

Grades K-5

Mini-Lesson: "Are vampires real?"

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hey, it's Esther. When I was a kid, sometimes my family forgot to turn the TV off after we were done watching a show. Because the TV stayed on, I'd catch a glimpse of the shows that were on late. And every once in a while, that meant I ended up watching a show that was scary. The ones that creeped me out the most had these: vampires. Someone named Alfredo has a question about vampires. Let's give Alfredo a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Esther!

- Hey, Alfredo!

- I have a question for you. Are vampires real?

- Great question.

You've probably heard of or seen stories about vampires, just like I did. Vampires are always a little different in different stories. Sometimes they're goofy, like Count Chocula or Mavis in the movie Hotel Transylvania. Sometimes they're scary. But across many stories, vampires often have these things in common: They have fangs, they drink blood, and they hide from sunlight. What do you think? Could a real living creature have all these characteristics?

VIDEO 2

So far as scientists know, there are no humans who have all these qualities. The human vampires we see in stories are made up. However, I bet you can think of animals that do have at least some of these qualities. There are even some wild animals that have vampire in their names. Let's take a closer look. You might be able to think of lots of animals who only go out when it's dark outside. Many animals are nocturnal. They are awake and active at night. This is true of everything from flying squirrels to moray eels. But the vampires in our stories, they don't just stay up all night. They actively avoid the sun. In some stories, a vampire that sees sunlight burns up into a pile of ashes. Being awake at night is different from never seeing the sun. Still, there are some creatures that never see sunlight because of where or how they live. For example, check out this creepy creature. This animal lives in the deepest, darkest waters of the ocean, where there's almost no light at all. And it's called a vampire squid. Besides living in the dark, see if you can tell what else about this animal is vampire-like. Some of these animals are blood red, others midnight black, but they all have this webbing connecting their arms. It kind of looks like a vampire's cape. Still, vampire squid don't do some things the vampires in stories do. They don't drink blood. In fact, vampire squids aren't even hunters. They're scavengers, which means they eat things that are already dead. And they don't have a vampire's famous long, sharp teeth. So let's see if there are any animals that have those teeth. Lots of animals have impressive chompers. Check out the teeth on this hippo. Or this baboon, or this fish, or even this deer. Animals use sharp teeth for different purposes: to smash food, or tear into meat, or fight off and defend themselves from challenging animals. But story vampires use their teeth for a really specific purpose. They use them to drink blood. So do any animals drink blood? You're probably already familiar with one animal who drinks blood all the time. Mosquitoes. These tiny

creatures have thin, needle-like mouthparts that are used to pierce skin and suck blood. But these aren't the only animals who enjoy a blood meal every now and then. Like, check these out. These moths are also blood suckers. Like mosquitoes, they have a thin, pointy mouth part at the front of their face that they use to pierce skin and drink blood. These animals are called, you guessed it, vampire moths. Okay. So there are plenty of animals that avoid sunlight or have fangs or drink blood. But does any animal do all three of these things? I'd like to introduce you to the vampire bat. These creatures are nocturnal. They're much more active at night, and during the day, they prefer to spend their time inside dark caves, so not much sunlight for them. They might not have teeth the size of hippos, but if you look closely, wow. They have impressively sharp fangs, which they use to help them drink blood. And not only that, but look at their leathery dark wings. Kind of looks like a vampire's cape, right? And in some stories, vampires like these have the power to transform into an animal, specifically bats. So wait. Are vampire bats true vampires? Well, I wouldn't go that far. Story vampires may be able to transform into bats, but vampire bats can't transform into people. And vampire bats aren't obsessed with chasing down humans to drink their blood. They drink the blood of cows and horses, mostly. Still, you gotta say, as far as animals go, the vampire bat is probably more like a vampire than any other creature. So in summary, no, vampires aren't real. Not the human ones in stories anyway. However, many animals do have traits we associate with fictional vampires, such as having fangs, drinking blood, and hiding from sunlight. Some of these animals even reminded scientists of vampire stories so much that scientists named them after vampires, like the vampire squid, the vampire moth, and, of course, vampire bats. But they're still not vampires. Not really. Still, dramatic animals like these can give writers and storytellers ideas for incredible fantastical monsters like vampires, dragons, werewolves, and so many others we see in our favorite scary stories. The animal kingdom is wild. It's full of so many bizarre and beautiful

creatures. No wonder they've inspired humans to tell creepy and wacky and wild tales for years and years. Maybe you'll invent a fantastical creature based on your favorite animals. That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Alfredo, for asking it.