feet? **b**
- a. two
b. **three**
c. four
d. six

2. Which fact about ground sloths is true? **d**
- a. They were smaller than tree sloths.
b. They are endangered today.
c. They were usually found in trees.
d. **They were heavier than tree sloths.**

3. Why don't sloths usually come down to the ground?

When they are on the ground, they are in danger of being hunted by jaguars and ocelots.
Also accept: They have weak back muscles and can't walk upright.

4. Describe how a sloth moves on the ground.

They lie on their bellies and pull themselves with their front claws.

5. Barry tells his teacher about his vacation to Africa last year. He says he was hiking in the jungle when he spotted a mother sloth with three young sloths. They were all moving slowly through the trees. The mother sloth stopped and began feeding small birds to her babies. After that, the sloth family slowly came to the ground and swam in a nearby river.

Barry's teacher doesn't believe his story. Give three reasons why his story doesn't make sense.

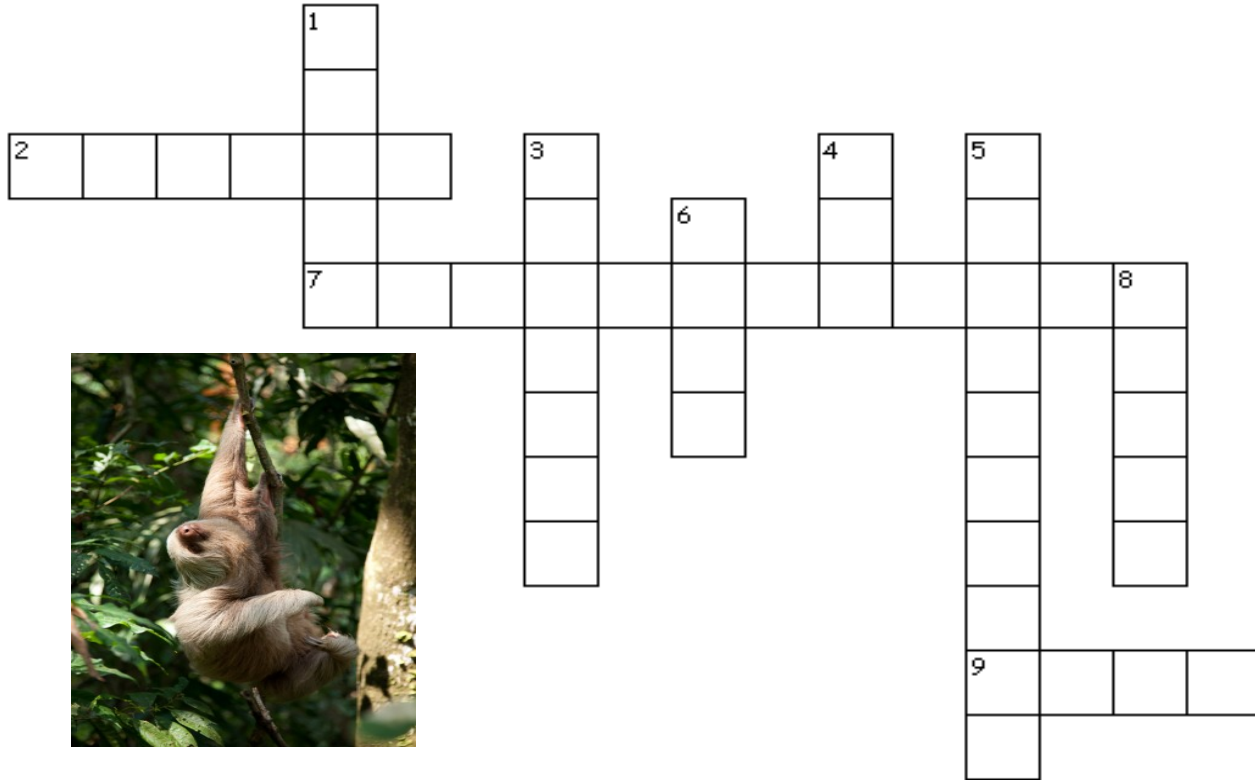
- 1. Sloths don't live in Africa.**
2. Mother sloths only have one baby at a time.
3. Sloths are herbivores and don't eat birds.
Also accept: Sloths rarely come down to the ground.

ANSWER KEY

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Use words from the article, "A Super-Slow Moving Mammal", to complete the crossword.



Across

- This animal is a predator of the sloth.
(jaguar)
- One of the continents where sloths live is...
(South America)
- When a sloth is in the water, it can...
(swim)

Down

- Sloths have long, sharp, curved...
(claws)
- Today, ground sloths are...
(extinct)
- The number of babies a mother sloth has at one time is... **(one)**
- Sloths live in the... **(rainforest)**
- When they sleep, sloths are in this shape.
(ball)
- This grows on a sloth's fur and provides camouflage **(algae)**