

## The Future of the Polar Bear Reading Comprehension

Name \_\_\_\_\_

With their huge paws, fluffy white fur, and dark, expressive eyes, polar bears can appear to be cute and friendly creatures - from afar. Up close however, it is easy to see why polar bears are fearsome apex predators in their arctic homes. These enormous animals are outfitted with strong, sharp claws and a keen nose to help them detect and catch seals that swim to holes in the ice to breathe. During cold arctic winters, polar bears enjoy prime hunting season. Other arctic animals like the arctic fox depend on the leftovers from polar bear kills to sustain them throughout the harsh winter. In this way, polar bears fill an important niche, or role, in arctic ecosystems by controlling populations of seals while also providing food to scavengers.

Unfortunately, polar bears face a perilous future. In previous years, the biggest threat to polar bear populations was hunting by humans. While careful regulations helped to control this threat, polar bears are still not safe. Today polar bears are most threatened by the effects of a warming arctic climate. Polar bears depend on the expansive sheets of ice that form during cold winters to hunt seals. When ice forms later in the fall and thaws earlier in the spring, polar bears have less time to fatten up during their most vital feeding season. This is especially dangerous for polar bear mothers and their cubs. Mothers fast for long periods of time while their cubs are very young. With a shortened hunting season, polar bear mothers can be particularly challenged in finding enough food to replenish fat stores. Sea ice is also vital for the long migration routes polar bears follow annually. The bears can get stranded when warm weather prevents the sea from freezing.

Hungry bears that are stuck in the wrong place at the wrong time can be a big problem for humans. With their routes across the ice unavailable, polar bears are unable to move north and may venture towards towns to try to find food in garbage dumps and backyards. This is dangerous for humans and bears and creates a perception that bear populations are increasing. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to survey, or count, the number of polar bears accurately. The remote habitat that polar bears occupy can be hazardous for humans to access. On top of that, polar bears have large ranges and can be spread over long distances. Even heat-seeking cameras don't make the job any easier. Polar bear fur is such effective insulation that bears give off almost no detectable body heat. Without accurate measurements of polar bear populations, it is difficult to make informed plans to protect this precious predator of the north.

**1.) Based on the following sentence, what could be the definition of “apex predator”?**

*Up close however, it is easy to see why polar bears are fearsome apex predators in their arctic home*

- a.) a predator that lives in the arctic
- b.) a predator who occupies the highest spot in the food chain
- c.) a predator that humans like to hunt
- d.) a predator that plays an important role in the food chain

**2.) Based on the information in the passage, if polar bear populations decline, what could you expect to happen to arctic foxes?**

- a.) Arctic fox populations might increase because they will not be hunted as much
- b.) Arctic foxes might be able to have larger territories
- c.) Arctic fox populations will probably stay the same
- d.) Arctic fox populations might decline

**3.) According to the passage, why could shortened winters be particularly dangerous to female polar bears?**

- a.) Female polar bears need more food to stay warm
- b.) Female polar bears have to spend some of wintertime taking care of cubs instead of hunting
- c.) Female polar bears overheat more easily than male polar bears
- d.) Female polar bears have to spend more time traveling during the wintertime than male polar bears

**4.) Why could it be important to have accurate counts of polar bear populations?**

- a.) Scientists need to know how many polar bears there are to be able to feed bears enough food
- b.) Citizens need to know if they should be practicing bear safety when in polar bear habitat
- c.) To know how polar bear populations change year after year
- d.) It is important to know if polar bears will hunt too many seals

**5.) What could be an appropriate title for the second paragraph?**

- a.) "Threats to Polar Bears, Past and Present"
- b.) "The Effect of Hunting on Polar Bears"
- c.) "Winter Survival Techniques"
- d.) "Yearly Polar Bear Migration"

**6.) What could be the author's purpose in writing this passage?**

- a.) To persuade
- b.) To inform
- c.) To entertain
- d.) To frighten

**7.) Which of the following is not a challenge to polar bear conservation?**

- a.) Not much is known about the lifestyle of polar bears
- b.) It is difficult to survey polar bear populations
- c.) Increased contact with humans means that some people believe polar bear populations are increasing
- d.) Polar bears have large ranges and can be hard to find