

# Owls

by Linda Vasquez



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There are about 200 kinds of owls around the world. Some of them are big. Some are small. The biggest owl in North America is the great gray owl. It can be almost three feet long. The smallest owl is probably the elf owl. It is about as heavy as a slice of bread.

Owls feed on small mammals, insects, birds, and snakes. They can catch an animal that flies, runs, or slithers. Some owls even catch fish. Most owls hunt at night.

## READ & RESPOND

Text Structure

**How are the great gray owl and the elf owl the same? How are they different?**

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# Hunting

There are a few reasons that owls hunt at night. They can see better at night than most other animals. They can also hear better. Their color makes them hard to see in the dark.

An owl may wait on a perch until it hears or sees a small animal. When an owl flies, it is silent. A small animal cannot hear the owl as it swoops down.



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## READ & RESPOND

Text Structure

**What does an owl do after it sees a small animal?**

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# Sight

Owls have very big eyes. This helps them see in the dark. Most birds have eyes on the sides of their heads, but owls have eyes in the front. They can see exactly how far away an animal is.

An owl cannot move its eyes. Instead, it moves its head. It can move its head to look backward, even while it is flying.

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## READ & RESPOND

Main Ideas and Details

**What are some unusual things about an owl's eyes?**

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# Hearing

If you look at an owl's face, you will see a circle of feathers around its eyes. These feathers send sounds into the owl's ears. It can hear sounds that people cannot.



Some owls' ears are at different places on each side of the head. They hear a sound in one ear a little sooner than in the other ear. This helps them know where an animal is. They use their ears the way we use our eyes!

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## READ & RESPOND

Text Structure

**Find two sentences that compare or contrast owls and people.**

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# Feeding

An owl's beak is sharp. Its claws are, too, and they are long and strong. When it catches an animal, the owl crushes it with its claws and tears at it with its beak.

It swallows the animal whole. Later, it spits up a pellet with the fur and bones that remain.

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## READ & RESPOND

Text Structure

**What does an owl do after it catches an animal?**

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# Owlets

Owls do not build their nests. They may live in an old nest that another bird made. They may live in holes in trees, in ditches, or on ledges of buildings.

Baby owls are called owlets. The eggs do not hatch at the same time, so the owlets in a family may be different sizes. Owlets get very hungry. If there are owlets near you, you might hear them squeak all night as they ask for food.



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## READ & RESPOND

Text Structure

**What causes the owlets to be different sizes?**

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# Who Gives a Hoot?

While the neighborhood dozes, owls are busy. You may have heard one hoot during the night. Or maybe you have heard an owl screech, or even whistle.

In the past, some people thought owls were very wise. Other people thought that they brought bad luck.

People today still find owls mysterious. But one thing we know for sure is that owls help get rid of pests.

## READ & RESPOND

Main Ideas and Details

**How do people feel about owls?**

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# Reread and Respond

- 1** Write in order the events that happen when an owl goes hunting.

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**Hint**

For clues, see pages 211 and 214.

- 2** Name two ways all owls are alike.

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**Hint**

For clues, reread the story.

- 3** What kinds of noises do owls make?

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**Hint**

For clues, see pages 215 and 216.