IELTS PRACTICE TASK 2

The giraffe towers above all other mammals in the world.

Roaming the African grasslands on long, thin legs, an adult male can reach a maximum height of six metres. But only about half of that height comes from its lower body – the rest is accounted for by the neck. The giraffe uses its height to feed on leaves and buds in treetops that few other animals can reach. The leaves of acacia trees are a favourite; these trees typically grow to be six or seven metres tall. And the giraffe has yet another tool to expand its reach – its tongue can stretch as far as forty-six centimetres. A giraffe spends most of its time eating, consuming hundreds of kilograms of leaves per week and travelling long distances in search of food. The animal's height also helps it to keep a sharp lookout for predators across the wide expanse of the African savannas, and it can move its head through 180 degrees in order to see what is behind it.

But it is the giraffe's neck that is its most noticeable feature. The neck has seven bones called the cervical vertebrae, and these are joined together by what are known as ball-and-socket joints – of the sort that join human arms and shoulders. These joints allow movements through 360 degrees. Another key anatomical feature is the giraffe's thoracic vertebrae – the ones that join the neck to the back. These have the same type of joints as the cervical vertebrae, which gives the giraffe great flexibility, as well as explaining why it has its characteristic hump. These bones support muscles that hold the neck upright, in the same way that cables hold up a crane on a construction site.

The giraffe has the highest known blood pressure among animals because it must pump blood, against gravity, all the way up its long neck to the brain. To pump blood on that long journey to their heads, giraffes have enormous hearts, weighing up to twelve kilograms. Their enlarged lungs compensate for the length of their tracheas. The giraffe also has a high concentration of red blood cells and tight skin, especially around the legs, which prevents blood from pooling in the limbs. It serves the same purpose as the G-suit worn by astronauts who are subjected to excessive G forces, or tight elastic stockings worn by people with leg circulation problems.

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While giraffes don't need to drink very often – they mostly get water from the leaves that they eat – they do need to do so every few days. To do this, giraffes must splay out their legs and lower their heads. The extremely high blood pressure, coupled with gravity, could cause a potentially lethal rush of blood to giraffes' brains when they bend their heads. This doesn't happen because of one-way valves that stop excess blood from flowing too quickly down their necks to their heads.

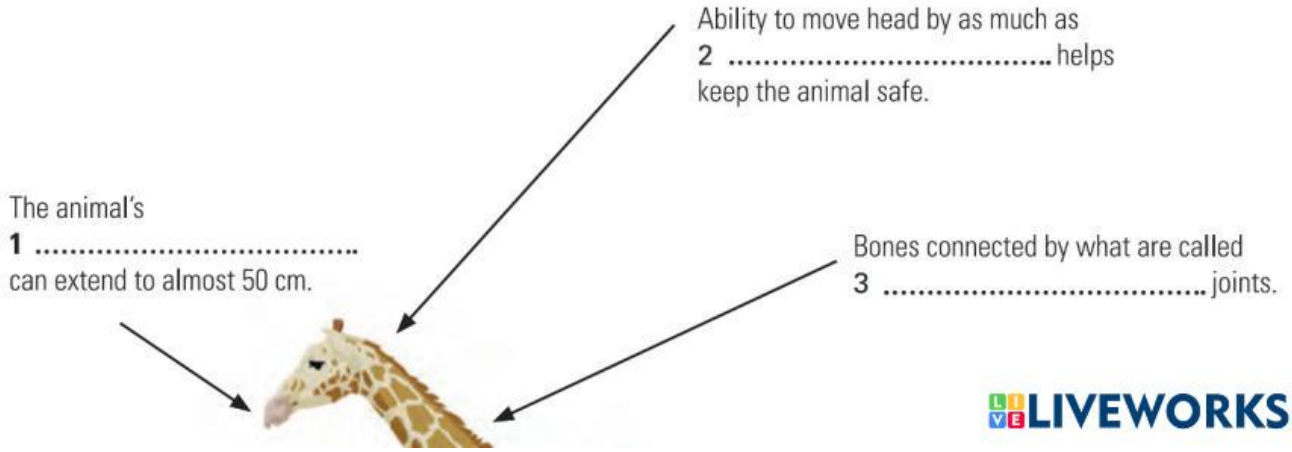
The giraffe's neck is also integral to the animal's movement and moves back and forth with its stride. That's because the weight and motion of the neck guides the animal's centre of gravity. The giraffe also tosses its neck to and fro to help it rise to a standing position on its spindly legs. This is comparable to the way people swing their arms up over their heads to pull themselves out of bed in the morning.

Questions 1–7

Label the diagram below.

Choose ***NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER*** *from the passage for each answer.*

The Anatomy of Giraffes



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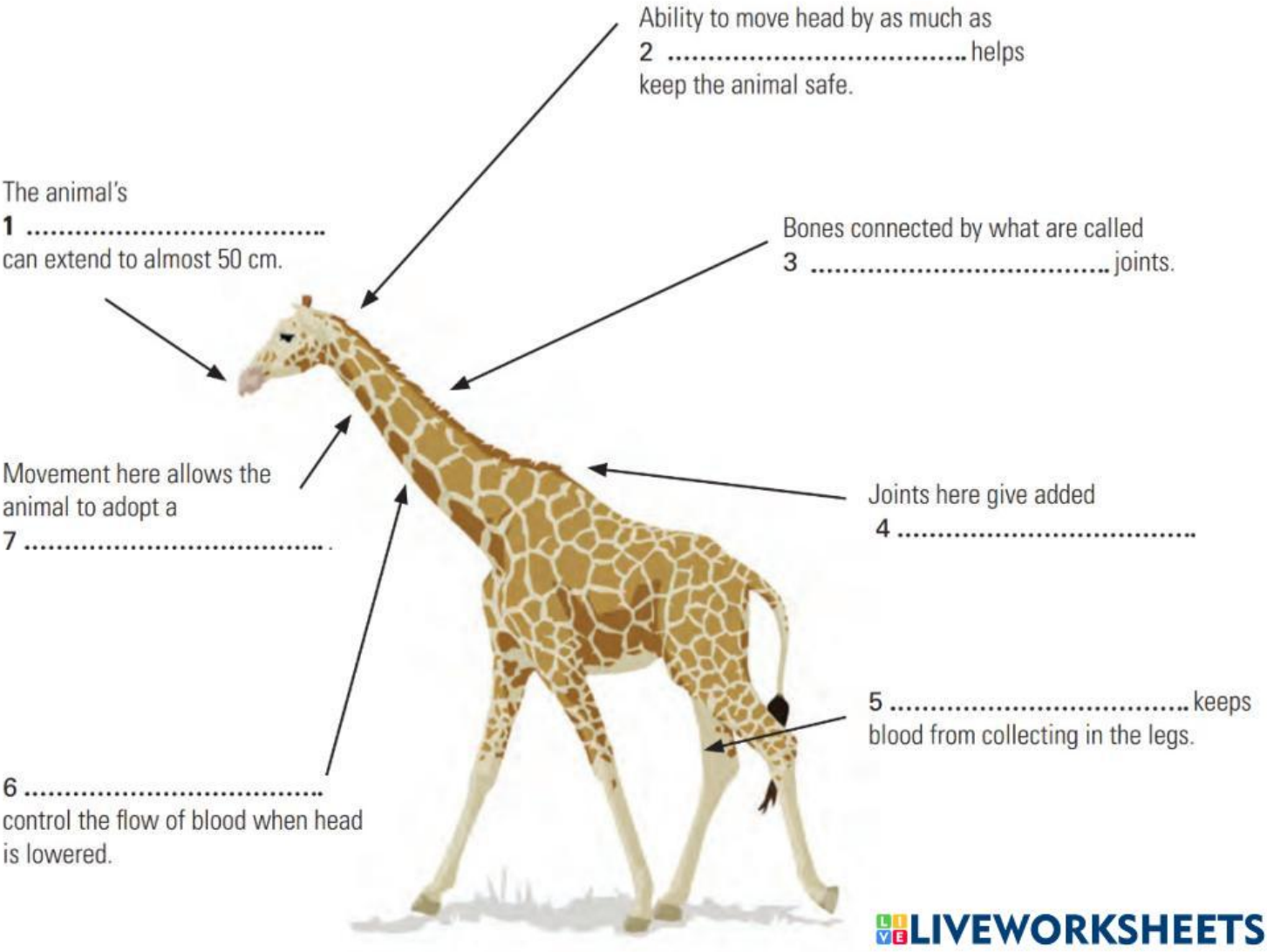

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