

The Ants Found the Kuih

One ant found the plate. By morning there were hundreds.

4 min read

Before you read

- **kuih** — a small sweet cake, in Malay
- **scout** — one who goes ahead to look
- **trail** — a line left behind for others to follow
- **antennae** — the two feelers on an insect's head
- **colony** — a large group living together



A plate of kuih on the kitchen table, with a thin line of ants crossing it

- ¹ Nenek made kuih on Friday. She left one plate on the kitchen table.
- ² On Saturday morning the kuih was covered in ants.
- ³ There was a thin black line of them running from the window to the table and back again.
- ⁴ “How did they all know?” I asked.

⁵ Nenek said one ant found it first. That ant is called a scout.

⁶ A scout ant walks a long way looking for food. When it finds some, it picks up a crumb and carries it home. As it walks, it leaves a smell on the ground behind it. That smell is the trail.

⁷ The next ant touches the trail with its antennae and follows it. Then another. Then a hundred.

⁸ That is why ants walk in a line and not all over the place. They are not following each other. They are following the smell.

⁹ The ants in our kitchen came from a colony under the step outside. A colony can hold thousands of ants, and they all come from one queen.



One ant carrying a crumb, antennae touching the ground



A wet cloth wiping the table, and the ant line broken

¹⁰ I watched one ant carry a crumb of kueh that was bigger than its own head.

¹¹ Then Nenek wiped the table with a wet cloth. The line broke, and the ants stopped coming.

¹² The smell was gone, so the road was gone.

¹³ The next Friday, she made kueh again. This time she covered the plate.

Part A Choose the best answer

Circle the letter next to the right answer.

1. Who found the kuih first?
 - A one scout ant
 - B the whole colony at the same time
 - C the queen ant
 - D Nenek found it first
2. What does a scout ant leave behind as it walks home?
 - A a crumb of food
 - B a tiny footprint
 - C a smell on the ground
 - D a line of sand
3. What do the other ants use to touch the trail?
 - A their feet
 - B their antennae
 - C their eyes
 - D their mouths
4. Why did the ants stop coming?
 - A the kuih was all finished
 - B the window was shut
 - C it started to rain outside
 - D Nenek wiped the smell away

Part B Write your answer

Answer in one or two sentences.

5. The passage says the ants are not following each other. What are they following, and how does that explain the straight line?

6. Why do you think Nenek covered the plate the next Friday?

Part C

Think deeper

There is no single right answer here. Say what you think, and say why.

7. Imagine Nenek had wiped only half of the table. What do you think the ants would do? What in the passage makes you think so?

8. One ant could never carry the whole plate of kuih, but thousands of them could empty it. Tell about a time you needed other people to finish something. What happened?

Answer key

For parents and teachers

Part A

1. A — one scout ant | 2. C — a smell on the ground | 3. B — their antennae | 4. D — Nenek wiped the smell away

Part B

5. They are following the smell left by the ant in front, not the ant itself. Because every ant walks on the same smell, they end up in one line. Accept any answer naming the smell or trail as the thing being followed.
6. So the ants could not reach it — she had learnt from Saturday. Accept also: to keep the kuih clean, to stop the scout finding it.

Part C

These answers vary. Mark the reasoning, not the answer.

7. A strong answer uses the rule from the passage — the ants would follow the half of the trail that was left and stop where it was wiped, or a new scout would find a way round. A weaker answer guesses with no link to the smell. Prompt with: what were they following?
8. Any honest personal answer counts, as long as it gives a reason. The skill being practised is because. Prompt rather than correct.

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