

Felix Pitre's
Animal Tales
Study Guide

Animal Tales, a program of lively stories and memorable songs, teaches respect for creatures large and small as well as lessons about ourselves. It was created for children in grades kindergarten through fourth. One story presents animals in the conflict of survival, another focuses on human emotions and the third is a magical fable of kindness and reward. The program aims to highlight the importance of animals in our lives, to engender respect for their right to exist and encourage further study through reading, writing, and performing.

Froggie Went A-Courtin'

Originally from Scotland, this traditional song has become a staple of American folklore. It is the story of Froggie who goes *a-courtin'* Ms. Mousie. After Uncle Rat gives his consent, the wedding celebration begins with a procession of animals and ends with an uninvited guest, the snake, putting a halt to the merry making. The audience participates with "uh-huh," keeps track of the animal guests, and afterwards lists and discusses them. As an added twist, new verses are created using students' names.

Coyote Rings the Wrong Bell

This tale from Mexico introduces the coyote and the hare who always manages to outwit him. In return for ringing the bell that calls the "tender, juicy rabbits" from the school, the coyote agrees to let the captured hare free. The bell, in reality a hornet's nest, provides a stinging lesson for the coyote who truly "rings the wrong bell." Discussed are the hare and the coyote, the habitat, and their dependency and relationship to each other in the wild.

How Beetles Got Their Beautiful Coats

A Brazilian folktale, it recounts the story of the lowly beetle walking the floor of the Amazon rain forest, and the rat who feels superior. She is accosted by the nasty, impatient rat who takes pleasure in ridiculing the "slow, slow beetle." A parrot enters the discussion and suggests a race, with a new coat as the prize. The rain forest, its location, climate, and natural inhabitants are part of the pre-story conversation and the lesson of not putting down others is the theme.

The Boy Who Was Kind to the Birds and the Animals

Audience volunteers help to present this tale from Peru. It is about a young boy whose father urges him to befriend the birds and the animals. The native names in the story such as Huathiacuri, Paricaca and Tanca may sound foreign to the audience but are those of people they know and are like them: a boy, his father, and a girl. The participants also play animals of their choice and must think on their feet solve the problem of "what to give a sick person to make them feel better." This experience proves to be a rewarding and memorable exercise for audience and players alike while encouraging students to participate in storytelling in their classrooms and at home.

Song Medley

Audience members play instruments and sing selected songs that have animals as their theme. From France, Mexico, and the United States, spanning popular to rock and roll, they reflect the close interdependence of humans and animals. The finale closes the program with a reminder to read and discuss animal stories at home and in school. They are left with Paricaca's advice: "My children, be kind to the birds and the animals."

Pre-Performance Activities

Discussion of animals in the wild and at home:

- By location: what animals live in the forests? The desert? The polar regions? The oceans?
- Discuss the relationship between man and these animals. Are they used for food? For control of insects or other animals? For tourism?
- What animals are kept as pets or as workers in these regions? How do they compare with pets you have at home?
- What does extinct mean? Discuss the animals that are extinct or on the endangered list. What is being done to help the species survive? Is there anything you or your school can do to help?
- How are people like animals? How are they different? If you could be an animal, which one would you pick? Why?

Post-Performance Activities

Questions for discussion:

- Were there any animals you learned about for the first time? Which animal did you like the most? Which one could you identify with? Why?
- In *Froggie Went A-Courtin'*, the snake eats up all the animals in the end of the song. Animals in the wild eat smaller ones to survive. This is called the food chain. Discuss the food chain and your place in it.
- In *Coyote Rings the Wrong Bell*, the coyote is stung by the hornets. Have you had an experience with a wasp or bee? What should you do if you get stung by a bee? What is the difference between the two? How do bees make honey?
- In *How Beetles Got Their Beautiful Coats*, the rat makes fun of the beetle. How do you feel about teasing someone because they are different? How would you feel if someone did it to you? What does it mean to have "hidden wings?"
- In *The Boy Who Was Kind to the Birds and the Animals*, Huathiacuri receives the cure for the sick man from the animals. Discuss how pets make you feel better (studies have shown them to lower blood pressure in their owners). What can we learn from observing animals to improve our lives?
- What songs do you know about animals that tell a story? What are your favorite animal songs? Why? Do you know any animal songs in another language?

Projects

- Start a scrapbook of animals and collect newspaper photos and articles about them.
- Write a story about animals that teaches a lesson and perform it for another class.
- Plan a trip to a zoological park or animal preserve. Each student can choose an animal to sponsor and report to the rest of the class about the animal.
- Hold a bake or book sale, etc. and raise money to donate to an organization that protects endangered animals.

Bibliography and Resource Aids

- Baylor, Byrd, ed. And It Is Still That Way: Legends Told by Arizona Indian Children. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1976 (a collection of favorite Native American stories)
- Belpré, Pura. The Tiger and the Rabbit and Other Tales. New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1965.
- Burnie, David. Mammals. New York: Dorling Kindersley, Inc., 1993.
- Cunningham, Maggie. The Cherokee Tale-Teller. Minneapolis: Dillon Press, Inc. 1978. (Includes man animal tales, with lovely illustrations)
- Hopkins, Lee Bennett. Flit, Flutter, Fly! Poems about Bugs and Other Crawly Creatures. New York: Delacorte Press, 1992.
- Lester, Lewis. Black Folktales. New York: Richard W. Barton, 1969. (African and African-American stories, in a contemporary setting)
- Lewin, Ed. Beeny Bird: 12 Jamaican Folksongs for Children. London: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Maestro, Betsy. Fat Polka-Dot Cat and Other Haiku. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1976.
- Pitre, Felix. Juan Bobo and the Pig. New York: Lodestar Books, Dutton, 1993.
- Seeger Ruth Crawford. Animal Folk Songs for Children: Traditional American Songs. New York: Doubleday, 1950.
- Watson, Wendy. Wendy Watson's Frog Went A-Courting. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Sheperd Books, 1990.
- Yeatman, Linda. A Treasury of Animal Stories. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982.

Suggestions for Listening and Viewing

- Audio**
Animal Folksongs for Children. New York: Folkway Records.
- How Rabbit Tricked Otter and Other Cherokee Animal Stories. New York: Harper, 1991.
- Video**
Animals Are Beautiful People, The Secret Life of Wildlife. Warner Home Video, 1992.
- Five Lionni Classics (The Animal Fables of Leo Lionni). Random House Home Video.)Color, Animated, Approx. 30 mins)
- The Bear. Columbia Tristar Home Video, Video released 1991. (Color, 92 minutes, PG)

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