

## In Focus 1 - Speed Reading Unit 10

### Talking to Animals

Talking to animals has always interested humans. While we once thought only humans could understand complex ideas, we've learned that animals, too, have their own ways of sharing messages. One famous animal that has learned to "talk" with people is Kanzi.

Kanzi is a bonobo, a type of ape, who has become famous for his ability to have a conversation with humans in a very special way. Kanzi uses a keyboard with shapes, known as lexigrams, to "talk" to people. This started when he was just a baby. While his mother, Matata, was being taught to use the keyboard but wasn't successful, Kanzi, who was often playing next to his mother, picked up the skill on his own. Over time, more and more shapes were added for Kanzi to use, increasing from 6 to eventually 348. These shapes cover everything from common objects like "drink" and "key" to activities such as "eat" and "walk," and even difficult ideas like "now" and "bad".

An interesting story about Kanzi shows his understanding and use of these shapes. On an outing, he used the shape for "marshmallows" and "fire," and then, given marshmallows, he actually made a fire and toasted the marshmallows. This and many other examples show that Kanzi not only understands shapes but can also apply them to real-world tasks.

Kanzi's abilities go beyond just using shapes. He can understand up to 3,000 spoken English words. People test his understanding by saying a word, and Kanzi responds by pointing to the appropriate shape on his keyboard. This shows not just that he remembers shapes, but that he has a deeper understanding of language and its use in the real world. Kanzi's story is not just about learning to "talk" in a human-like way. It challenges our understanding of language, communication, and the thinking of animals. It opens up new possibilities for how we deal with and understand the animal world.

The latest move in animal communication involves sperm whales and artificial intelligence (AI). Sperm whales make deep sounds to talk to each other across great distances in the sea. Scientists are now using AI to try to understand these sounds. The hope is to understand the whales' language, opening up new ways to understand the lives of these animals.

Learning to understand animals is more than just an interesting idea. It's about building a deeper connection and understanding of all animals. By understanding animal languages, perhaps we can protect them better and learn from their understanding of the world. Through efforts like Kanzi's and using AI to understand the meaning of whale sounds, we're taking steps toward closing the gap between human and animal communication.

If we are successful one day in being able to talk with sperm whales, I wonder what we should say to them. Perhaps the first thing we should say is sorry for all the bad things we have done to them when we used oil from their bodies to make things like candles, soap, and lipstick.

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When you have finished, write your time in the box.

Now, go to the next page and answer the questions. **Do NOT look back at the text.**

**Now, let's test your understanding of the text with some questions.**

1. What animal is Kanzi?
  - A) A dolphin
  - B) An elephant
  - C) A bonobo
  - D) A parrot
  
2. How does Kanzi communicate with humans?
  - A) Using sign language
  - B) Through a keyboard with lexigrams
  - C) By making sounds
  - D) Writing words
  
3. At what age did Kanzi start using the keyboard?
  - A) As an adult
  - B) As a teenager
  - C) It is not specified.
  - D) As a baby
  
4. How many shapes (lexigrams) can Kanzi use?
  - A) About 150
  - B) About 250
  - C) About 350
  - D) About 450
  
5. What activity did Kanzi perform that showed his understanding of lexigrams?
  - A) Playing a musical instrument
  - B) Toasting marshmallows
  - C) Building a shelter
  - D) Drawing a map
  
6. How many spoken English words can Kanzi understand?
  - A) 1,000
  - B) 2,000
  - C) 3,000
  - D) 4,000
  
7. What new approach is being used to understand sperm whale communication?
  - A) Underwater cameras
  - B) Classic linguistics
  - C) Direct interaction
  - D) Artificial intelligence (AI)
  
8. What does the use of AI with sperm whales aim to decode?
  - A) Their migration patterns
  - B) Their family structures
  - C) Their language
  - D) Their diet
  
9. What is the ultimate goal of understanding animal communication?
  - A) To build a deeper connection and understanding
  - B) To improve human language skills
  - C) To train animals for entertainment
  - D) To dominate animal species
  
10. What might humans apologize for to sperm whales?
  - A) Hunting them for oil
  - B) Ocean pollution
  - C) Climate change
  - D) Destroying their habitat