

# Gorilla Olympics



***Gorillas are social animals with incredible physical and behavioral adaptations for survival. Through the Gorilla Olympics, you and your household will engage in challenges that explore these adaptations and determine who is the “best adapted” gorilla!***

**Age:** Families with children ages 5-12

## **Gather your Gear**

- Masking tape
- Timer
- Blankets
- Pillows
- Beads
- Coins
- Paper
- Writing utensils
- Hamper/basket/plastic tub

## **Get Ready**

***Gorilla adaptations include both physical adaptations (physiological features that they are born with) and behavioral adaptations (things they learn to do as they grow into adulthood). An adaptation is something that helps an animal survive in its habitat.***

Gorillas are herbivores, eating a wide variety of fruit, leaves, some roots, and bark as they roam through their forest habitats. Their diet is important not only in providing gorillas food, but also in giving gorillas the ability to spread undigested seeds from the plants they consume to new parts of their range. The seeds, pre-fertilized by the poop in which it was deposited, then grow into new plants which will feed not only future gorillas, but other herbivorous species with which they share a habitat.

To assist in foraging, which gorillas will do for 50-60% of the day, climbing, and other daily activities, gorillas have specialized feet equipped with opposable thumbs. These opposable thumbs allow their feet to be incredibly dexterous, useful tools.

As gorillas forage through their home range, they use a method of movement called “knuckle-walking.” This involves walking on flat back feet, and on the knuckles of their front feet/hands. They can move bipedally (upright on their back feet) for short distances as well, but knuckle-walking is their primary form of movement.

At the end of each day, gorillas spend time creating a new nest to sleep in. Using grasses and branches, they gather soft materials to create a place to sleep overnight. Females and

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their offspring will share a nest while other individuals build their own. Nests may be built on the ground or up in trees to be out of the way of predators.

## Do the Activity

Within your household, either create teams, or compete against each other as individuals. Create a score sheet to track points for each team/competitor. You will keep track of points through each challenge, and the team or individual with the most cumulative points wins the title of best adapted gorilla.

### Challenge 1: Knuckle Walking Relay

Materials: Masking tape, long stretch of space (i.e.: hallway)

Set-up: Place one piece of masking tape at one end of the long stretch of space, and one piece at the opposite end to form your relay track. Line participants up on one side of the tape in teams (for households of more than two; in odd-numbered households, one player will be a swing player and compete on both teams, or one member of the smaller team will run the course twice).

- Starting at one end of the track, competitors will knuckle-walk down the track and then back to the starting line.
- If playing in teams, once the first player has returned, they may tag out with the next team member, who will then knuckle-walk down the track and then back to the starting line.
- The team or competitor who finishes the relay first wins the point. (If otherwise completing challenges as individuals, each member of the winning team gets a point.)

Alternate instructions if competing as individuals in a more-than-two-person household:

- Two competitors compete in the knuckle-walking relay.
- The winner then steps to the side, while two other competitors complete the relay.
- The winners then compete against each other.
- Whoever wins the final relay, gets the point for this challenge.

### Challenge 2: Nest Builder Extraordinaire

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Materials: blankets, pillows, towels, old clothes, stuffed animals, old boxes (enough things for two players to build a nest at the same time), timer

Set-up: Distribute the items into two, relatively equal piles, and set a timer for 60 seconds.

- With the timer set to 60 seconds, have two players prepare to build their nest for the night. Their goal is to build a nest that is large enough for them to comfortably lie down in. It should have clear edges, and cushion in the middle.
- When the timer starts, the players will build their nests. When the timer stops, they must step away.
- The player keeping track of the time will judge both nests. The nest that is the closest to an appropriate size for the builder, has evident cushion in the middle for the builder to rest on, and has clearly-defined edges, wins the point for this challenge.
- If playing in teams, allow all players to compete, and award points for the winning nests to the team to which the nest-builder belongs.

## Challenge 3: Foot Forage Frenzy

Materials: writing utensils, coins, paper, beads, other small items.

Set-up: Using the taped off area for the knuckle walking relay, scatter the area with various items that are small enough and light enough to be picked up by toes. Place one basket at each end of the taped area and line players up on each end (one team on each side).

- One player will start on one end of the taped-off area, and one player will begin at the other end.
- On "Go," the two players will begin removing items from the course with only their feet. In order to fully remove an item, it must be placed in the basket of the player outside of the taped-off area.
- When all items have been removed from the course, each player will count the number of items in their basket. The player with the highest number of items, wins!

## Recap

*Have a conversation about what you saw/did and questions your child may have.*

Gorillas are specially adapted to survive in their rainforest habitats. What are some of the adaptations, physical or behavioral, that we explored today? How do these adaptations support gorillas in surviving in their natural habitat? Which adaptation challenge did you find most challenging? What would have helped you complete that challenge more easily?

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## Relate

### *Create connections to the idea through activities.*

How are gorillas and humans similar and different? Do we have any of the same adaptations as gorillas?

Imagine that you are a gorilla who has to forage for food, knuckle walk to get around, and nest build at the end of each day. How difficult or easy was each activity? Gorillas live in family groups, called troops. The one male silverback protects the group and acts as the leader. He is joined by a number of females and their offspring. Think about your family and the role that each person plays. How do you support each other?

### **It takes a team.... join ours**

Help us save species by joining the “Zoo Conservation Corps” and raise awareness about wild animals, their habitats and why conserving both is so important.

Gorillas and humans are genetically very similar, but our relationship doesn’t stop there. A critical component of cell phones and other small electronics is a substance called coltan. One of the few places in the world where coltan is found is the forests of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo—right in the middle of gorilla habitat. As a result of mining for coltan, critical habitat has been destroyed and gorillas have been displaced or even killed by poachers. Recycling old cell phones helps reduce the demand for coltan and protects gorilla habitat in Africa. Gorillas are on the line. Join us to answer the call to help save gorillas in the wild! Get involved: <https://zooatlanta.org/conservation-action/gorillas-on-the-line/>

If your family members are on social media, post to show what you have learned, and use the hashtag #OnlyZooATL so that we can see all your great work!

### **Want to know more....**

To learn more about the gorilla species calling Zoo Atlanta home, visit:

<https://zooatlanta.org/animal/western-lowland-gorilla/>

To learn more Ivan and other individual gorillas who once called Zoo Atlanta home, visit:

<https://zooatlanta.org/animal-legend/ivan/> & <https://zooatlanta.org/animal-legend/willie-b/>

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