

Chameleons Are Cool

Written by Martin Jenkins
Illustrated by Sue Shields

Preface

Chameleons are lizards, and lizards are reptiles, like snakes, crocodiles, and tortoises. There are about 4,000 kinds of lizards altogether, including around 120 different chameleons. Just over half of all the types of chameleons come from Madagascar, a big island off the east coast of Africa. Most of the others live in mainland Africa.

Text	Supporting Facts and Opinions with Illustrations
<p>Some lizards eat bananas – chameleons don't. Some lizards walk upside down on the ceiling – chameleons can't. There's even a lizard that glides from tree to tree- a chameleon certainly wouldn't do that! But of all the different kinds of lizards, I still think chameleons are the best. Chameleons are cool.</p> <p>It's not that they're all that big. The biggest is only about the size of a small cat. It's called Oustalet's chameleon and it lives in Madagascar. They can be really, really small, though. The smallest one could balance happily on your little finger. It's called the Dwarf Brookesia, and it lives in Madagascar too.</p> <p>And I suppose you wouldn't exactly call many of them beautiful. Their skin is wrinkly and bumpy, and they've got big bulgy eyes, while lots of them have the most ridiculous. . .</p> <p>noses! (I think it's their noses I like best.)</p> <p>Their mouths are pretty odd, too. They turn down at the corners, which is why chameleons always look grumpy.</p> <p>Actually, they don't just look grumpy. They are grumpy. So if two chameleons bump into each other, things can get pretty lively. There's</p>	<p>Geckos' toes are as sticky as Velcro.</p> <p>The flying lizard glides on winglike flaps of skin.</p> <p>Iguanas don't just eat bananas. They love all sorts of fruit.</p> <p>Whatever their size, chameleons usually get sick and die if kept as pets. They're much better off in the wild.</p> <p>A chameleon will fight only with the same kind of chameleon as itself.</p>

lots of puffing and hissing – and sometimes, there’s a real fight. And that’s when chameleons do what they’re famous for – they change color.

Lots of people think chameleons change color to match their surroundings. They don’t! They change color when they’re angry, or when they’re too cold or too hot, or when they’re sick. And there are some sorts of chameleons that hardly change color at all.

As a rule, though, chameleons don’t bump into one another all that often. I suppose it wouldn’t be fair to call them lazy, but they certainly don’t move any more than they have to. And when they do, it’s almost always incredibly slowly. Sometimes they stop completely in midstep, as if they’ve forgotten what they’re supposed to be doing. But if you look closely, you’ll see that they’re actually carefully peering about.

Now, peering about is something chameleons are rather good at. That’s because their eyes can move separately from each other, unlike our eyes, which always move together. So while one eye is looking back over the chameleon’s shoulder, the other one is scanning the branches ahead. As soon as it spots something tasty, the chameleon fixes both eyes on its prey and begins to creep forward – even more slowly than usual. Then it opens its mouth just a crack, and . . .

Out shoots this amazingly long tongue with a sticky tip at the end, like a piece of well-chewed chewing gum.

thwap!

Then the tongue flies back, and there’s a lot of chomping and chewing, and perhaps a few bits of insect leg fluttering to the ground. And after that the chameleon just sits there for an hour or two, doing nothing at all, looking quite exhausted (and still grumpy) after all that hard work.

And there you have it. How could you possibly resist a pocket-sized, bad tempered, color-changing, swivel eyed, snail paced, long-tongued sharpshooter? If chameleons aren’t cool, then I don’t know what is!

A chameleon’s feet are shaped like pincers for holding onto branches tightly.

Most of a chameleon’s eye is covered in skin, like the rest of its body.

There’s a tiny peephole in the middle that the chameleon sees through.

Chameleons feed on all sorts of creepy crawlies. The big ones also eat small birds, mice, and even other chameleons.

Most lizards gulp their food down without chewing it, but chameleons grind everything up thoroughly!

Index

biggest chameleon	8
changing color.	17-19
chewing.	26-27
eyes.	10, 22-23
feet.	20
fighting.	16-17
food.	24
lizard.	3, 6
Madagascar.	3, 8, 9
mouth.	15, 23
moving.	20
nose.	12
smallest chameleon.	9
tongue.	25-26
where chameleons live.	3

Look up the passages to find out about
all these chameleon things.
Don't forget to look at both kinds
of words – this kind and this kind.