

Exercise 4

Read the article below about a gorilla named Koko, and then complete the notes on the opposite page.



Gorillas have a word for it

Koko is the first gorilla to have been taught sign language (a way of communicating by using hands and fingers rather than speech). With a vocabulary of more than 1000 words, she is the first to prove we share a world with other intelligent beings who feel emotions, look forward to celebrations and also have a sense of humour.

The 30-year study of Koko has redefined science's concept of gorilla intelligence. According to some scientists, genetically there is only a 2% difference between gorillas and humans: we share the same blood type, have the same number of hairs per square inch and also the same temperament. But what had not been recognised by the scientific community was that gorillas have the ability to learn a language and have complex emotions.

Koko lives in the Santa Cruz mountains in North America, in a wooded spot overlooking a valley. She has her own home, with curtains, and a nest of blankets, which is her bed, in one corner. She has a barrel on which she likes to sit when 'talking' to humans – gorillas feel more secure when they can look down on others – while her toys are spread everywhere. In addition she has an outside enclosure where she spends her days when it is not raining.

It is her conversations with her teacher, Dr. Penny Patterson, that are inspiring. Penny explains: "The reality of my discovery is that our abilities as humans, our skills, sensibilities and emotions are very similar to the great apes. What we have learnt is that gorillas are more complex than we ever imagined."

When she began teaching Koko sign language, placing the little fingers of the one year old gorilla into the correct positions for 'drink', 'eat', 'more', and rewarding her with food, Dr. Patterson had no idea how quickly Koko would learn. "At first, it seemed Koko was using sign language as a tool to get something," says Patterson. "It became the kind of reward system that you could expect of a cat or a dog. But early in her training, she began to combine signs that made me think she was capable of more." Now Koko is so proficient in sign language that if she doesn't know a word she invents one. For example, she didn't know the word for 'ring', so she combined the signs for 'finger' and 'bracelet' to express it.

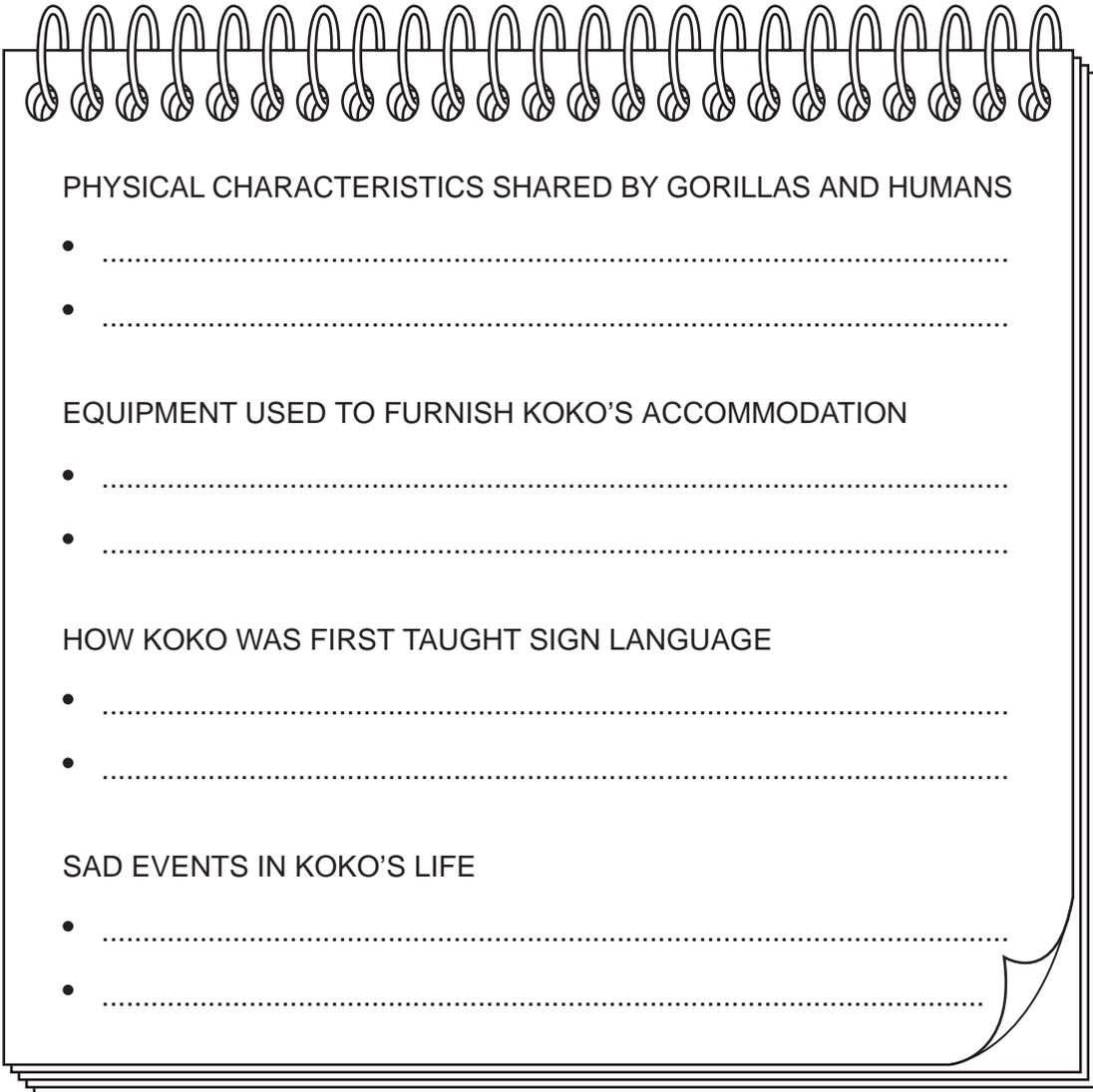
Dr. Patterson continues: "Koko loves babies and young people. And when she is asked what gorillas like best, she always says 'Gorilla love eat, good!'" One of Patterson's favourite stories demonstrates Koko's sense of humour. When a visitor asked her to show him something scary, she held up a mirror to his face!

When Patterson asked her what she would like for her 11th birthday, Koko signed that she wanted a cat. The story of Koko's cat enabled Patterson to learn more about her student: the cat was hit by a car and Patterson had to break the news to Koko, who signed "Cry, sad, frown". Then, once alone, Patterson heard Koko make the gorilla's distress call: a loud series of hoots.

From the age of three, Koko shared her accommodation with Michael who was intended as a mate. However, Michael died suddenly two years ago of a heart attack. "Koko went into a depression following Michael's death," says Patterson. "She would sit for hours with her head hung low looking upset."

Dr. Patterson asked her if she was looking forward to moving to Hawaii, where Patterson is raising money to build a gorilla refuge. Koko signed 'Yes', provided she could have curtains in her new home!

You are going to give a speech to a group about Koko the gorilla. Using the information in the article, write notes for your speech. Make **two** short notes under each heading.



PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS SHARED BY GORILLAS AND HUMANS

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EQUIPMENT USED TO FURNISH KOKO'S ACCOMMODATION

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HOW KOKO WAS FIRST TAUGHT SIGN LANGUAGE

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SAD EVENTS IN KOKO'S LIFE

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[Total: 8]