The aardvark looks as if it had been constructed by a mad scientist let loose in a warehouse where parts of various animals are kept. Its thin head ends in a pig-like snout. Its ears belong on a rabbit. You might expect to find its tail on a kangaroo. The toes on its front feet even have webbing between them, like a duck, to help it dig.

This unique animal, which lives in Africa, has a surprising way of leaving its underground burrow. The aardvark waits until it is completely dark. It stands without moving for a few minutes at the mouth of its burrow. Suddenly it leaps out, bounds several times, then stops abruptly and rises up on its hind legs. At this point, the aardvark listens carefully to determine whether any enemies, such as lions, leopards, hyenas, or people, are nearby. Sometimes, if the burrow is narrow, the aardvark will back out, sweeping its tail before it, in much the same way that we wave our arms in front of us if we are blindfolded.

Once the aardvark has left its burrow, it looks for its favorite food—termites. But the aardvark can’t get fast food service because the walls of the mounds where termites live are almost as hard as cement. It takes a lot of work for the aardvark to make an opening. It would be very hard for you to do this with your bare hands. Fortunately, the aardvark has sharp claws on its front paws to help it.

When the insects are exposed, the aardvark licks them up with its long tongue. This tongue is coated with saliva, so that termites stick to it and are easily swallowed. Sometimes the aardvark will even put its snout against the hole it has made and suck in termites like a vacuum cleaner. The aardvark has a huge appetite. A few hundred termites are about as filling for an aardvark as a tiny nibble of a Big Mac would be for you. After it eats its fill, it returns to its burrow to sleep all day. Aardvarks in zoos can’t get termites, so they learn to eat a diet of chopped meat, eggs, oatmeal, and milk, with worms and ants sprinkled on top like nuts on a sundae.
The Aardvark
Comprehension Questions

Identifying the main idea
1. What is the main idea of the story?
   a. The aardvark is an unusual animal.
   b. The aardvark eats many termites.
   c. The aardvark lives in a burrow.

Recalling a fact
2. Why do aardvarks have webbed feet?
   a. to help them swim
   b. to help them dig
   c. to help them eat

Getting meaning from the context
3. What does mouth mean in this story?
   a. the lips, teeth, and tongue
   b. an opening to a burrow
   c. saying words in an angry way

Making connections within the text
4. When is the aardvark most likely to look for food?
   a. in the early morning
   b. when it is in its burrow
   c. when it is dark

Connecting the author’s and the reader’s ideas
5. What do aardvarks do to keep them safe from predators?

Developing vocabulary
6. An antonym is a word that has the opposite meaning of another word. Write the number for the word from column 1 in front of its antonym in column 2.
   1. constructed
   2. unique
   3. abruptly
   4. exposed
   5. narrow
   a. ___ ordinary
   b. ___ wide
   c. ___ slowly
   d. ___ destroyed
   e. ___ hidden

Attending to details
7. Write how the aardvark uses each body part listed below to get termites.
   a. sharp claws
   b. sticky saliva
   c. long tongue
   d. long snout

Processing information
8. The name aardvark comes from one of the official languages of the Republic of South Africa; aard means earth and vark means pig. Why is the name aardvark so fitting for this animal?

Finding supporting details
9. Write about two features of the aardvark that support this statement: The aardvark has unique ways of obtaining food.

Enrichment Activity
Find information about the okapi, and describe how it is similar to the aardvark.