

Orangutanka-A Story in Poems

Author: Margarita Engle

Illustrator: Renee Kurilla

Publisher: Henry Holt, 2015.

Note to educators grades 2-4, ESL and Special Needs students- Can also be used for animal study, animal behavior and orangutan wildlife conservation units. In addition this book can be used in tandem with teacher's efforts to focus young learners on forms of Japanese verse that include numbered syllables. These tanka poems will work well alongside haiku ones.

\*\*\*Can also be integrated in support of STEM Science Teaching Engineering and Mathematics . Highly recommended as a K-1 enrichment and as a STEAM Stem with ARTS (pencil and ink, plus digital coloration) enhancement. This accessible and inherently joyously illustrated work by Engle which focuses on a family of Borneo orangutans ready for a nap in their tree home, also includes a wonderful sharing of humans (in this case the illustrated rangers) and the orangutans can happily coexist. In addition, the factual narrative carried forward through linked poems puts an emphasis on the value of dance and physical movements for the benefit of the orangutans and the caring humans who are providing for them.

Created and developed by Dr. Rose Reissman , Recipient of the Pennsylvania Social Council Award for Curriculum Design-2014, Newmest participant, author of Project Based Literacy (Infoage 2016) and founder of the Writing Institute.

This informational picture book in which Margarita Engle uses tanka ( with an introduction for teachers to help them present this genre to young readers and writers) poems blended with pencil and ink illustrations of Renee Kurilla is an excellent one for grades 2-4 where the educator is seeking to effect the bridge between fictional literature and informational literature. While there are many engaging fictional stories about orangutans, few are research based as was this one for which Engle journeyed to Borneo and visited the Semenggoh Wildlife Centre in Malaysia. With the assistance of these experts steeped in knowledge about orangutans and their perilous survival threatened by the logging of their rain forests to plant palm oil, Engle manages to write an inspiring story that focuses on orangutans familial connections and love of dance movements. Beyond filling the work to the brim and tree branches with the movements of the orangutans , this work subtly advocates for its young readers to join in these dances of celebration. The dances of the rangers support, mimic and celebrate those of the orangutans. Since young readers will not be familiar with all the dance names and styles, this allows this STEM, animal study and nature book to also serve as a teaser for future dance styles study as well.

Before:

Below are a few potential introductory activities the educator may want to do with the entire class or give out as differentiated ones if students read this work from a classroom learning center or library or individuate for students as needed. The work is so rich that there are unlimited introductory activities , these have worked well for the guide author.

1. Pre and post Orangutan Knowledge Survey

While the book seems to be a sweet and engaging story of orangutans napping, eating and dancing their way through tree branches, it in reality imparts many key facts about orangutans that are not familiar to most of its target readers. The best way to focus the students on the acquisition of these true facts as they are also being charmed by the tanka verse is to give the whole group a short Orangutan I(information) Q test to check what true facts they begin the story already knowing and what facts they come out of the story with based on listening and on reading its text or examining the illustrations.

\*\*Note to teacher, some facts are not included in the story and students as individuals or the class as a whole, should be encouraged to look them up after they have finished the story. As the questions are shared have the students note the answers they give and date them. Then after the story is finished being studied, they can return to their first answers to assess what facts they have learned or had expanded by reading Orangutanka.

Be certain to include time for that discussion.

#### Orangutanka IQ

1. Where can you find orangutans today in the world?
2. What kinds of habitats or places to live do orangutans choose?
3. What types of foods do orangutans eat?
4. Do orangutans like to be alone or do they enjoy making friends and being with their families?
5. Are orangutans safe in their homes or are they in danger of losing their homes?
6. What kinds of moves do orangutans enjoy making?

2. Pre- VIEW of Orangutans

Before reading the story teachers might also ask their students to draw pictures of orangutans and discuss what they eat and how they move around and where they think they live.

All of these exercises and notes and drawings can serve pre-assessments of knowledge which students can then return to and compare with Orangutanka facts.

These activities also focus the students independent reading and listening to the work.

During a reading- either the whole class or as prompts for use in a reading center or library:

1. Onomatopoeia- Words we hear- movements that make sounds for our media-  
Ask that students try to capture words/vocabulary they can use in a podcast sound recording or for a video recording of this book. This addresses Common Core focus on science special domain vocabulary and on nuanced word use and on craft words. Among these words might be: hip hop, sway, cha cha cha, rattle, swish, buzz, zoom, hum, flip flop, snap, shiver, rattle, shake and more. Tell them they should also note what images will be needed to draw these sound words. In some classes, students might even be challenged to think about performing the words or illustrating them for a Power Point glossary with audio and illustrations input. They may also be able to create their own personally developed sound effects to mimic the onomatopoeia words or identify public domain sounds effects for a podcast reading of this story as a final media creation inspired by the book.
2. Tanka Poetry Start-  
Engle explains for teachers in a note before the story how tanka strings consist of poems with short long short long long line patterns and loose non-traditional syllable counts. This makes the tanka poetry format extremely accessible to young readers and even potentially one they can “talk” with the teacher recording. The teacher can introduce this type of anchor poetry writing which of course is a Common Core craft writing study and explores a range of writing styles within an informational book, by having the class take one of the Tanka poems say the one where grandma watches the ranger children dance below her tree branch and retell that poem from the point of view of the dancing children or the story could be retold from the view of the butterflies who flit through the narrative.
3. Need to know where can I find the answer or see what this means? Part of inquiry education is asking questions as readers of all ages encounter a word or reference that is somewhat familiar but about which they want to learn more. Encourage the students on their own as a group to ask questions or identify words or references they do not recognize. For example in this work they should raise and the teacher should list on an experiential chart at least five or more questions about the story. Among these might be:
  1. Where geographically does the story take place?
  2. Are the family of orangutans in this story the only ones in that place?
  3. How and why are the ranger children helping and feeding the orangutans?
  4. What exactly does a forest ranger do?
  5. How does one become a forest ranger?
  6. Is it safe for the children to touch the orangutans without adult supervision?
  7. What are the chattering children saying?
  8. Do orangutans dream and if so what do they dream about?

4. ENRICHMENT Since the students will create their own podcast or video treatment of this story and it has so much movement, ask them to consider what types of music could be used to “score” the story. If some of the children are taking musical instrument lessons, they may have ideas as well as those take ballet or jazz. Again the students can research online to identify public domain music that will go well with this story or perhaps compose a song from the taka poetry of Engle.

After:

In addition, to revisiting any of the Before activities so students themselves can assess and express the reading, historical concept, and diagram interpretation skills they learned from this work, teachers might have students create an END PROJECT THEY OWN inspired by this book.

Among potential projects:

Students use their onomatopoeia words and music and sound effects to create a podcast recorded version of this story. In doing so they will be engaged in interpreting the exact words of the text and voicing this visual story. They can also consider whether the illustrated picture book format of this work is more suited to conveying the orangutans’ dance than is the podcast format. This engages them in the Common Core task of comparing and contrasting different media formats for storytelling.

Engle includes a section at the end of the book where she suggests other books and sites that stress the need for students to help save the rainforest habitats that are crucial for orangutan survival. Students can create posters advocating for orangutans and collect or donate money to one of the websites so they can begin to make a difference in this ongoing battle.

Students can develop and add further questions to the Orangutan IQ test survey they took before reading the book and share it with peer and younger grades or parents to raise awareness about the plight of orangutans.

Students can search each week online for a media story or new site which can add to their body of orangutan expertise and they can develop on their class web site or on an outside bulletin board a DO YOU KNOW? Information update plus list sites, causes or ways to write in support of orangutans.

Finally many dance movements are inspired by animal moves. Students who are already taking movement or dance classes, can carefully review the illustrations and “moves” shown in the story and develop their own “Orangatanka” which can be filmed for the school web site and taught to parents and families on family dance. Ultimately as student readers study, engage empathize and dance with the orangutans, they expand their knowledge as animal behaviorists and present and future wildlife conservationists. That’s a string of needed Tanka and real life support that is crucial to students development as readers, writers, and citizens of our natural world.