

Harvey Hippopotamus

by Marilyn Alexander

Harvey: [low, round-voice singing of the song found on the last page] “I can spell *hippopotamus*. *H-I-P-P-O*, I know, and then comes *P-O-T*. Oh! I can spell—”

Mrs. T.: Harvey Hippo! What a lovely song about yourself!

Harvey: Thank you, Mrs. T. It’s about spelling. I have a very long name to spell, you know.

Mrs. T.: I know. I wouldn’t try to spell it.

Harvey: Do you know what my name means?

Mrs. T.: No. Tell me.

Harvey: Sure. *Hippo* means horse; *potamus* means river. I’m a river horse!!

Mrs. T.: Horse!?! You look more like a pig!

Harvey: Well, actually, you’re right, Mrs. T. I have four-toed feet like a pig, and I have skin that looks more like a pig’s than a horse’s.

Mrs. T.: And you both like to stay in the mud.

Harvey: Oh, I LOVE the mud and river water, Mrs. T. You see, it’s terribly hot out here in the African sunshine. Even though my spongy skin is two inches thick in some places, it is still delicate. I sunburn easily.

Mrs. T.: I’ve never thought of a hippopotamus as being delicate before. So you stay in the water and mud about 16 hours a day to avoid sunburn?

Harvey: Yes, but I have other reasons, too.

Mrs. T.: What are they?

Harvey: Well, daytime is really my snoozing time, and the water protects me from enemies.

Mrs. T.: You snooze in the daytime?

Harvey: Yes. That’s why people think I’m kind of lazy. Maybe I am during the day, but at night, I’m pretty busy.

Mrs. T.: What do you do at night?

Harvey: That’s when I have to find food. At night, when the sun won’t dry out my skin, I get out of the river and find food on land. I eat between 150 and 300 pounds of grasses and plants in a single night, you know.

Mrs. T.: No, I didn’t know. That’s quite a bit. But then you are quite large.

Harvey: You’d better believe it! I am pleased to tell you that I am the third largest land mammal. *World Book Encyclopedia* says I’m the second heaviest.

Mrs. T.: Really? What two land mammals are bigger than you?

Harvey: Why don't we ask the kids what they think? What two land mammals do you think are larger than I am, kids?

(Wait for response from the kids. *Rhinoceros (#1)* and *elephant (#2)* are the correct answers.)

Mrs. T.: Hey, they got (or didn't get) it! Just how tall are you, Harvey?

Harvey: Well, you can see that I'm about as tall as a short lady—four feet, eight inches tall.

Mrs. T.: You would come up to here (demonstrate) on me.

Harvey: Okay. But I weigh about as much as [Miss Marilyn] over there.

Mrs. T.: Harvey!!! Now you are being VERY impolite!

Harvey: Oh, I was only kidding, unless [Miss Marilyn] weighs 8,000 pounds.

Mrs. T.: I hardly think so!

Harvey: Is she about 14 feet long? I am. Add my tail, and I'm 16 feet.

Mrs. T.: Wow! That's about from here to [the wall?] over there [demonstrate].

Harvey: You wouldn't want me to come to Bible club. I'd kind of take over.

Mrs. T.: Well, you're here, aren't you? We are glad to learn about how Christ the Creator made you special, even though I have to admit, Harvey, that, well, uh, I find you, uh, well—

Harvey: I know what you're getting at, Mrs. T. By your standards, I'm not too good looking. You might say I'm ugly.

Mrs. T.: Well, I really didn't want to say it.

Harvey: Let me tell you about these ugly characteristics. Which one do you want to talk about first?

Mrs. T.: Well, how about your pop eyes?

Harvey: Great design by a Great Designer, Mrs. T. Notice how my whole body except my eyes, ears, and nostrils can be under water? The Master Designer made my pop eyes so that I raise only a small part of my head above water to see while I'm hiding. What's next?

Mrs. T.: Let's see. Your teeth are not in neat rows, and they are huge and in various shapes and sizes.

Harvey: Ah, yes. God gave me 40 powerful teeth that grind, bite, and pull up grasses, cut through tough stems like a scythe, and easily chew the roughest vegetable food. You don't think they look very good, but they are perfect for me. Actually, my health depends a lot on my teeth: if I couldn't chew tough grasses with these "ugly" things, I could starve to death. Now, what's next?

Mrs. T.: Well, Harvey, you have a —uh—a big mouth! All that yawning you do isn't polite in human society.

Harvey: Ahh! (open mouth wide) But yawning is very important to a hippo, Mrs. T. That's how I communicate. My yawn impresses other hippos. On the other hand, when my enemies see my long, dangerous teeth, they think twice about attacking me.

Mrs. T.: I see.

Harvey: There's something else that's gross about my yawn, though.

Mrs. T.: What's that, Harvey?

Harvey: Are you sure you want to know?

Mrs. T.: I think so.

Harvey: You've got to be sure. It's gross!

Mrs. T.: Okay. I'm sure the boys want to know; so go ahead.

Harvey: My yawn gives me a chance to exhale a mighty gust of air.

Mrs. T.: Oh?

Harvey: Like a burp.

Mrs. T.: Oh.

Harvey: These gusts are filled with really bad-smelling gases that come right from my stomach.

Mrs. T.: Oh, gross!

Harvey: I warned you.

Mrs. T.: Oh, that's sickening!

Harvey: Exactly!

Mrs. T.: Huh?

Harvey: The odor is bad enough to make a human sick. Really.

Mrs. T.: Well, let's leave that subject, Harvey. I have one more subject to talk about.

Harvey: What's that?

Mrs. T.: Well, I'd prefer to call it *perspiration*, but I guess people call it "red sweat."

Harvey: Oh, yes, another wonderful design for this big, old hippo.

Mrs. T.: Please, tell the kids about it.

Harvey: I told you my skin is rather delicate. It's tough, but it dries out quickly. Instead of sweat glands, I have glands that coat the skin with an oily red fluid. This red fluid keeps my skin from drying out, and it protects me from sunburn. It even helps heal my wounds or cuts.

Mrs. T.: So "red sweat" is really red oil.

Harvey: Yes, indeed!

Mrs. T.: Harvey, I'm so glad you were our "Creature Feature" today. Our wise and good God made you ultra special, even though, if you'll pardon me, I think you are quite ugly.

Harvey: Don't call "ugly" what God has said is very good, kids. I might not be pretty, but I'm perfectly fitted to my environment. Jesus Christ made me just right!

Mrs. T.: That's right! By the way, Harvey, how DO you spell *hippopotamus*?

Harvey: *H-I-P-P-O-P-O-T-A-M-U-S!* Hippopotamus! (singing) "*H-I-P-P-O*, I know, and then comes *P-O-T*" [exit].

I Can Spell Hippopotamus

(Harvey sings this part of the song, "I Can't Spell Hippopotamus," altered, in the puppet skit.)

