

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Batty Bridge

Do you shudder at the thought of a bat, the flying mammal? Perhaps modern people are still afraid of bats because they have been part of the folklore of Halloween for centuries. The old folklore links bats with blood-sucking vampires, saying that a vampire can take over the body of a bat. While there are some species of bats that do live on the blood of other mammals, these vampire bat species only live in Mexico and parts of South America. Bats in the United States are beneficial because they eat insects, especially mosquitoes.



Bats are nocturnal creatures; this means that they sleep during the day and are active at night. Many species of bats live in caves. Bats sleep hanging upside down and sleep very close to each other for warmth. The temperature in a cave is usually around 55° F year round. At dusk the bats leave the cave as a giant swarm to feed on nighttime insects, especially mosquitoes.

What if there isn't a suitable cave to live in? A clever group of bats adopted the underside of the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin, Texas as a place to roost and sleep during the day. Female bats, most of which are about to have pups, fly to Austin from Mexico in March and stay through October. No, these are not a species of Mexican vampire bats! These are free-tailed bats. There are between 750,000 and 1.5 million bats (after the pups are born) that live under the bridge during the spring and summer.

The original Congress Avenue Bridge spanned the Colorado River. There has been some type of a bridge in the same location since the early 1870s. The current bridge spans Lady Bird Lake which was created by a dam on the Colorado River. This modern bridge is a concrete arch bridge with 6 traffic lanes and 2 sidewalks for pedestrians. In 2006 it was named the Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge, in honor of a famous Texas governor.

About 100,000 tourists a year plus local citizens come to watch the huge swarm of bats, the largest urban bat colony, emerge at dusk. They feed on insects on and around Lady Bird Lake, eating somewhere between 10,000 to 30,000 pounds of insects each night. This is beneficial to the city because it keeps the insect population in check.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. A bat is a
  - a. Reptile
  - b. Bird
  - c. Mammal
  - d. Fish
  
2. Vampire bats live on
  - a. Blood
  - b. Insects
  - c. Both a. and b. above
  - d. None of the above
  
3. Bats sleep during the
  - a. Day
  - b. Night
  - c. Evening
  - d. Twilight
  
4. The largest urban bat colony is located in Texas in the city of
  - a. San Antonio
  - b. Dallas
  - c. Houston
  - d. Austin
  
5. Over the years Congress Avenue Bridges spanned
  - a. The Colorado River
  - b. Lady Bird Lake
  - c. Both a. and b. above
  - d. None of the above
  
6. The current Congress Avenue Bridge is made from
  - a. Wood
  - b. Steel
  - c. Concrete
  - d. High impact plastic



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### Short Answer Questions

1. Explain some of the Halloween folklore about bats.
2. Where are vampire bats found?
3. Do some research and write a short biography about Governor Ann Richards of Texas.
4. Lady Bird Lake was named for Lady Bird Johnson, First Lady of the United States when Lyndon Johnson was President. Do some research and write a short biography about Lady Bird Johnson.
5. Do some research about the Colorado River in Texas and the Colorado River that makes the Grand Canyon. Trace the route of each river on a map of the United States.
6. Do some research and describe what a concrete arch bridge looks like.
7. This is a copy of a poster to create an identity for Austin using the bats as its theme.



Use your imagination and create your own promotional poster for Austin using the bats as the theme.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Answer Key

### Multiple Choice

1. c.
2. a.
3. a.
4. d.
5. c.
6. c.

### Short Answer

1. The old Halloween folklore links bats with blood-sucking vampires, saying that a vampire can take over the body of a bat.
2. Vampire bat species only live in Mexico and parts of South America.
3. Individual response
4. Individual response
5. Individual response
6. Individual response
7. Individual response

