

TRUE TO LIFE BOOKS TEACHER'S NOTES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jan Latta was born in Sydney. She worked in advertising as a creative director. In 1994 she went to Africa and came face-to-face with a mountain gorilla in Rwanda. The experience changed her life. When her guide said there were only 600 mountain gorillas left in the world, she decided to publish books for children on endangered animals.

But first, she had to become a wildlife photographer to tell the animals' stories. She traveled to Africa eight times, living in tents and hiring local guides to keep her safe. Every day she followed prides of lions, dangerous rhinos, herds of elephants and gentle giraffes. She came close to cheetahs and played with mischievous chimps. She went to China twice to photograph and write about pandas. Then took two trips to Borneo, where she photographed orangutans in the jungle. And for the tiger book, she went to India. Jan is returning to Africa in 2011 to follow leopards for her latest book.

Taking photographs and writing about endangered animals in their natural habitat gives children a unique look into the animals' lives.

CONCEPT

In the True to Life Book series the animals talk to children about where they live, what they eat, and how the family lives together. Jan's photographs tell the story in pictures, and there are facts and maps at the back of the books.

In 2007 the ABC asked Jan to write Diary of a Wildlife Photographer. This is a journal of 14 years of adventures in the wild creating the True to Life Book series.

CREATING ELLE THE ELEPHANT BOOK

To create the elephant book I travelled to Africa and India. In Africa, I met my guide in Amboselli and followed herds of elephants each day. Then I flew in a tiny plane to Samburu where I spent many hours and a few heart-stopping moments with elephants by the river. Next, the open grasslands of the Masai Mara where some elephants were gentle, some cranky, some let me get close and others charged the jeep. Doing homework and having a good knowledgeable guide is very important for a successful book.

I obtained special permission from David Sheldrick's daughter, Angela, to go into the bush with a guide to see nine orphaned baby elephants in their care. Some of the close-up photographs in the book are of the orphaned babies. I put my fingers into one baby's mouth, and he sucked on my fingers, obviously missing his mother.

Taking photographs of Indian elephants was part of the Timba the Tiger trip. I was very fortunate to ride a famous elephant called Tara every day. A book had been written about her called Travels on my Elephant by Mark Shand.

Questions

1. Where do elephants live?
2. How many years have elephants been on Earth?
3. What are elephant's tusks made of?
4. What is a matriarch?
5. Can elephants swim?
6. What is the importance of the elephant's trunk?
7. How long can it grow?
8. Why do elephants flap their ears?
9. What is a herbivore?
10. How long can elephants live?

Fun facts: If you look at the Indian elephant's ear it's the shape of India's map. And if you look at the African elephant's ear, it's the shape of Africa.

See the African Safari and Diary of a Wildlife Photographer videos on my website, www.truetolifebooks.com.au and on YouTube.

CREATING TIMBA THE TIGER BOOK

This was a very difficult book to create because I couldn't find a tiger to photograph. I spent many months researching areas where tigers had been seen in India, but when I arrived, there were no tigers. I spent three weeks searching with my guide and very disappointed, I was ready to fly home. Then I saw the pug marks. We followed the footprints and a magnificent female tiger came out of the jungle. She was hunting for her small cubs that were hidden in the undergrowth.

Later I went to the north of India and rode an elephant every day. This was a natural way to go into the jungle to photograph and write about tigers in the wild.

Questions

1. Where do tigers live?
2. Do all tigers have the same stripes?
3. What is a pug mark?
4. Can tigers swim?
5. What do tigers hunt?
6. How much can a tiger weigh?
7. What is scent marking?
8. What are tigons or ligers?
9. When did tigers arrive on Earth?
10. Name the four different types of tigers.

CREATING OLLIE THE ORANGUTAN BOOK

To create this book I went to Borneo twice. On the second trip I hired a guide and we went up the river each day to search for orangutans. It was a struggle hiking through the jungle. I was always covered in mud, and I didn't like the leeches. But my reward was watching orangutans swing through the trees with their bright red hair catching the light. One day a dominant male charged us, so that was very dangerous.

I spent hours taking photographs of a mother and baby by the water's edge. Sometimes the animals helped me write my books by watching their behaviour.

I made special arrangements with scientist Dr Birute Galdikas, who runs the care centre for orphaned orangutans. Holding tiny baby orangutans was a wonderful and touching experience.

See Orangutan Adventure on YouTube and my video on www.truetolifebooks.com.au

Questions

1. Where do orangutans live?
2. What does the word orangutan mean in the Malay language?
3. How long have orangutans been on earth?
4. Can orangutans walk the same as humans?
5. Male orangutans have large cheek pads. What are they called?
6. Do orangutans have hands and feet similar to humans?
7. Why do orangutans have opposable thumbs?
8. What do orangutans eat?
9. Where do orangutans sleep at night?
10. Are orantutans endangered?

CREATING CHIMAKA THE CHIMPANZEE BOOK

I met the scientist Dr Jane Goodall when she visited Sydney. I was very impressed with her dedication and the many years she'd spent researching chimps, so I decided to create a book for her. Her chimp orphanage was in Ngamba, on Lake Victoria in Uganda. I spent days going into the jungle with the chimps. Often they wanted to ride on my back, but I always had to dissuade them so I could take photographs and write about them. Chimps are very intelligent and very mischievous. They tried to steal my camera and one managed to grab my glasses. Thankfully the guide retrieved them for me.

I have a special chimp in my life called Mzee, (meaning old man in the African language.) When he was young we would groom each other and play together. This gave me an insight into his behaviour and it was a privilege to experience that.

Questions

1. Where do chimpanzees live?
2. What is a primate?
3. When did primates arrive on earth?
4. What do chimpanzees eat?
5. What tools do they use ?
6. How do chimpanzees walk on the ground?
7. How do chimpanzees communicate?
8. Why do chimpanzees groom each other?
9. How close are chimpanzees to humans?
10. How can we help save chimpanzees?

CREATING LENA THE LION BOOK

The first time a huge male lion walked past my jeep, just a metre away, I was breathless with fear. When I realized he wasn't going to jump into the jeep, I relaxed and spent many productive hours taking photographs and writing about lions. Lions are very entertaining. The cubs are always getting into mischief, biting mum's tail and annoying dad. But when a kill is made, each lion fights for its share. The sound is deafening.

Lions greet each other by rubbing their heads together and often grooming each other. This is why I follow lions in the wild so I can write a true story about their behaviour.

I had an amazing once-in-a-lifetime experience in Zambia when I walked with four young lions for an hour in the bush. I must add, with very experienced guides.

See Lion Encounter and Safari adventures on YouTube and www.truetolifebooks.com.au

Questions

1. Where do lions live?
2. What is a pride of lions?
3. What is a pug mark?
4. What time of the day do lions hunt?
5. What do lions eat?
6. What is a carnivore?
7. Are white lions albinos?
8. Can lions swim?
9. Can lion cubs see when they are born?
10. What is the lifespan of lions in the wild?

CREATING CHIPPER THE CHEETAH BOOK

I went to the Masai Mara to photograph and write about cheetahs, but it was a close encounter with two cheetahs in Nanyuki, near Mount Kenya, that created Chipper the Cheetah book. I was amazed when a cheetah walked up to me, then flopped down beside me when I was taking photographs. On the next trip I returned to the same area and the cheetah came up to me again. You can read about my encounter in Diary of a Wildlife Photographer.

I've been back to the Masai Mara four times. Each time I've spent many rewarding hours watching cheetahs out on the plains, mothers protecting their fluffy cubs from predators, and the drama of the hunt.

See the African Safari and Diary of a Wildlife Photographer videos on my website, www.truetolifebooks.com.au and YouTube.

Questions

1. Where do cheetah live?
2. When did cheetahs first appear on Earth?
3. How fast can cheetahs run?
4. What do cheetahs hunt?
5. Why do cheetahs have a black stripe around their eyes?
6. What is a carnivor?
7. How many sounds can cheetahs make?
8. What is a King cheetah?
9. What is the difference between a cheetah and a leopard?
10. Can cheetah's swim?

CREATING RUFUS THE RHINOCEROS BOOK

Rhinos are very dangerous, and they always seem bad tempered, charging at anything that moves. This is due to their poor eyesight. So I had to be very careful while taking photographs of rhinos in the wild.

It took many weeks to find the black rhino with its pointy lip and then the white rhino with its square lip. Both are the colour of the mud they like to roll around in.

When I went to the Ngora Ngora crater I encountered a mother and baby. This was a dangerous situation with the mother protecting her young.

I included the Indian rhino in the book. They are easily recognised with their 'coat of armour' skin. I hired an elephant and mahout to photograph the Indian rhino and discovered how difficult it was taking photographs on top of a moving elephant.

Questions

1. Where do rhinos live?
2. What is the difference between a black rhino and a white rhino?
3. Can you tell the difference between an Indian and African rhino?
4. What makes the rhino endangered?
5. How long have rhinos been on earth?
6. What do rhinos eat?
7. What is a rhinos horn made of?
8. How long can a rhino live?
9. Why does a rhino like rolling in the mud?
10. How many rhinos are left in the wild?

CREATING GERRY THE GIRAFFE BOOK

A journey of giraffes is wonderful to watch. They ambled past my jeep looking at me with their soft beautiful eyes. Usually there is plenty of time for photography and writing because they stop and stare. I noticed the Oxpecker birds who ride on the giraffe's back and groom them. They also enter the giraffe's mouth and pick their teeth. It was a challenge to record all the different patterns of the African giraffes, so I've included the two main patterns in the book.

There's a feeding station at Giraffe Manour, so this is always a good opportunity to get close-up photographs. And it's such a lovely experience being so close to their handsome faces.

I'd never heard a sound from a giraffe until the last trip. A big male was making a horsey sound by blowing through his lips and all the hairs on his mane were vibrating. Again, here is an example of the importance of being in the animals' natural habitat to tell the story.

Questions

1. Where do giraffes live?
2. How many different types of giraffes in Africa?
3. Name two of the most seen patterns on giraffe's skin.
4. How tall is a giraffe?
5. What is special about a giraffe's tongue?
6. What do giraffe's eat?
7. How does a giraffe go to sleep?
8. Can a giraffe make a sound?
9. How many years have giraffes been on earth?
10. How many vertebrae does a giraffe have in its neck?

See the African Safari and Diary of a Wildlife Photographer videos on my website, www.truetolifebooks.com.au and YouTube.

CREATING PING-PING THE PANDA BOOK

When I read that 16 baby pandas were born at Wolong in China I knew I had to find a way to photograph them. It was difficult. I wasn't part of a group and they wouldn't let me travel alone.

So I went to Wolong, hired a Chinese driver and interpreter, and we travelled for four hours up the mountains. It was a terrifying trip, but worth it to see the pandas. I asked permission to play with the baby pandas and it was allowed, provided I covered my shoes and clothes with plastic. The baby pandas promptly pulled everything off. They were adorable and very funny with their antics.

One panda had a favourite tree stump. Each morning he would go to the same place to try many different positions until he was comfortable. Then he would fall asleep. Another panda would see how comfortable he was and push him off. This entertained me for a week. It was a privilege to be so close to these endangered animals.

Questions

1. Where do pandas live?
2. Do pandas have black markings when they are born?
3. What do pandas eat?
4. Are pandas related to bears?
5. How many sounds can a panda make?
6. Do pandas live alone?
7. How many years have pandas been on Earth?
8. Can pandas give birth to twins?
9. Is a red panda related to the giant black and white panda?
10. Can pandas swim?

CREATING KOLAH THE KOALA BOOK

Koalas sleep for about 19 hours of the day so I had to be very patient waiting for them to wake up. I spent a week at Kangaroo Island perched on a platform, taking photographs and writing about their behaviour. They are surprisingly active at times. They run up and down branches, have fun swinging and jumping from tree to tree. It's great to be close to a mother with her tiny baby clinging onto her back.

Children often ask me, "What is your favourite photograph?" "The koala jumping," I reply, because I've never seen anyone else capture that action. It was important to be with koalas when I was writing the book because I needed to describe the sounds. And koalas are often noisy! I was living in Hong Kong at the time so I flew back to Australia to produce the book.

Questions

1. Where do koalas live?
2. What do koalas eat?
3. Why is it dangerous for koalas to walk on the ground?
4. Are koalas a type of bear?
5. How many different types of leaves do koalas eat?
6. How many hours do koalas sleep each day?
7. What is a snore-belche?
8. What is the aboriginal word for koala?
9. How long have koalas been on earth?
10. What is a marsupial?

CREATING MIA THE MEERKAT BOOK

Meerkats are so entertaining. And it's wonderful to watch the family members helping each other and looking after the babies. The lookout guide is always vigilant even in a zoo environment. Although I travelled to Namibia, their natural habitat in Africa, I didn't have enough time to photograph the meerkats. The photographs were taken at Mogo and Taronga Zoos. This is the only book I have produced in a zoo setting.

Questions

1. Where do meerkats live?
2. Do they live in a family group?
3. How do meerkats keep sand out of their ears and eyes?
4. How do meerkats stand upright?
5. Why is it important to have a lookout guard?
6. What do meerkats eat?
7. Why do meerkats groom each other?
8. How many sounds do meerkats make?
9. What is their main predator?
10. Do meerkats get poisoned when they eat a scorpion?

CREATING LENNIE THE LEOPARD BOOK

This was the most difficult book to create in the series because I couldn't find a leopard to photograph in the wild. I searched for the elusive leopard for 15 years.

In 2010 and 2011, I joined Jonathan Scott from the Big Cat Diary TV series at Rekeru Camp in the Masi Mara, Africa. He knew where leopard territory was. He even knew their names.

After many weeks of searching I had the photographs to tell the story of Lennie the Leopard.

Questions

1. Where do leopards live?
2. How many different types of leopards are there?
3. What are a leopard's spots called?
4. What is a leopard's 'necklace'?
5. Which animals do leopards hunt?
6. Where do leopards store their kill?
7. Can leopards swim?
8. Do leopards climb trees?
9. Which is the most endangered leopard?
10. Do leopards live together?

ANIMAL ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

Paper Paws

Give each child two paper bags, one for each paw. Draw the shape of a leopard's paw on each bag. Paint the shapes yellow. Once the paint is dry, add big black leopard spots. When dry, draw on claws with a black marker. Wear your fierce leopard paws!

You will need: a packet of paper sandwich bags, yellow paint, black paint, paintbrushes, black marker.

Leopard Headbands

Measure around each child's head and cut out a strip of yellow construction paper to make a leopard headband. Use a thick black marker to decorate the headband with leopard spots. Secure with tape or staples. Use more yellow paper to draw the shape of leopard ears and cut out. Decorate with spots. Secure the ears to the headband with tape or staples.

Half the class can use white paper to be Snow Leopards.

If you want, use face paints or an eyebrow pencil to add whiskers and a nose for a leopard face.

You will need: yellow/white construction paper, thick black markers, tape or stapler and staples, safety scissors. Optional items: face paints or eyebrow pencil.

FOR OLDER CHILDREN Leopons and Lipards

Draw a 'leoapon' (a cross between a female lioness and a male leopard). Let your imagination guide you. What does it look like? What colour is it? Does it have spots all over or on half of its body?

Draw a 'lipard' (a cross between a male lion and a female leopard) Let your imagination guide you. What does it look like? What colour is it? Does it have spots all over or on half of its body?

You will need: pencils and paper, crayons or paints.

Animal Ancestors

Research and list the names of animals that were alive during the Ice Age. A woolly ancestor of the elephant roamed the earth. What was its name? Draw its picture. Why did it become extinct?

Elephant Mask

From one side of a cereal box cut out the shape of an elephant's head. Paint it grey or brown. Cut out tusks and ears and glue them on. Make a hole at either side and loop with string or elastic to wear. You will need safety scissors, paper, paint, glue and string.

Panda Puppet

Turn a simple paper bag upside-down to wear as a panda puppet over your hand. Decorate the bag to look like a panda. Draw on a face. Cut out ears and paws and glue them on. You will need scissors, glue, extra paper, markers and crayons.

Chimp Chopsticks

Head outdoors, crouch down and use a wooden chopstick as a chimp's tool to forage for food in the ground. Record what you see at chimp level.

Track a Tiger

What are pug marks? Make a set of pug marks with a potato print. Cut a potato in half. Cut out the shape of the pug marks. Dip in paint and make a print of the tiger tracks on paper. You will need potatoes, plastic knives, paint and paper.

Koala Portrait

Make a koala portrait using a paper plate. Paint the plate grey. Cut out ears, nose and eyes and glue them on. Pick gum branches and hang them in your classroom so your koalas can live in the trees. You will need paint, paper, glue and gum branches.

Gum Leaf Print

Collect some gum leaves and make a paper rubbing of the leaves. Place a flattened leaf under a piece of paper and gently rub a crayon over the top, making sure you don't move the paper. You will see the pattern of the leaves. You will need leaves and paper.

Happy Lion Face

On a piece of paper draw a the shape of a lion's face and paint it yellow. Cut out ears and glue on. Mark eyes, nose and mouth in black. With glue, stick pasta spirals around the head for a mane. You will need paper, paint, markers, dried pasta spirals and glue.

Orangutan Oranges

Make an orangutan face on an orange. Place each orange on a flat surface. If it's wobbly ask the teacher to cut a base. Using the edible icing, stick on sultanas for eyes and nose and draw on a smile. Use icing to stick on mini marshmallows as ears. You will need oranges, sultanas, edible icing, mini marshmallows.

Giraffe Dot Painting

On paper draw the outline of a giraffe. Use a paintbrush to make an Aboriginal-style dot painting with brown, orange and yellow paints for its coat. Draw on a face with a marker, then hooves and mane. You will need paper, paints, paintbrush and markers.

Meerkat Finger Puppets

Place two pieces of paper flat in front of you and put your forefinger on top. Draw around the outline of your finger and cut out the shape allowing at least a centimetre extra space. Staple the top and sides together keeping the bottom edges open. Decorate with meerkat markings, adding face, arms, legs and tail at the back. You will need paper, staples, markers and crayons.

Rhino Horn Rattle

Make a rhino horn from black construction paper. Take an A4 size piece of paper lengthways and fold the two top corners to the middle and keep folding until you get a cone/horn shape, pointed at one end. Tape the horn shape and fill with a few dried beans. Fold up the bottom edges to seal and tape across. You will need paper, tape and dried beans.

Cheetah Word Game

How many words can you make out of the word cheetah? You should be able to make at least five words. Look at the letters and try putting them in different sequences to find new words.
(Answers: cat, tea, hat, chat, cheat, ate, act, heat, hatch, etc)

Animal Map Zone

On a map of the world find the countries where the animals in the True to Life books live in the wild and label them with pictures of the animals. Label the animals' habitats, too. For example, rainforest, jungle, savannah, bamboo forest, etc.

Collective Quiz

Some groups of animals are described using collective nouns eg A pride of lions.
Here are some collective nouns for the animals from True to Life books:

- A journey of giraffes
- A herd of elephants
- A pod of hippos
- A pride of lions
- A crash of rhinos
- A leap of leopards
- A swift or ambush of tigers

Animal Superstars

Look out for TV advertisements featuring wild animals and explain why you think a specific animal has been used for a particular ad.

Animal Classification

Animals are classified into different groups. Some groupings are simple eg birds, mammals, reptiles, and some are more scientific. Choose an animal from the True to Life books and use the technique of scientific classification to fill out the table below:

Common name:

Scientific name

Phylum

Class

Order

Family

Genus

Species