

Tassie Devils!

Help save our endangered devils

This teachers' supplement should be used in conjunction with Project Pull-out #25: Tassie Devils, which is found in DMAG's issue 78, September 2008. The Project Pull-out will inspire students to learn about Australia's animals.

These activities encourage students to:

- Learn about Australia's unique fauna
- Find out more about Australia's endangered animals
- Appreciate what a crucial role scientists have in saving animals
- Use maps
- Express themselves regarding a current issue

Science: Our Australia Identifying and promoting Australian plants and animals

As a class read through the project pull-out and then carry out the activity on the Student Worksheet entitled "Marsupial Mix-up".

Discuss the fact that so many Australian animals are marsupials. Are there a lot of marsupials in Australia? Can the students think of any other marsupial animals in other countries? Students most probably won't be able to think of them but opossums are marsupials that are found in North and South America. No marsupials are found in Europe, Africa or Antarctica.



The exercise "Marsupial Mix-up" only lists eight Australian marsupials, but there are over 100 marsupials in Australia. In fact, most of Australia's native mammals are marsupials. Ask the class to come up with a list of over 30 Australian marsupials. Then ask every person to choose a different marsupial and to do a short report on it. Each report should include the name of the animal, a picture, its distribution and whether it's endangered.

Food for thought

In Australia, marsupials occupy every level of the food chain. Before dingoes came to Australia, Tasmanian tigers and Tasmanian devils were found on mainland Australia. But with the dingoes, both these animals became extinct on the mainland. Ask the class to discuss why this might have happened? What theories do they have?

Some prompts could be:

- Did the dingoes eat the same things as Tasmanian tigers and devils?
- Would they have competed for the same foods?
- What would happen if one type of animal was a better hunter?
- What about if one type of animal had more offspring and could reproduce quicker?

Now ask the class to think about why the Tasmanian tiger and the Tasmanian devil were able to survive in Tasmania. Prompts:

- Are there dingoes in Tasmania? (No)
- How would dingoes get to Tasmania? (They can't, it's too far and dangerous to swim. Humans would have to bring them.)
- 200 years ago, would any animals in Tasmania have competed for food with the Tasmanian devils and/or Tasmanian tiger?

Tell the class that until recently, Tasmania was also fox free. What effect

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would an animal like a fox have on the food chain? Discuss.

Extinct

Less than 100 years ago, another meat-eating marsupial - the Tasmanian tiger or thylacine - still lived. Humans hunted this species to extinction and the last thylacine died in 1936.

Ask students to break into pairs and to research the thylacine. What was it like? What did it eat? Why was it hunted? Where was the last one seen? Each pair should write a report about the thylacine.

English: Discussion, comparison and listening

Discuss as a class the similarities between the Tasmanian tiger/thylacine becoming extinct and the Tasmanian devil possibly becoming extinct. Draw on the board a table with two columns, one headed "Similarities" and the other "Differences."

Prompts: Are people trying to save the Tasmanian devil? Are there lots in zoos? Are the devils being hunted?

English: Exposition

Ask each student to write a piece about why they think we should (or shouldn't) be helping to save the Tasmanian devil. In their exposition they can draw on similarities/ differences between the plight of the Tasmanian devil and that of the thylacine.



jobs that scientists might have to help save the Tasmanian devil?

Prompts: Medical research, genetic studies, tracking, tagging and monitoring them etc. Ask the class to break into groups and each group is to find a scientist/research group and describe what that person or group is working on. Why is their

work so important?

Maths: Mapping

Look at the map on page 49 which is the extent of the disease as at February 2008. Now look at the Department of Primary Industries and Water's website www.dpiw.tas.gov.au. Click on Tasmanian Devil Facial Tumour Disease and see how their map compares to DMAG's map. Their map is made up of dots showing where the disease has been reported. Ask the class if the map is likely to change as the disease spreads? How will the DPIW update their map? Ask every student in the class to trace the map of Tasmania on page 49 of DMAG and then to mark on the map the dots shown on the DPIW map. Check their website every few months to see if the map has been updated. What would it mean for the Tasmanian devil if all of DMAG's map were to be shaded in?

Science: The role of scientists

Read pages 48 and 49 of the project pull-out and discuss the devil facial tumour disease. What are some of the

English: Interview and role playing

Ask the students to complete the "interview" activity on the worksheet. Once they have their questions, ask one student to pretend to be Tim and one student to interview Tim. The pretend Tim should then answer in character.

This exercise can also be applied to any of the scientific roles uncovered in the above exercise.

Art: Make a poster

Ask pairs of students to make a poster encouraging people to help save the Tasmanian devil. Stick the posters up around the school.

About DMAG

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