



Chapter Twelve: Mbogo

*Broad in the head,
Flat in the nose,
Curved in the horn,
Split in the toes.*

*We snort and stamp,
And you'd better take heed:
That's, oh, more than a bluff –
We also stampede.*

Panic spread among the meerkats. Most of them rushed up from the tunnels, leaving Shuffle with Curl and Fara.

Sheena followed, quickly. When she reached the open space in front of the mound, she realised why the meerkats were terrified. Forty or more very large, black animals with enormous thick horns – so curved that they almost curled round on themselves – were moving steadily towards the mound from the direction of the slope, cropping the patchy ground-cover as they came. They looked very heavy. The ground they were feeding on must lie above the chamber with Shuffle in it, and it was their weight that had caused the sand to fall from the roof. If they continued to drift towards the main mound, the tunnels and chambers beneath would collapse. Their arrival could mean the end of much of the Deepden system, in fact. If Nyegere had been a natural disaster,

this was more like the end of the world. Something must be done.

Sheena did it. She knew the meerkats themselves would not be capable of halting this ponderous advance, no matter how much jumping and hissing they did. She had only a moment to form a Plan to deal with this Problem. In an instant she selected a target and ran towards it.

She took a grave risk. She had to weave in and out of thick legs like black tree-trunks, and great hooves that were being lifted in no particular order and set down again heavily in the earth. If she had slipped or been knocked off balance by a shifting hoof, she could well have been badly injured.

As she ran among the legs she tried to keep sight of her target. It was the largest of the animals, a great broad-shouldered beast with glaring eyes and a horrible fat, flat, wet nose dribbling slime onto the ground. She had judged it to be the leader of the herd. Two white birds were sitting close together on its head.

She broke out into the space to one side of the animal. Without pausing she jumped up onto its head, causing the birds to flap away in panic. She dug in her claws high up on the animal's bony skull and between its thick, curved horns. Once she was there, it could not see her, no matter how hard it swivelled its dark eyes upwards. All it knew was that its two passengers had suddenly left and another creature, a strange black-and-white one, had flown up from the ground to replace them, and was causing it pain.

Sheena clenched her claws slightly so that they dug a little further in. She was relying on the animal being as slow-witted as it appeared to be. It began to turn in a cumbersome circle, on the spot, as if looking for the thing that was tormenting it. Sheena waited until it was facing back towards the slope and away from

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Deepden. Then she called out, 'Up here, bone-brain!'

She freed her claws and gave a little jump down onto the animal's long snout, then beeped its horn – well not its horn exactly, rather its nasty wet nose. She beeped it by reaching forward with a front paw and squeezing it hard, once, twice, making sure her claws went far enough in to cause further pain.

'Beep! Beep!' she said, to add insult to injury. Then she squeezed it once more, much harder, to add injury to insult.



The animal shook its head violently, but she was expecting that and hung on tightly. It then did something else she expected

it to do. It set off to chase this out-of-focus black-and-white animal now directly in front of its eyes, trying to run it down and trample it. That was the only way it knew how to deal with things that threatened it. It did not seem to realise that it was carrying the cause of the pain with it as it ran: all it could do was charge forward in blind anger, snorting out clouds of steamy breath as it went – ‘Hrrummff! Hrrummff!’

Sheena had guessed correctly. This *was* the herd leader. Where it went, the others followed. She could see them on either side, turning in the same direction and beginning to move. They did so slowly, however, as if reluctant to give up grazing: they did not seem to be aware that anything unusual was happening. Sheena was relieved. She had not wanted to start a thunderous stampede that might have brought about the very thing she was trying to avoid – wholesale collapse of the tunnels beneath.

The great creature continued to lumber heavily in a straight line away from the mounds. Whenever it showed signs of slowing down, she reached forward again with her claws.

‘Beep! Beep!’

She even found she could steer it: a little shift of her body to the left, for instance, and a beep on that side of its nose, turned its head slightly in that direction...and its clumsy body followed. She was beginning to enjoy herself.

‘Beep! Beep!’ went Sheena.

‘Hrrummff! Hrrummff!’ went the animal.

She made sure it kept going until it was well away from Deepden – half-way down the slope, in fact, and off to one side. The other animals had followed steadily, but were now some way behind.

As her strange mount passed under a low branch Sheena released her grip on its bony muzzle and sprang upwards, landing

safely on the branch. The animal snorted in surprise, ‘Hrrummff!’, and stopped suddenly. The black-and-white creature it thought it was chasing had suddenly disappeared. The pain had, too. So it bent its head and began grazing once more, as if it had never moved from the spot where Sheena had hi-jumped it.

‘Long horns, short memory!’ Sheena said to herself, scornfully.

Almost immediately the two white birds, who must have been flying behind all this while, settled once more on the animal’s broad head. Life, for him, was back to normal. All Sheena had to do was wait until he had moved away from the foot of the tree, then jump down and run back towards Deepden – taking care to go round instead of through the herd, who were now, also, grazing again as if nothing had happened.

She could not resist, however, calling out, ‘Beep! Beep!’ once more, over her shoulder.

She passed quite close to the last animal in the herd, a little way beyond the others. It looked up, briefly, and made the only noise she had heard from any of them, this time rather absent-mindedly:

‘Hrrummff!’

All the way through this wild event Sheena had been trying to remember the name of these creatures. Now she thought she knew. Hrrummffaloes.

***The Meerkat Wars* by H.S. Toshack.....Chapter Twelve, *Mbogo* - Study Tasks**

Page by page (understanding and interpreting texts):

| Page | Task | Suggested responses, teaching notes |
|------|--|---|
| 107 | Are these large black animals attacking Deepden? | No. They are drifting towards it accidentally, as they feed. |
| 108 | a) Find three separate words, describing their movement, that also suggest their great weight and clumsiness. b) List the physical features that emphasise the animals' size. | a) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ponderous • Heavily • Cumbersome <i>[Further teaching opportunity: Massive. This could appear in both lists, since although we often use it to describe size, it also implies that something has great 'mass' (weight). Question: Can we accurately describe a hot air balloon as being 'massive'?]</i> b) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thick legs • Great hooves • Broad shoulders • Massive horns |
| 109 | How does Sheena insult the animal, twice? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She cheekily calls out, 'Beep! Beep!' as if she is driving a car with an old-fashioned horn. • She calls it 'bone-brain'. |
| 110 | Why do the other animals follow the herd leader? a) Because they have had enough to eat b) Because they realise something strange is happening c) Because they always follow their leader d) Because it is easier to go down the slope | c) Because they always follow their leader. |
| 111 | a) What does Sheena's phrase, 'Long horns, short memory' suggest about how she views these animals' mental abilities? b) What other details on this page reinforce her impression? | a) She thinks they are not very smart. b) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The animal she passes close to makes a sound 'absent-mindedly', as if it is not really aware of what is going on around it. • The sound it makes – 'Hrrummff!' – seems to be the only one these animals are capable of making. • The whole herd have immediately taken up grazing again 'as if nothing had happened'. |

Whole chapter (other activities):

| Focus | Task | Suggested responses; additional teaching opportunities; notes |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking • Listening and responding • Group discussion, interaction | <p>Have a short conversation with a partner or partners in which the only word any of you uses is 'Hrrumff'. Try to suggest what you are saying by the way you speak the word (e.g. in an enquiring tone, or a commanding one) and your accompanying gestures and facial expressions.</p> <p>Then discuss (in normal language) how we can sometimes do without words, and sometimes not.</p> | <p>Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering a book, showing something in it and explaining. • Suggesting that you do something together (go outside to play a game, go to the cinema together this evening). |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word structure and spelling | <p>How has the author created the word 'hi-jumped' (Page 111)?</p> | <p>By taking the word 'hi-jacked' and changing it (but using the same structure) so that it fits this particular situation.</p> <p><i>[Further teaching opportunity: Such words are called 'nonce-words', words designed 'for the nonce' – for use once only. They are usually meant to be humorous.]</i></p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word structure and spelling | <p>'Hi-jumped' (above) is a hyphenated word.</p> <p>a) How many other hyphenated words can you find in this chapter?</p> <p>b) When do we join words by means of a hyphen?</p> <p>c) Can you find a single word on Page 100 that may once have been two words joined by a hyphen?</p> <p>d) Which of the hyphenated words you found in answer to a) is often written as a single word without the hyphen?</p> | <p>a) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Tree-trunks• Broad-shouldered• Black-and-white• Slow-witted• Out-of-focus• Half-way• Absent-mindedly</p> <p>b) When we create a 'compound' word (by joining two other words). We create such words when the two or more separate words are frequently used together. Over time, the hyphen may disappear, and we are then left with a single word. ('Wholesale' was once usually written 'whole-sale'; 'tree-trunk' may in time become 'treetrunk'). Nowadays, words are often joined together directly, without passing through the 'hyphenated' stage ('toolbar', 'hyperlink').</p> <p>c) Halfway</p> <p>d) <i>[Further teaching opportunity: Hyphenation rules. There are no hard-and-fast rules governing the way words are hyphenated. Hyphenation is a good example of the way language changes and develops by a natural process rather than by regulation.]</i></p> |

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|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with, respond to texts | <p>How important is it, in a story that is mainly serious, to have episodes which are ‘fun’, like this one? Think of some serious stories you have read that from time to time have their mood lightened in this way.</p> | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating and shaping texts Text structure and organisation | <p>Consider the way the two sounds made by Sheena and the hrrummffalo (‘Beep! Beep!’ and ‘Hrrummff! Hrrummff’) are spaced out across Pages 109 and 100, and seem at times to answer each other.</p> <p>a) What effect does that have? b) Write a description of a short incident in which sounds seem to answer each other.</p> | <p>a) It helps hold the incident together, and adds to its comic effect. b) Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The creaking of a door inside an empty (and spooky) house, and the hooting of an owl outside. A tug boat tooting as it goes up a river estuary, followed by squawking seagulls. The beeping of a heart monitor in a hospital bedroom, and the sounds of children playing outside. |

The riddle:

| Page | Task | Suggested responses, teaching notes |
|------|---|--|
| 107 | Write down the answer to the riddle, and explain how its different parts (and what happens in the chapter) have helped you guess its meaning. | Buffalo. Most of the riddle is straightforward description; but ‘buffalo’, of course, is ‘more than’ (has more letters than) ‘a bluff’, and they include the sound ‘oh’ from the riddle’s second-to-last line. |

Possibly new vocabulary:

ponderous
swivelled
tormenting
lumber

Questions on the illustrations:

| Page | Task | Suggested responses, teaching notes |
|------|---|--|
| 109 | What does the way the illustrator has drawn the buffalo's eyes suggest that it is struggling to do? | See Sheena clearly: she is described in the story as 'out-of-focus'. |

Personal writing:

| Task | Teaching support |
|---|---|
| Write about the different ways in which we can control animals and also other people (both people we know and people in general). Which ways work best? | <p>We could begin by brain-storming, but at an early point students need to be set free to offer their own thoughts and provide their own examples.</p> <p>Outline list:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical means• Rules and laws• Punishment• Reward• Promises• Training• Persuasion• Advice and guidance• Encouragement• Example |

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