

Activity 8

Giant Panda Vital Statistics

Objective & Overview:

Before visiting the Zoo's pandas, students will gain a better appreciation of panda size and diet by seeing numbers "come to life."

Teacher Background Information:

Here are some facts from which you can illustrate panda dimensions for your students:

- an adult giant panda grows up to six feet long
- male giant pandas weigh up to 250 pounds (females to 220)
- a newborn giant panda is the size of a stick of butter
- giant panda adults eat up to 40 pounds of bamboo per day
- humans eat, on average, five pounds of food per day.

How long from birth until a giant panda cub reaches adult size?

Cubs do not open their eyes until one-and-a-half to two months old and cannot move around on their own for three months. They grow slowly, not attaining adult weight and size for two to four years.

Materials:

- a scale for weighing students
- masking tape
- a stick of butter
- something that weighs five pounds (such as a small barbell or food items)

Directions:

1. Mention to the class that you will soon visit the National Zoo's giant pandas but that first you want them to understand about more about weights and measures relating to these animals.
2. Discuss all of the following points, using concrete objects to illustrate them to your students:

An adult giant panda grow up to six feet long:

Lie down on the floor and have a student measure you, marking in pencil the beginning and end points. Place a straight piece of masking tape from point to point. Next to your length tape, place the panda's six-foot measurement so students can compare.

Male giant pandas weigh up to 250 pounds (females to 220):

Select a student and have her or him step on the scale. Draw the weight on the board. Calculate how many "Sallys" or "Tyrones" it takes to reach 250 or 220 pounds. Illustrate that number of students on the board.

A newborn giant panda is the size of a stick of butter:

After exploring the weight of adult pandas, contrast this by showing the class a stick of butter (preferably still in its wrapper!) and telling students that this is the size of a newborn panda (four to six ounces). Explain how long it takes for a baby panda to reach adult size (see Teacher Background Information). You can also explain that giant panda babies are, proportionately, the second

smallest mammal newborns, after marsupials (kangaroos, possums, and their kin).

Humans eat, on average, five pounds of food per day:

Choose the way you'd best like to represent the five pounds. One way would be to show a five-pound barbell and have students heft it briefly. Or you could bring in five pounds of food, calculating it from the weights marked on the containers.

Adult giant pandas eat up to 40 pounds per day of bamboo:

On the board, you can draw eight representations of the five-pound weight you just showed your students.

3. Discuss with your students whether or not any of these weights or measures surprised them. Can they imagine what it's like to eat 40 pounds of food per day?