mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Can animals laugh?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hi, it's Doug! Laughing is something everybody does, even little babies. Like this baby here finds it hysterically funny that her family's pet dog is trying to catch bubbles. But what about animals? Do they ever laugh? Someone named Caiya has a question about this. Let's give them a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Doug!

- Hi, Caiya!

- I have a question for you. Can animals laugh?

- Ooh, that's a great question.

You might have seen an animal laugh in a cartoon, and with special effects in movies. Sometimes, an animal laughing can look incredibly real. But these are just special effects, made using computers. They're not real animals laughing. Even something like this. Now, this is a real parrot. This isn't special effects. But parrots, you might know, are incredibly good at imitating sounds that they hear. It's hard to say that this parrot is actually laughing when it makes these laughing sounds. It's just imitating the sounds that it hears human beings do. So do any animals laugh? Can animals even laugh? Well, for a long time, many people assumed that animals don't laugh and that they can't laugh, and that's because we human beings, we laugh at things we

find funny. And most of the things we find funny, there's always some reason we find it funny. We find things funny because our brains are thinking about something. In order to think, you need a pretty large brain, which we human beings have. Animals can't find things funny, can they? Well, check this out. This is a video of a real dolphin and a real person. Watch as this person does a cartwheel and a handstand, do you see that? The dolphin definitely sees what she's doing, and it's interested in what she's doing. It's really paying attention to her. Some say it really looks like the dolphin is even laughing. Right there, you see that? What do you think? Do you think what this dolphin is doing counts as laughing?

VIDEO 2

Well, whatever this dolphin is doing, we can't hear if it's making a sound or not, but it does look like it's laughing, and dolphins are known for being smart, intelligent animals. They even have a really big brain, so maybe this dolphin does find what she's doing funny. But are dolphins the only animals that do this? And what about the fact that we couldn't hear anything that sounded like laughter? Well, at least one scientist, who was studying rats, discovered something really interesting. He noticed that when the rats were doing something that looked like playing, they'd often make little sounds like this. He discovered that these rats would make this same sound when he played with them, especially if he was petting them in a way that might tickle them. Are rats ticklish? He recorded this sound and then created something called a spectrogram, something that allows us to see what a sound looks like. What you're seeing here is the sound rats make when they're being tickled. You can see how the sound repeats in a pattern, just as if the rats were going “ha ha ha ha ha ha.” And rats aren't even the only animals that do this. Some other animals seem to find certain things funny, especially being tickled, like this guinea pig. Check it out. Or, check out this monkey. So, in summary, scientists now think some animals

do laugh, maybe even find some things funny, especially tickling, or in the case of dolphins, seeing us acting silly. And maybe we shouldn't be too surprised. After all, there are other behaviors human beings and some animals have in common, too. Behaviors like yelling and crying. While people and animals are very different, we have so much in common. That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Caiya, for asking it!