

Write your notes
about what you are
reading in this space.

Science Shorts - 7

What are traits?

It is easy to recognize an elephant. An elephant is very large and has a long trunk. A giraffe is easy to recognize too – by its long neck. An elephant's trunk and the giraffe's neck are examples of traits. Traits are characteristics that living things have. They help us to identify living things.

Scientists have divided living things into groups according to traits. All members of a group have certain traits that are the same. For example, all birds have feathers. All mammals have some hair. All giraffes have long necks. All elephants are large and have long trunks.

Organisms within a group may share certain traits, but no two are exactly alike. There are always individual differences. We call these differences individual traits.

Take the elephant for example. All elephants are large, but some are larger than others. All giraffes have long necks, but some giraffes have longer necks than others. All humans share certain traits. However, no two people are exactly alike – not even identical twins. There are always individual differences.

Individual differences enable us to identify different members of the same group. Think of your friends, for example. You know one from another by their individual traits. They include differences in size, hair type and coloring, skin coloring and the shape of their face.

Humans and frogs are alike in some ways. They both share certain traits. Both humans and frogs are living things, therefore they both carry out life processes such as eating, excreting and reproducing. Both humans and frogs are animals and both are vertebrates.

But humans and frogs are different from one another too – very different. We can tell humans from frogs by traits they do not share such as skin color, size and number of legs used to move. There are many other differences between frogs and humans. These examples indicated how important individual traits are in living things.

Complete each statement using a term or terms from the list below. Write your answers in the spaces provided.

group
traits
humans
living things

the same
individual traits
individual

plants
exactly
identified

1. The characteristics a living thing has are called _____ .
2. Living things are _____ by their traits.
3. Scientists group _____ according to their traits.
4. Members of a group have certain traits that are _____ .
5. No two living things are _____ the same.
6. Difference among individuals of the same group are called _____ .
7. Having a spinal cord, internal fertilization and embryo development are group traits of _____ .
8. Individual differences enable us to identify different members of the same _____ .
9. Having cell walls and making their own food are group traits of _____ .
10. Wrinkled skin or smooth skin are _____ traits of peas.

Match each term in Column A with its description in Column B. Write the correct letter in the space provided.

Column A

Column B

- | | | |
|-------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| _____ | 1. traits | a) group trait of birds |
| _____ | 2. feathers | b) individual human trait |
| _____ | 3. color of feathers | c) human group trait |
| _____ | 4. hair | d) characteristics |
| _____ | 5. hair texture | e) individual trait of birds |