

Voices for the Animals

An Easy Prep Lesson for English Teachers
to follow viewing of *The Witness*

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Version

Summary of Activities

After viewing *The Witness*, students break into groups to read and summarize for their group their assigned part of the jigsaw reading, which explores nonhuman animals' inability to speak for themselves and the works of prominent authors who have attempted to give these animals a voice. Students then create their own poem, essay or short story, written in the voice of an animal, based on the animal issues exposed in *The Witness*.

National Standards Addressed

NL-Eng.K-12.4 Communication Skills

Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

NL-Eng.K-12.5 Communication Strategies

Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

Student Objectives

Students will:

- Synthesize information from a film to understand the problems faced by different animals.
- Independently gain additional information from printed text regarding animals' inability to speak for themselves and the works of prominent authors who have attempted to serve as their voice through novels or poetry.
- Communicate information verbally in a group, synthesizing each other's contributions.
- Write a short story, essay or poem to communicate the needs of an animal, written in the animal's voice.

Activity — Day One

Students view *The Witness*. To allow time for the entire film to be introduced and shown, you may need to arrange for students to come a little early to class or stay a little late. Introduce the film very briefly by telling students that they will be using some of what they learn from this film in a writing assignment the next day. Tell them to pay special attention to the problems faced by the animals in the film. Explain to the students that the film tells the story of one person's journey to awareness about animal issues, and that while ultimately hopeful, the story does include some images of animal cruelty. They will be able to tell when these images are coming, and if a particular image is too much, they can close their eyes for a moment.

Activity — Day Two

After viewing *The Witness*, students may want to spend a little time at first just processing what they saw in a general discussion, as most are quite moved by it.

When you think the students are ready to move on, divide the class into groups of five. Give each member of each group one of the parts of the jigsaw reading assignment: <http://www.tribeofheart.org/guides/english-jigsaw.htm> Explain that they are to read their part silently and prepare to summarize it to the group. They may not read it aloud to the group, except that they may choose to read aloud selected quotes (text in italics). Give students about five minutes to read silently and think about their presentation, and then about 20 minutes for the members of the groups to share what they read with each other. Through this exercise, students first are reminded of Eddie's comments about nonhuman animals' inability to express themselves in our language or advocate for themselves. They then learn about the work of prominent authors who have given a voice to animals.

Bring everyone back together. Discuss the reading as a class. You might want to ask students if they can think of other examples of books or movies that have given a voice to animals (e.g., *Watership Down*, *Babe*, *Chicken Run*).

Writing Assignment

Explain to students they are to compose an essay, short story or poem, written in the "voice" of one of the animals portrayed in *The Witness*. In other words, they are to employ the technique used in *Black Beauty* and *Beautiful Joe* and pretend that they are an animal "writing" for a human audience. Students may want to frame their writing as an autobiography, as was done in these two books. If writing an essay, students may argue for different treatment for the animal "writing" the essay. Ask students to include in their writing material a description of the animal's experiences at the hands of humans, his or her feelings about the situation, and what the animal would like humans to do to help. The film should give students good ideas about what messages different animals might want to convey. Below are resources for students who may want more information.

Students will need to complete this assignment at home, or be given additional class time for completion.

Please share some of your students' stories/poems with Tribe of Heart! We will be publishing selected student writings on our web site. After some examples are posted, they will help inspire other students doing this assignment, so please share! You can email material to James LaVeck, Co-Founder and Executive Director, at james@tribeofheart.org.

Learning More – Additional Resources

For students interested in reading some of the source work cited in the jigsaw:

[Black Beauty](http://www.classicbookshelf.com/library/Sewell) online <http://www.classicbookshelf.com/library/Sewell>

[Beautiful Joe](http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/saunders/joe/joe.html) online <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/saunders/joe/joe.html>

[Call of the Wild](http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/London/Writings/CallOfTheWild) online <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/London/Writings/CallOfTheWild>

[Michael, Brother of Jerry](http://www.literature.org/authors/london-jack/michael-brother-of-jerry/index.html) online
<http://www.literature.org/authors/london-jack/michael-brother-of-jerry/index.html>

Below are links to information provided by advocacy groups concerning the problems faced by the animals portrayed in *The Witness*:

Animals Trapped or Ranched for Fur

[Fund for Animals - Fur Facts](http://fundforanimals.ctsg.com/library/documentViewer.asp?ID=77&table=documents) <http://fundforanimals.ctsg.com/library/documentViewer.asp?ID=77&table=documents>

[The Fur Bearers - Fur Trapping Info](http://www.banlegholdtraps.com/home_parent.htm)
http://www.banlegholdtraps.com/home_parent.htm

[Humane Society of the US - Fur Free 2000 Campaign](http://www.hsus.org/current/fur.html)
<http://www.hsus.org/current/fur.html>

[Friends of Animals - Anti-Fur Campaign](http://www.friendsofanimals.org/fur/f1.shtml)
<http://www.friendsofanimals.org/fur/f1.shtml>

Farmed Animals

[Farm Sanctuary - All About Farm Animals](http://www.farmsanctuary.org) <http://www.farmsanctuary.org>

[Mad Cowboy – Cattle Rancher Turned Vegan](http://www.madcowboy.com) <http://www.madcowboy.com>

[Slaughterhouse - Meat Industry Exposé](http://www.friendsofanimals.org/farm/slaugtr.htm)
<http://www.friendsofanimals.org/farm/slaugtr.htm>

Feral Cats and Companion Animals

The Feral Cat Coalition: [Describes the Problem](http://www.feralcat.com) <http://www.feralcat.com>

Feral Cats : Alley Cat Allies [Info Center](http://alleycat.org/ic.html) <http://alleycat.org/ic.html>

Best Friends Animal Sanctuary makes available the following booklets in downloadable PDF format. When you get to the site, look for "downloadables" in the menu on the left. <http://www.bestfriends.org/nmhp/resourcesfrm.htm>

How to Find Homes for Homeless Pets

The Adoption Option

How to Start Your Own Sanctuary

How to Care for Feral Cats

How to Start a Spay/Neuter Program

Below are a series of links about animals who *have* learned to use our language:

Boston Globe article on Alex, the parrot who is learning phonics

<http://pubpages.unh.edu/~jel/video/alex.html>

ABC News: "What is it that elevates human beings above the rest of the animal kingdom? It's getting complicated." More on Alex!

http://abcnews.go.com/onair/CloserLook/wnt_000303_CL_parrot_feature.html

Videos of Koko the gorilla using sign language

<http://www.koko.org/world/kokotv.html>

Article on Roger Fouts' work with Washoe, the chimpanzee who learned signed language and then taught it to her son.

<http://www.animalnews.com/fouts/conversation.htm>

Also read about how chimpanzees communicate in the wild, as documented by Dr. Jane Goodall. <http://www.janegoodall.org/chimps/communication.html>

Students may also be interested in the Great Ape Project, which seeks basic rights for all the great apes. Thus far this project has not been expanded to include other animals. <http://www.greatapeproject.org/gaphome.html>

Evaluation Rubric

Exceeds Standard: An appropriate and effective voice for an animal is apparent in the short story, essay or poem. Student communicates many of the problems faced by one of the animals shown in the film, the impact on the animal, and what people can do to help.

Meets Standard: Story, essay or poem is written in the "voice" of an animal shown in the film. Some of the problems faced by the animal(s) and the impact on the animal are included. There is some indication of what people can do to help.

Does Not Meet Standard: Voice is not appropriate or inconsistent. Problems faced by animal(s) are weakly referenced.