

LEMURS ARE CULTURAL CREATURES

4-5TH GRADE
LANGUAGE ARTS, SCIENCE, ART

Learning Goals: Students know how different people and cultures view lemurs and are able to compare their own myths and views of wildlife.

Students will be able to:

- Explore the ways in which people view lemurs
- Describe the impact of culture on the way humans view wildlife
- Identify specific human actions that affect lemurs and other wildlife

- Distinguish between facts and myth pertaining to lemurs as well as wildlife in their own communities

Materials needed:

- Resources such as books and computer with Internet access to research the animals
- Pens, pencils or markers
- Index cards—6 cards per student
- Optional game elements such as a bell, flyswatter, ball etc. to play the Animal Fact or Fiction game

LESSON DESCRIPTION

After reading *Ako the Aye-Aye*, students learn about Malagasy myths involving two kinds of lemur. They then research myths about particular animals in their own community. From this research, they try to determine what is fact and what is fiction about local wildlife by playing a quiz show style game.

TWO
1 HOUR
ACTIVITIES

MADAGASCAR'S PEOPLE AND PLACES

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Folklore refers to the traditional beliefs, myths, tales, and practices of a culture which have been passed from generation to generation. While folklore is typically shared through word of mouth, it can be written as well. A folk tale is a legend or story that is part of an oral tradition. They usually encompass universal themes and are a way for people to make sense of the world around them. American folklore includes tales of Paul Bunyan, Davy Crockett, John Henry, Pecos Bill and Casey Jones. In Madagascar, it is common for folklore to focus on local animal species and lemurs in particular. These folk tales have inspired local people to have a wide range of views toward lemurs—from reverence and protection to fear.

FOR BACKGROUND
INFORMATION SEE:

*MADAGASCAR'S
PEOPLE AND PLACES*

Ako the Aye-Aye



FEATURED BOOK:
AKO THE AYE-AYE

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The Indri—Locally, the indri is known as the *babakoto* which means little father or ancestor of man. Many indri legends establish a close relationship between the indri and humans. In some regions it is believed that humans began with an indri. One story tells of two brothers who lived together in the forest until one of them decided to leave and cultivate the land. That brother became the first human



and the brother who stayed in the forest became the first indri. Today the indri cries in mourning for his brother who went astray.

Another legend tells of a man who went hunting in the forest and did not return. His absence worried his son, who went out looking for him. When the son also disappeared, the rest of the villagers ventured into the forest seeking the two but discovered only two large lemurs sitting in the trees: the first indri.

Since the indri resembles their ancestors, it is revered and protected by *fady* (taboo) in some areas where these stories are told. They are traditionally treated as a sacred animal and protected from hunting and harm.

The Aye Aye—While the human-like characteristic of the indri inspires reverence, the odd physical characteristics of the aye-aye more often inspire fear. This strange looking, timid lemur species usually hides in forest canopies under the cover of night. With its wide orange eyes, large ears, catlike face, giant grasping hands,

rat-like front teeth and long bushy tail it is easy to see why there are many local taboos



surrounding the aye-aye. In earlier times, the aye-aye was considered *fady* and today the appearance of an aye-aye in some regions of the island is seen as an omen of death, sickness and bad

ANALYTICAL WRITING

Think about the culture of people in Madagascar; now compare that culture to your culture. How are we the same and how are we different? Write a letter to a person living in Madagascar and explain your culture.

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luck. In some Malagasy folklore the aye-aye plays an important role as the magical keeper of the forest. Some believe that if you sleep out in the forest an aye-aye will prepare you a cushion of grass. If the aye-aye places the cushion under your head as you sleep, you will receive good luck and great riches. However, if it is placed under your feet you will become ill and fall prey to the magic of sorcerers and bad luck. Some believe that if you kill an aye-aye you will die within the year. Others believe that if you see an aye-aye someone close to them will die or if it is seen in a village, someone in the village will, too. Some even believe that aye-ayes break into houses murdering the occupants with their elongated finger. These people kill aye-ayes whenever they see them.

Luckily aye-ayes are usually very timid and hide in the deepest parts of the forest. Unfortunately these forests are quickly disappearing. Aye-ayes are forced to come out of the forests and compete with farmers for food by stealing coconuts and cane sugar. Some island residents have responded by killing aye-ayes whenever they see them, due to fears and beliefs and to reduce competition for crops. In truth, the aye-ayes strange characteristics—large, orange eyes, large ears, long chisel-like incisors and elongated finger—are adaptations that help the aye-aye survive.

READ AND DISCUSS

1. Read *Ako the Aye-Aye* to the students or instruct the students to read the story independently. Ask students to note the different views expressed by the forester, local resident and tourist as they read or listen to the story.
2. After the students complete the story, discuss their varying viewpoints as a class. Why were their views and feelings about aye-ayes so different? Which of the views do they think were based on fact and which were based on fiction?
3. Review the background information about lemur myths with the class.

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4. Are there any other animals that are feared due to myths, folk tales and misinformation? With the class create a list of animals that like the lemur suffer from a bad reputation due to myths and folk tales. Discuss why people might have negative feelings towards these animals. Are these feelings made based on facts or fiction (myths, folk tales and beliefs)? How can we tell the difference?
5. Explain that cultures around the world often base their views about animals on folk tales and myths. This can influence conservation efforts and the species ability to survive. In the U.S., animals such as wolves, bats, sharks and snakes are just some of the species that have faced persecution due to folk tales, myths and negative beliefs. In Madagascar there are folk tales surrounding lemurs that also impact their conservation.
6. Explain that the students will research lemurs and other species that have been the subject of myths. During their research they will look for myths and beliefs about their animal, both positive and negative, and how these have shaped people's views of it. They will also research facts about their animal. Do the facts support or dispel the myths and beliefs? When their research is complete they will share their information with the class in a game show format.

THE ACTIVITY

1. Assign each student an animal species from the list below or allow them to select their own. The cards can easily be adapted to your favorite class game. Be creative!

Lemur	Wolf	Rat	Crow	Vulture	Snake
Frog	Owl	Opossum	Coyote	Earthworm	Spider
Toad	Ostrich	Alligator	Cockroach	Shark	Daddy Long-legs
Bat	Insect	Cat	Bee	Skunk	Mouse

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2. Provide students with research time and resources. Distribute 6 index cards and markers to each student.
3. Once the students have completed their research, instruct them to select 6 pieces of information from their research – 3 facts and 3 myths or fictional statements – and clearly write one on each card.

Below the statement, students should also include the correct answer (fact or fiction) and a brief explanation of their answer. Remind students to write clearly so the information can be read aloud. During the game the contestant will decide whether or not each statement is fact or fiction. After the students have completed filling out their cards, collect them to be used as game cards and be sure to mix them up within the stack.

4. Play Animal Fact or Fiction. This game can be played in just about any game show format. One option is to turn it into a “Flyswatter Showdown!” The class can be split into two groups. Before you start, draw a line down the center of the blackboard. Then, write both “fact” and “fiction” on each side of the board. Each group will send one student up to the board. The chosen students will each grab a flyswatter and wait for the statement to be read aloud by the teacher. Read the statement aloud and have each student swat the correct word: “fact” if the statement is true, “fiction” if the statement is false.

OR, Grab a ball and shoot some hoops! Divide the class into at least two groups and give each group a dry erase board. The teacher reads the statement and the groups get a chance to discuss their answers. They must then write their answers (fact or fiction) on the dry erase board. All groups reveal their answers and give a short explanation as to why they think that they have the correct answer. Any groups with the correct answer get a chance to shoot a ball into a basket for a point.

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WRAP-UP

Complete the activity with a wrap-up discussion. Use the following questions to guide you:

- Were there any answers that were particularly surprising?
- Why were you surprised?
- Why and how are animal myths and folk tales perpetuated?
- Can you think of movies or books that contain any of the false statements included in the game?
- During your research how did you determine which of the information was fact and which was fiction?
- Did hearing animal facts change your original view of the animal?
- Did your original views towards any of the animals change after hearing the presentations? If so why?
- During your research did you discover any species that were threatened in the U.S. in part due to fear and misconceptions? (Wolves, bats and rattlesnakes are examples.)

EVALUATION

Ask students to explain what is fact and what is fiction, how to tell the difference, and why it can sometimes be challenging to know the difference.

THIS ACTIVITY MEETS THE FOLLOWING NATIONAL AND FLORIDA EDUCATION STANDARDS

FLORIDA STATE STANDARDS

4th Grade Science

SC.4.L.17.2
SC.4.L.17.4
SC.4.N.1.1
SC.4.N.1.7

4th Grade Language Arts

LAFS.4.RI.1.1
LAFS.4.RL.1.1
LAFS.4.RL.3.9

5th Grade Science

SC.5.L.14.2
SC.5.L.15.1
SC.5.L.17.1
SC.5.N.1.6

5th Grade Language Arts

LAFS.5.RI.1.1
LAFS.5.RI.1.3
LAFS.5.W.3.7
LAFS.K12.W.1.2
LAFS.K12.W.3.8

NATIONAL SCIENCE STANDARDS

4th Grade

Characteristics of organisms
Organisms and environments
Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry
Understanding about scientific inquiry
Characteristics and changes in populations
Changes in environments
Form and Function

5th Grade

Structure and function in living systems
Regulation and behavior
Populations and ecosystems
Diversity and adaptations of organisms
Populations, resources and environments
Natural Hazards
Risks and Benefits
Evolution and Equilibrium
Form and Function
Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry
Understanding about scientific inquiry

NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS

4th Grade: Structure, Function, and Information Processing (4-LS1-1)

5th Grade: Earth's Systems (5-ESS3-1)

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