

# CHOMP!

by Lee Lamb

Remember when you lost your two front teeth in the first grade? Imagine what it would be like to have no front teeth on the top at all—ever! Not only would you smile goofy, but you'd have a hard time whistling and eating corn on the cob. Elk don't have any top front teeth, but it suits them just fine. Instead they have a hard, rubbery pad on the roof of their mouth. They rip grass by crushing it against the pad with their lower front teeth and swinging their head sideways to tear it.

## OH MY, WHAT BIG TEETH YOU HAVE!

Humans have three types of teeth for three different jobs: *incisors* (biting), *canines* (tearing) and *molars* (chewing). Wolves and mountain lions have teeth like ours, but with huge canines built for catching and killing their dinner. Elk have large molars that help grind grasses and shrubs into easy-to-digest pieces.

Beavers have extra-long incisors that never stop growing. Built for the tough work of gnawing through tree trunks, they're always wearing down, but they just keep on growing back. Armadillos have only one type of tooth, a mouthful of peg-like molars for munching crunchy insects. Snapping turtles have no teeth at all and gulp their food down whole.

## HOW OLD ARE YOU?

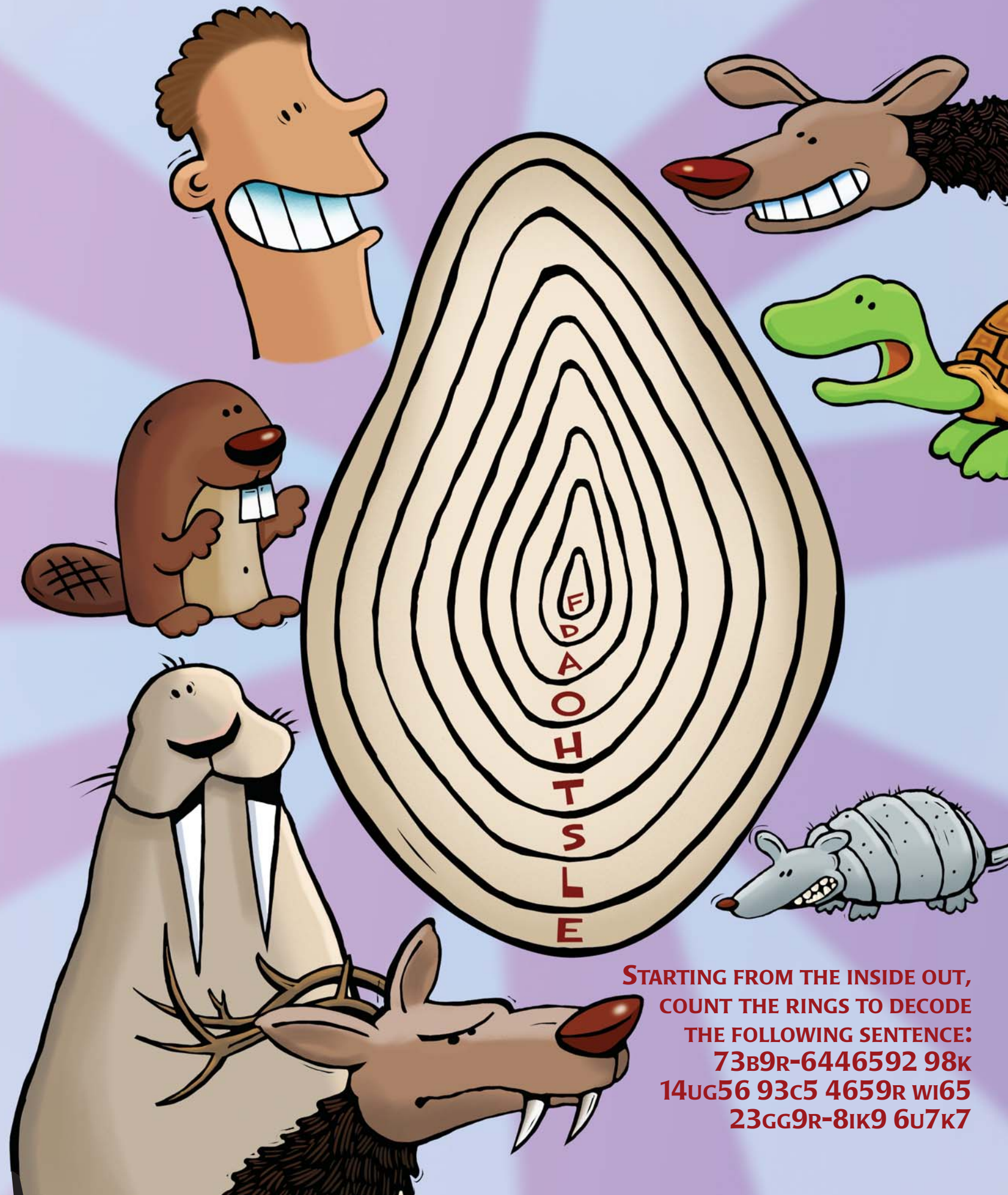
Did you know you can guess the age of an elk by looking at its teeth? During the first two years of an elk's life, its jawbone gets longer and it grows more teeth. After that, its molars darken and start showing wear from eating plants. Biologists can use tooth wear to estimate an animal's age.

A more exact method, called *cementum aging*, is conducted in a lab. By cutting a very thin slice from a tooth and putting it under a microscope, you can count the number of dark rings. Each ring represents one year, just like counting the rings in a tree.

## EN GARDE!

Elephants and walrus sport a pair of extra long ivory teeth called tusks that they use as both sword and shield in battle. Elephants also use their tusks to dig for water; walrus use theirs to uncover shellfish on the ocean floor.

Elk still have two rounded canine teeth, known as ivories. When an elk sneers and exposes its canines, it means business.



**STARTING FROM THE INSIDE OUT,  
COUNT THE RINGS TO DECODE  
THE FOLLOWING SENTENCE:  
73B9R-6446592 98K  
14UG56 93c5 4659R WI65  
23GG9R-8IK9 6U7K7**

