

Clever Creatures: Pigs

(An article to read & discuss with your child)

When we think about pigs, we usually visualise them happily rolling around in the mud, squealing and thinking about very little else.

It looks like great fun but probably wouldn't be on the list of criteria when we are considering what traits the planet's most intelligent creatures display.

But over the last decade, researchers have found more and more evidence to help them conclude pigs are actually pretty smart.



Pigcasso is a natural with the paintbrush

One of the first people to put forward the idea that pigs are actually pretty clever cookies was an ecologist named Meredith Root-Bernstein. She was at a zoo in Paris, looking at some Visayan warty pigs in their enclosure.

All of a sudden the endangered species which are native to the Philippines started doing something unusual.

One of the group picked up a piece of bark and started using it to dig in the dirt. Initially, that might not sound too impressive. But use of tools in such a way is something very few creatures can manage.



Visayan warty pigs can use tools to make nests.

Meredith remembers thinking that was pretty cool. "When I looked up tool use in pigs, there was nothing available."

A bit more research found that those particular pigs use pieces of wood or bark to build cosy nests for new piglets every six months.



A pig named Lulu saved her owner's life while the woman was having a heart attack. The pig heard the cries of pain, forced her way out of the yard, ran into the road and 'played dead' to stop the traffic. A driver stopped, the pig led him to the trailer, he heard the woman and called 911.

If that wasn't enough evidence of pig intelligence, the same species have also been witnessed investigating if an electric fence was activated or not.

Fernando Gutierrez, who works to protect the Visayan warty pigs, was the man who spotted this.

"As soon as they push and the rocks make contact, they would wait for the clicking sound," he explained.

"This noise means the wires are hot, and the pigs will back off; no sounds mean it is safe to investigate what's beyond the wire. They're smart little creatures."



As much as playing in the mud is clearly great fun, pigs can do an awful lot more.

As people have learned more about pigs we've started to realise they really are some of the most intelligent animals on the planet.

They have great memories, can sense how another pig is feeling and communicate superbly. It's thought they have more than 20 types of oinks, grunts and squeals.

The more we learn, the more amazing they appear to be. Some porkers have even demonstrated that they don't like to sweat like pigs by figuring out how to turn the heating system in a barn off and on as required.

And many people have been extremely grateful for pigs' brain power as it's helped saved their lives.

This included a pig named Priscilla who rescued a young boy from drowning and Lulu who raised the alarm after a woman had collapsed from a heart attack.

Clearly, they've made us reconsider which animals are the most intelligent and that they're definitely not just squeaking mud rollers!

This article could inspire you to find out even more about pigs! Search online with a parent or use the 20 Pig Facts sheet on the website.

Make a poster or factfile and email it to Mrs Arnold at sarnold379@c2kni.net. Include your favourite surprising facts.

You can do it on your own or do it with an adult, brother or sister!

