

## GEORGE SCHALLER'S STRUGGLE TO SAVE THE LAST GREAT BEASTS

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Golden Kite Award, Kirkus starred review, Booklist starred review, Northern California Book Award, NSTA Recommended book, Kirkus Best Book for Young Adults, NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade Book, CCBC Choice, 2009 Cybils Award nominee, Booklist Top Ten Sci-Tech Book for Youth.

1. Ask students to brainstorm reasons animals might become endangered. Save this list and revisit it after reading *A Life in the Wild*. What have they learned that they can add to or change about their list?
2. Ask students to write their own definition for the word *endangered*. Have them consider what it means for an animal to be endangered.
3. Have your students consider how scientists learn about the migratory patterns, social behavior, and feeding habits of animals such as the tiger, gorilla, panda, or snow leopard. What challenges might scientists face while making observations or recording data?
4. Consider visiting a zoo and then have your students research and debate the positive and negative aspects of animals in captivity. After reading *A life in the Wild*, have your students revisit this question.

## A photograph of two wild asses (Equus hemionus) standing in a grassy field. They have brown and white mottled coats and are looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred, hilly landscape.

## CHAPTER 2: GORILLA FOREST

1. How did early scientists describe the gorilla? Did these descriptions match with George's observations?
2. What questions were George and his team hoping to answer by surveying the gorilla habitat in the Belgian Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda?
3. What interesting social behaviors did George observe in gorillas?
4. In what ways did George observe gorilla behavior to be similar or different to human behavior?
5. What feature did George use to tell gorillas apart?

## CHAPTER 3: A CLAN OF TIGERS

1. What famous fictional story was inspired by the area now known as Kanha National Park?
2. What did George learn are the tiger's main food sources? How did he learn this information?
3. What are the tiger's feeding habits? Who gets to eat first? What happens if there is not enough food for all?
4. George found that the tigers were good for the hooved animals in Kanha National Park, even though tigers prey upon these animals. In what way did this benefit the hooved animal population?
5. What threats did George find were facing the tiger population during his research?

## CHAPTER 4: LION COUNTRY

1. What technology did George employ to track nomadic lions when ear tags were not enough? How did he attach this technology to the lions?
2. George studied wild dogs in East Africa. Did hunter's opinions about wild dogs match George's observations of their behavior?
3. George learned that life is not easy for a lion cub. What challenges did he discover these animals face?
4. We learn about Ramses in this chapter. Who is he? Where did George find him, and what became of him as he grew older?
5. What did George Schaller mean by the comment, "Predators are the best wildlife managers?"



## CHAPTER 5: A CAT AMONG THE CLOUDS

1. What challenges did George face during his journey to Shey?
2. Why did George choose to use living, domestic goats to attract a snow leopard? Were his efforts successful?
3. What part of the markhor did George learn hunters prize?
4. What methods did George employ to observe the snow leopard at Shey? Was he successful?
5. Was George able to gather enough data about snow leopards to calculate the size of a leopard's home range? What did he learn about this range?



## CHAPTER 6: PANDA POLITICS

1. What is the panda's "thumb" (or sixth digit)? How does the panda use it?
2. What did George learn is the panda's home range? How do pandas mark their home areas?
3. What information did George use to calculate how many pandas an area of habitat could support? How did George and his team collect this information?
4. Why must pandas keep their stomach constantly full?
5. Describe bamboo's life cycle. What happens to pandas when bamboo flowers?
6. What was the downside of the "Save the Panda" campaign?

## CHAPTER 7: ASSES AND ANTELOPES

1. What wildlife did George observe on the plains of Chang Tang?
2. What are chiru? What did George learn poachers were doing with chiru wool?
3. What is the “Tibetan ibex”?
4. What is shahtoosh? How did governments around the world stop the sale of shahtoosh?
5. What happened on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1993?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Ask students to discuss what they would find to be most challenging and most rewarding about being in the field and conducting similar research to George Schaller’s. Are their feelings the same as George’s? What might he have found most challenging and most rewarding during his work? (RST.6-8.2)
2. In *A Life in the Wild*, Turner writes that the panda was in danger of being “loved to much.” Ask students to discuss what she meant by this phrase, citing examples from the text. Then, have students conduct research and discuss different ways that endangered wildlife can be protected. (W.7.7; W.7.8; RST.6-8.1)
3. In *A Life in the Wild*, George discovers that chiru wool is being sold under a false name. Have students conduct research projects to learn about other instances in which popular products have been misrepresented and what has been done to prevent similar occurrences. Then, have students discuss actions they think would best prevent the sale of products made from endangered species. Task them with referencing information from their research. (W.7.7; W.7.8; RST.6-8.2)
4. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has long been an area of controversy between individuals who feel it should remain protected and others who feel that the United States should drill for oil on its land. Have students conduct research into this topic and then have a debate from both sides. (W.7.7; W.7.8; RST.6-8.2)

## GROUP WORK:

1. Assign groups of students to “follow up” on the regions that George Schaller helped to protect. For example, assign groups to Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, to the Virunga Mountains, to Kanha National Park, Serengeti National Park, Shey Phoksumdo National Park, and the Chang Tang reserve. Have them conduct research on these parks and refuges and create posters with information about their history and the challenges they still face. (W.7.7 ; W.7.8)
2. Task groups of students with designing and implementing a school-wide conservation effort. For example, students could tackle Global warming by creating posters encouraging students and teachers to bring water bottles to school rather than buying bottled water. Or, they could host a bake-sale to raise money (and awareness) for a conservation effort of their choice.

## WRITING AND RESEARCH

1. Task students with conducting research and writing a paper about a conservationist of their choice, such as Olaus Murie, George Schaller, Sir David Attenborough, or Jane Goodall. Task them with citing sources and clearly summarizing, not copying, important information. (W.7.7; W.7.8; RST.6-8.1)
2. Take your students to the park or playground and encourage each child observe a nearby animal. Your students might observe ants, a chipmunk, or birds in the trees. Have them take notes on the animal’s behavior and social interactions, the animal’s response to unknown stimuli, and the animal’s feeding habits. You might also have each student use local field guides or internet resources to identify the species by both its common name and its scientific name. (RI.6.7)
3. Use George Schaller’s adventures as a jumping off point for your students to write their own creative short stories about traveling to an unknown place. Students could choose to write their stories in first, second, or third person. Or, they could write the same story from all three perspectives as a way to see how their story changes as the voice changes. (RST.6-8.1)



## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

1. Have students create sculptures of an endangered animal of their choice. When done, consider displaying their work as part of a school-wide conservation project.
2. Task students with writing poems about the animals described in *A Life in the Wild* (RST.6-8.1)
3. Choose an ecosystem to focus on and then have students paint a mural of the animals living in that ecosystem. Your students can help paint the background of the mural. Then each student can be assigned an animal to paint. Consider auctioning off the mural as a way to raise money for a conservation effort of your student's choice.

## MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

*Champions of the Wild: Mountain Gorillas.*  
Omni Film Productions, 2000.

*Mountain Gorilla.* National Geographic IMAX  
movie, Warner Home Video, 1991.

*Mountains of the Snow Leopard.* Survival  
Anglia, 1994.

*Planet Earth.* BBC Warner, 2007. (episodes  
"From Pole to Pole;" "Mountains;" "Great  
Plains;" "Seasonal Forests;" "Saving  
Species;" "Into the Wilderness" and "Living  
together."

*Save the Panda.* National Geographic Society,  
Washington, D.C. 1984

*Silent Roar: Searching for the Snow Leopard.*  
Nature Video Library, Thirteen/WNET New York  
and Wild Wise Ltd., 2005.



## INTERNET RESOURCES

The Wildlife Conservation Society: [www.wcs.org](http://www.wcs.org)

Teens for Planet Earth: [www.teensforplanetearth.org](http://www.teensforplanetearth.org)

The Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project: <http://mgvp.org>

Project Lifelion: [www.lionresearch.org](http://www.lionresearch.org)

Snow Leopard Trust: [www.snowleopard.org](http://www.snowleopard.org)

Snow Leopard Conservancy: [www.snowleopardconservancy.org](http://www.snowleopardconservancy.org)

Panthera: [www.panthera.org](http://www.panthera.org)

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RST.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or conclusions of a text; provide accurate summary of the text distinct from prior knowledge or opinions

CC.ELA-Literacy.R1.6.7 Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.R1.6.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (A single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences

CCSS.ELA.RST.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of science and technical texts.