

Informational Reading Comprehension

Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

Baobab, Tree of Life



- 1 An elephant lumbers across African grassland as dust rises up from each of her steps. She finds a giant tree and works to pierce its thick bark with her tusks. She is prying and poking to get at the water the tree often stores inside. This is no ordinary tree but a baobab, a tree that looms large in size and importance for both the animals and people of Africa.
- 2 The baobab's astonishing appearance alone proves it is special. It can grow up to 60 feet high and 30 feet wide, soaring above most other life in the dry savannah. The baobab has a wide barrel-like trunk topped with shorter, twisted branches. It only grows leaves for two short periods, giving the branches the appearance of **gnarled** roots for most of the year. In fact, some African legends say that a god, angry at the baobab, decided to uproot and replant it upside down.
- 3 This remarkable tree survives dry conditions and is found in many regions of Africa. Its roots spread out up to a hundred feet away to gather needed water. The adaptable sponge-like bark contracts in dry months and expands in wet ones. Baobab trees serve as a source of water, food, and a safe home for a variety of animals. In particular, the white-backed vulture, with a wingspan of about seven feet, nests high in the baobab's branches. The great bird only nests once a year, laying just one egg. The tall, strong baobab provides the ideal site for several months of safety for the mother and baby vulture.
- 4 For centuries, the baobab has also been essential to the people in various parts of Africa, many of whom call it the "Tree of Life." The baobab's immense trunk is hollow, creating a large circular chamber at the center. Baobab chambers have been used as shelters, prisons, and animal stables. The tree's spinach-like leaves can be eaten, and people use them for both food and medicine. The fruit provides a citrus-like refreshment. People strip off the fibrous bark to make rope, cloth, roofing, and paper. Unlike most other trees, the baobab can endure this practice, regenerating its bark and continuing to grow.
- 5 Perhaps this is one reason baobabs have such incredible **longevity**. Some have even been known to live for over 2,000 years! These amazing survivors continue to provide valuable resources across 32 countries in Africa.



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Answer the following questions about “Baobab, Tree of Life.”

1. What is a central idea of the passage?

- a. The baobab tree can survive for thousands of years.
- b. The baobab tree is home to the white-backed vulture.
- c. The baobab tree is important for both animals and people in Africa.
- d. The baobab tree is used as a water source for animals like the elephant.

2. What idea(s) from the passage do the elephant’s actions in paragraph 1 help support? Check all that apply.

- ☐ The baobab absorbs water.
- ☐ The baobab provides a safe place to stay.
- ☐ The baobab gives life to animals.
- ☐ The baobab trunk is used for shelter.
- ☐ The baobab lives for thousands of years.

3a. Which paragraph is best illustrated by the image?

3b. How does the image help readers better understand that paragraph?

4. What other word from paragraph 2 most closely means the same thing as *gnarled*?

- a. angry
- b. soaring
- c. special
- d. twisted

5. In paragraph 2, how does the phrase “soaring above” help explain baobabs?

- a. It emphasizes the tree’s height.
- b. It highlights the size of their leaves.
- c. It shows why birds nest in their branches.
- d. It proves that rope is needed to climb them.

6. What does the word *longevity* mean in paragraph 5?

- a. appearance
- b. length of life
- c. popularity
- d. height

7. What are some reasons people call the baobab the “Tree of Life”? Provide examples from the text to support your answer.

