

Sun Bears Are Special

by Philippa Werry

Overview

In this report, Philippa Werry describes a family of Wellington Zoo's sun bears in order to illustrate the general characteristics of sun bears and the difficulties involved in breeding them. There is an audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2002*.

Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of forming hypotheses, asking questions, visualising, and identifying and summarising main ideas.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the specific information about sun bears
- the information about the problems of conserving endangered species
- the subject-specific vocabulary
- the Malaysian names
- the friendly style:
- the appealing photographs
- the emotional impact of the information on the inside back cover
- the text box on page 4
- the map on page 3
- the website link
- the meanings of the bears' names
- the use of quote marks for word meanings on pages 4 and 9
- the use of comparisons
- the use of the comparative and superlative adjectives "bigger" and "smallest"
- the design features (the frames around the text and the photographs, the use of warm colours, the paw-print motif, and the sun graphic on the front cover)
- the plural possessive apostrophe in "bees' nests".
- the inclusion of the writer's opinions
- the conversational language ("no luck", "peace and quiet", "maybe", "anything and everything", "of course", and the use of contractions)
- the use of dashes and exclamation marks

Possible challenges

- the Malaysian and Māori names
- the meaning of "one in one hundred"
- the subject-specific vocabulary.

Introducing the text

You may find it helpful to listen to the audio version yourself before the reading so that you can support the children with the pronunciation of the sun bears' names.

Show the children the cover of the book and find out what they know about sun bears (or other bears). *Why might sun bears be special?* Browse through the book together and record the children's ideas on a chart along with their ideas about the words they might meet in the text.

Alternatively, you could have the children browse through the photographs and think, pair, and share their own questions. Record their questions and refer to them during the reading.

During the reading

Read the title and the name of the author. (There is no photographer named here because the photographs come from different sources.) Ask the children to read the text silently, pausing at various points for discussion or to clarify any difficulties.

Page 2 – If necessary, model the pronunciation of the cubs' names. Check that the children understand what "cubs" are. *What is special about the sun bears on this page?*

Page 3 – *What information does this page give you? What does the map tell you? Why are they called honey bears?*

Page 4 – Clarify that now the writer is focusing on the sun bears at Wellington Zoo. Explain that "Malaysian" means "from Malaysia".

Page 5 – *What is the main idea on this page? How does the writer feel about this? How do you know?*

Page 6 – *What did the zookeepers do differently?* If necessary, explain what an enclosure is. You could help the children visualise the idea of "one in one hundred" by using a hundreds board.

Page 7 – Have on hand an object weighing approximately 300 grams and pass it round the group. *Show me how big a guinea pig is.*

Page 8 – *What do sun bears eat?*

Pages 9 and 10 – You may need to reassure children about the silent letters in "tongues". *How did Arataki get his name?* If necessary, refer the children to the front cover so they can see the clue on the honey pot. *How would the bears get honey if they lived in the wild in Malaysia?*

Pages 11 and 12 – *Why don't the cubs stay with their mother?*

Share-read the information on the inside back cover. Check the children's understanding of the term "endangered species". Encourage the children to share their reactions to the sad news on this page.

Review the children's ideas (or questions) on the whiteboard. Talk about any new ideas they discovered in the text. *Why do you think Philippa Werry wrote this book?*

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text with a partner, observing how they manage the challenges in the text and their ability to express the conversational style.

Read through the book together, using sticky notes to indicate the sections of general information (about all sun bears) and specific information (about the sun bears at Wellington Zoo). Talk about how using examples can make a report seem more interesting and real.

Review what the children have learnt about sun bears and use a graphic organiser to record and sort the information.

Why do you think sun bears have become an endangered species? How could we find out?

Focus on the subject-specific vocabulary in the text and discuss the meanings of the words. Create a glossary together.

Have the children work with a partner to discuss the design features of the text. *Why has the designer used these ideas? What do you think of them?*

Focus on the use of the adjectives “bigger” and “smallest” to make comparisons and how it helps readers to build a picture in their heads. Investigate the word endings used for comparative and superlative adjectives, for example, “big”, “bigger”, “biggest”.

Focus on the word “bees” on page 9. Briefly explain that the apostrophe comes after the “s” because the nests belong to lots of bees. *How would the word be different if the nests belonged to only one bee?*

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2002*.

Use this text for reciprocal reading.

Read “Zoo Babies” in *School Journal*, Part 1 Number 5, 2002. This follows a similar structure to *Sun Bears Are Special*, using specific examples to support general information about trying to breed endangered species.

Find out more about how New Zealand zoos are trying to save endangered species.

You could visit Wellington Zoo’s website

(www.zoo.wcc.govt.nz/animals/animals/mammals/sunbear.html) to find out more about sun bears and why they’re endangered.

Write a group report about sun bears.