

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Why do pandas eat bamboo?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hey, it's Danni. Check this out. It's a panda dinner party. See? They're all flopped on the ground eating. Cute, right? Someone named Haley has a question about pandas. Let's call Haley now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Danni.
- Hey, Haley.
- I have a question for you. Why do pandas eat bamboo?
- That's a great question.

If you've seen a panda before, you may have noticed they are constantly munching, and they're almost always eating the same plant: this long, skinny green thing called bamboo. But why? There are lots of other kinds of bears, and they eat lots of different things. Polar bears hunt for seals, grizzly bears catch salmon out of rivers, black bears have been known to eat bugs, berries, and honeycomb, but none of them eat bamboo. For pandas, it's almost always bamboo. Very, very occasionally, they'll snack on something else, but mostly, it's bamboo, bamboo, and more bamboo. Why is this? What do you think?

VIDEO 2

There are many reasons an animal might eat a particular food. Maybe they just like it. It just tastes good to them. Or maybe it's good for them. It helps them stay healthy. Or how about a simpler reason? Maybe they eat it because it's there. Think of it this way. Imagine the grocery stores and restaurants in your town always serve potatoes. Potatoes in the kitchen, potatoes at the cafeteria, potatoes at the dinner table, potatoes everywhere. Chances are, you're going to end up eating a lot of potatoes, whether you like them or not. It's just so convenient. Bears eat the food that's most available near them. These grizzly bears live near coastal rivers that are full of salmon, so they eat salmon. These black bears live in forests full of berries and bugs, so they eat berries and bugs. Polar bears live near icy ocean with lots of seals, so they eat seals.

Pandas live in just a few mountain ranges here in the country of China. That area grows lots and lots of bamboo, so pandas eat bamboo. One bamboo plant isn't a very filling meal, so to fill up and stay healthy, pandas have to eat a lot of bamboo. That's why when you see a panda, they're often snacking on bamboo. An adult panda can spend up to twelve hours a day eating as much as 84 pounds of bamboo. That would be like if you ate celery from the moment you woke up to the moment you went to sleep. This might seem like a lot, but it works for pandas. That is, it works as long as there's enough bamboo. Eating mostly one food means pandas are super dependent on that one food for survival. What happens if a panda runs out of bamboo to eat? This is a real problem for pandas these days. Bamboo forests are threatened. Many things humans do, like building more roads and farms or putting harmful things into the air and water, harm bamboo forests. That can make it hard for pandas to find enough bamboo to eat. Other bears face these problems too. When there's not enough ice for polar bears to hunt seals, polar bears go hungry. When there's not enough salmon in the rivers, grizzlies go hungry. When there

isn't enough healthy forest full of bugs and berries, black bears have to look for food elsewhere. So, in summary, pandas eat bamboo because there's lots of it where they live. Pandas need to eat lots of bamboo to survive. When bamboo forests are threatened, pandas are threatened. This is true of other bears and other animals all around the world. To protect animals, we have to protect the places they live. When we care for the Earth, we care for all the living things that depend on it. That's all for this week's question. Thanks for asking, Haley.