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11-year-old "hero" speaks up for endangered gorillas

By Dara Elasfar, Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.02.19

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Image 1. Addy Barrett of Germantown, Maryland, watches a gorilla with her mom after a visit with Meredith Bastian, curator of primates at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. Addy, who's 11, recently won the Gloria Barron Prize for her efforts to raise awareness of threats to gorillas. Photo by: Bill O'Leary/The Washington Post

When Meredith Bastian was 8 years old, she went to the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. She wanted to get help with a school project. She interviewed the curator of primates at the time and asked her about wild gorillas. Fast-forward 34 years, and Bastian is the curator of primates at the zoo. This summer she talked to a girl who shares her passion for the primates.

"What is the difference between a gorilla in the zoo and a gorilla in the wild?" asked Addy Barrett. She is an 11-year-old who raises money to save gorillas.

There isn't much of a difference between an ape in the wild and an ape in the zoo, Bastian said. Every animal has a personality, just like every human does. They can be shy, friendly, playful or aggressive.

Addy is a regular visitor to the zoo. She never gets tired of watching the gorillas interact. She tugged her mom's shirt with excitement when 1-year-old Moke was chased around the outdoor

enclosure.

"It wasn't until I read a book about gorillas that I really fell in love with how smart they are and how they relate to us," Addy told Bastian while sitting in front of the zoo's Great Ape House. "I learned they were being poached and killed for reasons that I felt were unnecessary. I needed to do something."

Addy is now a sixth-grader at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School in Germantown, Maryland. She is working to save her favorite animal species. She has sold T-shirts and homemade cookies for the cause, and she hosts an annual Gorilla Gala. Addy was recently named a winner of the 2019 Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes for her work to raise \$7,000 for conservation groups such as the Ellen Fund and the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International.



Addy asked Bastian what challenges wild gorillas face that some people may not be aware of. Bastian said that it is a combination of habitat loss, climate change, poaching and spread of disease such as the Ebola virus. But there is also the problem of mining. Coltan is a mineral that is used to make cellphones. It is mined mostly in Congo in Central Africa. These mines destroy gorilla habitats and worsen living conditions.

"One of the strongest messages you can send to people is to recycle their cellphones," Bastian told Addy.

Habitat loss is one of the reasons Addy decided to start the Gorilla Heroes project last year. She has held fundraisers, bake sales and social media challenges in hopes of starting a conversation on the threats to gorillas. The animals, which are native to Central Africa, are critically endangered. According to the World Wildlife Fund, there are fewer than 900 mountain gorillas and about 100,000 Western lowland gorillas in the world.

Addy hopes to get close to a gorilla in the wild — something Bastian did for 10 years as a young professional. Typically a person needs to be at least 15 years old to trek to where the gorillas live, so for now Addy is sticking to raising awareness.

Bastian offered words of advice for Addy's future visit: Never look at a gorilla in the eye because they take that as a threat.

"They're not going to hurt you," Bastian said. "You just need to be confident about that and have your body language tell them 'yes, this is your forest, not mine.'"

Quiz

1 Read the list of sentences from the article.

1. She has sold T-shirts and homemade cookies for the cause, and she hosts an annual Gorilla Gala.

- 1. Habitat loss is one of the reasons Addy decided to start the Gorilla Heroes project last year.*
- 2. She has held fundraisers, bake sales and social media challenges in hopes of starting a conversation on the threats to gorillas.*
- 3. Addy was recently named a winner of the 2019 Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes for her work to raise \$7,000 for conservation groups such as the Ellen Fund and the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International.*

What central idea do these details support?

- (A) Addy has been having lots of fun helping to save gorillas.
- (B) Addy has been raising money so she can visit gorillas in the wild.
- (C) Addy has been doing many different activities to win a prize.
- (D) Addy has been working hard to raise money to save the gorillas.

2 Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?

- (A) Addy is now a sixth-grader at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School in Germantown, Maryland.
- (B) Addy asked Bastian what challenges wild gorillas face that some people may not be aware of.
- (C) According to the World Wildlife Fund, there are fewer than 900 mountain gorillas and about 100,000 Western lowland gorillas in the world.
- (D) Bastian offered words of advice for Addy's future visit: Never look at a gorilla in the eye because they take that as a threat.

3 Read the selection from the article.

Addy is a regular visitor to the zoo. She never gets tired of watching the gorillas interact. She tugged her mom's shirt with excitement when 1-year-old Moke was chased around the outdoor enclosure.

How does this selection contribute to the article's main idea?

- (A) It shows a reason why Addy became interested in gorillas.
- (B) It explains a problem gorillas in the zoo experience.
- (C) It describes the type of enclosure gorillas live in at the zoo.
- (D) It illustrates some of the passion Addy feels about gorillas.

Read the sentence from the article.

"One of the strongest messages you can send to people is to recycle their cellphones," Bastian told Addy.

What does this sentence show that other sentences do not?

- (A) that Bastian gave Addy some advice
- (B) that Addy is talking to people about about threats to gorillas
- (C) that ordinary people can take action to help save gorillas
- (D) that cellphone use is a problem that affects gorillas