

Surviving Australia

Surprising animal secrets

These teachers' notes should be used with Project Pull-out #24: Surviving Australia, which is found in DMAG's issue 77, August 2008. The Project Pull-out will inspire students to learn about Australia's animals, past and present.

These activities encourage students to:

- Learn about Australia's unique fauna
- Understand that survival of a species depends on many things
- Find out more about Australia's endangered animals
- Learn about Australia's past environment and fauna
- Appreciate that humans can change the environment

Science: Our Australia Through tourist's eyes

As a class read through the project pull-out and look at the fabulous pictures. Discuss which animals are unique to Australia. Ask the class to imagine that they're tourists from another country, which animals would they like to photograph?

Ask the class to break into pairs. Each pair is to imagine that they're running a business that takes tourists on tours to see wildlife. Each pair must come up with a brochure promoting their tour. The brochure should explain when the tour happens, where it will



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be, the animals the tourists can expect to see, some interesting facts about the animals, and what the tourists will learn on the tour (e.g. first aid for snake bites, or how to find bush tucker).

Ask the students to choose one of the following tours:

- Suburban spotlight (e.g. this could happen at night and include possums, bats, owls etc.)
- Blue Edge (what creatures are found down by the sea?)
- Dangerous Australians (snakes, spiders etc.)

Brochures should include headings and pictures.

Note: if you're able to take the class to the Surviving Australia exhibition at the Australian Museum, you can also include "Island Homes" as a tour.

Maths: Mapping

Ask each student to choose one of the dangerous animals discussed or pictured on pages 48-49 of DMAG. Each student must research where this animal is found and draw a map of Australia showing its habitat.

Science: Our Australia School make-over & animal database

As a class, read the section *Backyard Buddies* on pages 50-51, and do the exercises entitled *Match the Habitat* and *Backyard Helper* on the activity sheet. Discuss how the students could apply these ideas to the school environment. Ask the students to have a go at redesigning the school grounds to attract native animals and help the environment.

As a first step, discuss the animals they might find in the area. Also ask what animals used to be in the area. Draw up a table (a database) of each animal



See Surviving Australia!

These activity sheets

have been inspired by the Australian Museum's fantastic exhibition *Surviving Australia*.

To organise a school visit call 02 9320 6163 or see www.australianmuseum.net.au.

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and describe what it eats, what sort of habitat it prefers etc. Save this database as an excel spreadsheet (or similar) and update it as you find new information. If you are able to make-over the school grounds, add actual observations the students have made to this database, for instance, the students might observe that blue-tongued lizards eat snails.

Science: An Ancient Land

Read pages 52-53 about Australia's extinct megafauna. Discuss some of the times involved in the story.

- Would the megafauna have been around when the dinosaurs were? [Ans. No, dinosaurs became extinct about 60 million years ago].
- Would people have been around?
- When did the first aborigines arrive? [Ans. About 40,000 years ago]
- Would they have seen some of these creatures?

Ask the students how we know that these megafauna existed? [Ans. palaeontologists have uncovered fossils etc]. Ask them to think about this question, if aborigines were around to see such creatures, would they have told stories about them? Would they have painted pictures of them?

English extension: There are many Aboriginal Dreaming stories about big creatures. Ask the class to find some, then read them out to the class. Ask each person in the class to re-tell one of the stories in their own words and to illustrate it.



Science: An Ancient Land Food for thought

Discuss as a class why the megafauna became so big. Would they have to have had lots of food? If one creature in a food chain – say a herbivore – has a lot of food, how can this affect other creatures in the food chain? For instance, would carnivores then have a lot of food? If these creatures did have a lot of food, do you think that the Australia they inhabited thousands of years ago looked the same? Might there have been more water? Would the vegetation have been different? Ask pairs to break off and investigate one of the animals featured on pages 52-53 with regards to its food and habitat.

If the habitat were to change – say from fire – how would this affect the animal and the food chain? Discuss.

Maths: Drawing to scale

Discuss what drawing to scale means. That is: keeping the sizes of things in proportion to one another. Ask each student to do a graph showing the heights and sizes of each of the four megafauna shown on pages 52-53. Also include a human, a giant echidna (students need to research heights) and a present day echidna.

Extension exercise: Make a diorama

In the same pairs used in the *Food for Thought* exercise, ask students to create a diorama showing their megafauna and also showing the likely vegetation and landscape. Ask students to try to make their diorama to scale - if they want they can put in a human!

English

Read page 54 of the pull-out entitled *Who Will Survive?* Discuss the fact that there are many Australian animals that are in danger of extinction. Ask each student to choose an endangered animal (e.g. Tasmanian devil) and to write a letter to someone in the future about what is happening to the animal. For instance, the letter could be to someone in 50 years time. Perhaps Tasmanian devils are extinct then. The student can describe why the animal is endangered now, what people are doing to save it, what it's like to see one in the flesh and their hopes for the future of the animal. Students should bear in mind that the reader may never have seen the animal except in books (much like today when people talk about the extinct Tasmanian tiger). Share some of the best letters with the class.

About DMAG

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