

The Wonderful World of

WHISKERS

by Lee Lamb

When you think about whiskers, you might picture the stubble your dad shaves off his face every morning. During hunting season, he may let his whiskers grow into a mustache or beard to keep his face warm or help him blend into the woods. Most mammals have whiskers on their brows, snouts and chins—and they serve purposes way beyond just keeping cheeks toasty.

NOT YOUR TYPICAL HAIRS

Called vibrissae (*vie-briss-ee*), whiskers are made of dead skin cells, just like regular hair. But they are usually longer, thicker and stiffer—and much more sensitive. Whiskers can feel the slightest air movement or the softest touch. They can help an animal sense the size, shape or presence of an object without actually seeing it. Nocturnal animals that are active at night and critters that live underground count on whiskers to help them find their way, catch prey and detect danger.

101 USES

Cats use their brow whiskers to measure whether they can squeeze through tight spaces. Hungry walrus

put their snout whiskers to work combing through ocean bottom sand for clams and snails. And elk? They have long whiskers that fan from above and below their lips and a halo of whiskers around their eyes. These likely help them be extra alert in tall grass and thick brush.

YOU'VE GOT WHISKERS WHERE?

Did you know that some animals have whiskers on other parts of their bodies, too?

Squirrels use whiskers on their feet to help land safely when jumping from tree to tree. A pocket gopher's tail whiskers can feel breezes blowing through underground tunnels, which helps pin down its location in the pitch black maze. And bats wiggle their bottom whiskers along rocks and trees, searching for comfy spots to roost.

CAN YOU FIND THESE WHISKERY WORDS?

See if you can find all eight words in the puzzle:

- Beard
- Brow
- Cell
- Cheek
- Hair
- Sense
- Stiff
- Tail

C	S	T	P	K	D	L	I	H	E
E	A	Q	T	E	A	Y	A	S	Z
L	I	A	T	E	P	I	N	D	C
L	I	D	Q	H	R	E	H	F	Q
B	V	J	R	C	S	B	B	Z	Y
N	R	D	K	A	S	F	O	G	F
Y	Y	O	P	X	E	X	C	E	K
V	H	E	W	B	G	B	Z	G	Q
N	R	Y	I	L	D	E	D	S	P
E	F	H	S	T	I	F	F	O	M