

Bullfrog Films presents

BUNCH OF FIVES

five short videos without words

*a series of delightful,
award-winning animated films
by Nick Hilligoss
that comment ruefully on our
relationship with the natural world
produced by
the Australian Broadcasting
Company's Natural History Unit*

POSSUM'S REST

cohabiting with nature

LOWER ORDERS

a new look at the food chain

TURTLE WORLD

an allegory on resource use and
sustainability

CELL ANIMATION

Cell walls do not a prison make.

BANJO FROGS

We all make our own kind of music.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

This discussion guide was written by

Clara Pincus, M.A.

in consultation with Jennifer Royall, National Board Certified Teacher, and Bobbi Geise, Director, Bridger Outdoor Science School (Bozeman, MT), certified science teacher.

Grades 4-12, adults.

These videos invite thought-provoking, cross-curricular, inquiry-based discussions for language arts, social studies, and biological science.

POSSUM'S REST 5 min.

It was a quiet leafy neighborhood until the humans moved in. Motors, loud music, and barbecue smoke disrupt possum sleeping hours, and the possum's habits disrupt the humans. What's a possum to do?

LOWER ORDERS 6 min.

An eclectic and enterprising group of city critters feeds on garbage from a local restaurant, but when they get too big for their boots, they learn a lesson about life on the food chain.

TURTLE WORLD 9 min.

With imagery from traditional mythology, a sea turtle swims through space, as a world evolves on her back. Primate inhabitants enact a saga of civilization; and over-consumption and politics take their toll, despite the warnings of a wise little monkey.

CELL ANIMATION 6 min.

A free-spirited, artistic soul gets thrown in jail for going overboard with painting on city streets and private property. With the use of his imagination and talent, he is able to create his own escape, only to end up behind bars of a different sort.

BANJO FROGS 5 min.

Strolling through the garbage dump, a frog picks up an abandoned banjo and finds he's a natural. However, his style just doesn't fit in with a frog trio he happens upon. He slinks away, only to find that there is a place for him, after all.

Since these videos can engage a very wide age range, this discussion guide invites teachers to adapt the suggestions as appropriate for their age group and specific class interests.

POSSUM'S REST

Concepts, questions and activities:
differing perspectives, conflict resolution;
disappearing habitat, backyard wildlife habitat;
nocturnal, diurnal; definition of a pest;
mammals: marsupials

Before viewing:

- List the animals that share the area around your home; your neighborhood; your city/town.
- Close your eyes and listen to the sounds in your immediate environment. Categorize them. What sounds might you hear at your home? At night? On the weekend? In different seasons?
- Solicit definitions of a "pest."
- What do we know about possums? *See note.

After viewing:

- Lead students in a summary of the story, so that they arrive at a concise description.
- What is the setting? Describe it from the possum's point of view; from the humans'.
- Who are the characters? What are the problems — for the family; for the possum after the family moved in; for the possum when he was taken to the nature preserve?
- What solution did they arrive at? Are there other ways of solving the problem? Consider pros and cons of different solutions.
- Appoint students to take the roles of the individual family members, the possum, and the pest removal expert. Appoint a panel of interviewers to ask the characters questions about their problems as shown in the video.
- Recall and/or research media coverage of habitat conflict between animals and humans. (One good example concerns bison in Yellowstone Nat'l Park.)
- How might you go about making better habitat for animals in places that people live?

For further inquiry:

The Lorax, Dr. Seuss; *Living with Wildlife*, California Center for Wildlife, Sierra Club Books; web searchwords: backyard wildlife; Australian students' habitat/animal impact website: <http://library.thinkquest.org/10009/>

* *The possum in this story is the Brush-tailed Possum, native to Australia and Tasmania (phalanger family); their North and South American relatives are in the opossum family.*

LOWER ORDERS

Concepts, questions and activities:

what animals need to live; adaptability of animals (urban animals specifically); niches; definition of a pest, food chain; metamorphosis taxonomy, orders/ lower orders; soundtrack/dialogue

Before viewing:

- List adjectives describing insects.
- Definitions: bugs,* insects, pests, chemical controls, biological controls, metamorphosis.
- What do living things need to survive?
- If your students are familiar with *Hatchet*, by Gary Paulsen, ask how the boy in the story adapted his needs to his new environment.

After viewing:

- Outline the story, by scenes (Exterior [EXT]: street; Interior [INT]: critter restaurant, etc.) with a brief description of what happens in each scene. Listen carefully to the AUDIO in the video. What sounds do we hear? Make a column for AUDIO and add the sounds to the story outline.
 - Name the animals and classify them by groups. What different "tools" (adaptations) and characteristics allow them to do things in the story? (cockroach, 'limbo'; rat, gnaw; housefly, fly; frog, snag food with tongue)
 - Discuss the concepts of the food chain and "lower orders."
 - How do the animals in the story work together to solve their common problems? How do the people?
 - Assign groups to come up with dialogue for the characters. You could proceed with class performances, complete with simple props and background music.
 - Discuss characteristics of insects and see if the depiction in the video is accurate (three body parts, three pairs of legs attached to the thorax or middle part). Discuss complete and incomplete metamorphosis. What larval stage did you see? (fly maggots)
 - How did the restaurant solve the problem? What other solutions were there? What benefits and drawbacks do various solutions present?
- P.S. Did anyone notice the newspaper headline? (during the credits)

For further inquiry:

the poems "pity the poor spiders," and "a spider and a fly," from *the lives and times of archy and mehitabel*, Don Marquis; see the comprehensive listing of insect websites:

<http://kidscience.miningco.com/kids/kidscience/msub21.htm>

* We use "bugs" casually, but there is also an order of insects, Hemiptera, or True Bugs (Ex.: shield bugs).

TURTLE WORLD

Make sure you view this through to the very end, after the credits are finished. If you do not, you haven't seen the end of the story, and the video may be unnecessarily disturbing to younger viewers.

Concepts, questions and activities:

civilization, timelines; allegory; elements needed for life; sustainability; Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.

Before viewing:

One approach is to say nothing, but draw the students' attention to a poster showing a photograph of the earth, taken from the moon, then show the video.

After viewing:

- Ask what the video has to do with the image of the earth seen from space. Discuss the meaning of allegory, simile, and metaphor. Mention legends from throughout the world that imagine the origins of life (imagery of a turtle as the world or carrying the world in legends of American Indians, and legends from India).
- Inquire what the video shows about elements needed to give rise to life, and to sustain life.
- Make a timeline showing events in the story. Connect this with stages in civilization: the bare necessities of food and shelter, then the development of aesthetics, as shown here by architecture. You could touch on the human inclination to envy, competition and consumption, if you wish.
- Especially for younger viewers, you might ask about the problem solving that the monkeys engaged in.
- Solicit ideas about the points that the video makes; the advice that it gives; its point of view.
- Mime the saying, "Hear no evil, see no evil..." and ask if they saw this in the video. Replay this scene (@ 7:10). Inquire what it was showing. If you want to get into this, ask how people may react to hearing things they don't want to think are true. Can the viewers make any connections to their lives? to the world?
- Discuss concepts of carrying capacity, sustainability, and overpopulation.

For further inquiry:

"The Big Turtle," in *Spirits, Heroes & Hunters from North American Indian Mythology*, Marion Wood; *Legends of Earth, Air, Fire and Water*, Eric and Tessa Hadley; great websites for schools and teachers, with info and resources related to overpopulation, are: www.dayof6billion.org/ www.zpg.org

CELL ANIMATION

Concepts, questions and activities:

storytelling, imagery, repetition and variation, use of color, exaggeration, irony; meaning of freedom; differing points of views about zoos

Before viewing:

- Solicit different meanings of the word "cell." *See note.
- Ask students to make a simple drawing that illustrates a jail. See what most people draw (probably bars).
- Ask students to write down a color when you say these words: jail; plants.
- Ask them if they know of any stories that use exaggeration. (Many will have studied some tall tales or will be familiar with the concept.)

After viewing:

- Ask students when they saw bars in the video. (We see the man behind bars three times: crib, jail, zoo.) Discuss irony, in which the outcome of events is the opposite of what is expected. (He escapes from jail, only to end up behind bars again.) Ask about different times they saw a shock of stand-up red hair (baby, man, monkey).
- Consider the debate about the role of zoos. Proponents say that: zoos benefit wildlife because animals in zoos serve as ambassadors for their wild kin and help the public learn and care about preservation; zoos engage in conservation projects; zoos help preserve species. Exemplary zoos are now designed with sophisticated habitat duplication in mind. Opponents say that zoos are the equivalent of prisons for animals, and decry abnormal behaviors seen in zoo animals.
- Identify elements of exaggeration in the story (long jail sentence for the offense, skeleton of prisoner, jailer throwing away the key).
- In small groups, identify elements of surprise and humor in the story. Often something that is a surprise is humorous. Can each group come up with two or three?
- Ask about the use of color (much gray in jail, spot of blue in the window; the bright colors of his drawings.)

For further inquiry:

For differing perspectives on zoos: www.animal-lib.org.au/lists/zoo/zoo.html; zoo websites, such as www.zoo.org/ for the Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle; look at the Conservation link.

* As well as the reference both to jail cells and biological cells, there is an animator's pun here, in that the title suggests "cell animation," with "cel" coming from the transparent cellulose acetate used to create layers of animation artwork.

BANJO FROGS

Concepts, questions and activities:

*community, individuality, fitting in; communication within and among species; animal adaptation; frogs (Red-Eyed Tree Frog, *Litoria chloris*; Banjo Frog, *Limnodynastes dumerilii*)*

Before viewing:

- Ask for examples of animals communicating with their own species, and with other species.
- Assess what the class knows about frogs.

After viewing:

- Have students summarize the story, in writing, in two to three sentences, working in groups. Share the results, and ask for opinions about what makes a good summary. (Includes setting, characters, problem/conflict, and action.)
- Elicit or suggest common sayings re individuality and fitting in: "Birds of a feather flock together"; "Marching to the beat of a different drummer." How does the video relate to these?
- Ask for examples of times they felt like the frog.
- Are there any liberties taken with the natural history? Why? If the frogs walk upright, we perceive them as more like humans, and think about how the story applies to humans, which is very common in stories with animals. Think of examples. Also, the frog's tail disappeared very quickly!
- How do animals find each other? For what purposes? (mating, mutual protection, making a community, migration, defending territory...)
- Research/discuss examples of animals learning to communicate with humans (African gray parrots, Bonobos chimps, dolphins, Koko the gorilla learning American Sign Language).

For further inquiry:

The Red Eyed Tree Frog, Joy Cowley; *Mama Don't Allow*, Thatcher Hurd; web search phrases: Exploratorium frogs; Bogert's frog sounds; Pepperberg and Alex; Koko for Kids; Interspecies Communication, Inc.

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Bullfrog Films
(800) 543-3764
PO Box 149 Oley PA 19547
video@bullfrogfilms.com
www.bullfrogfilms.com