
SAM THE SEA COW

Author: Francine Jacobs

Illustrator: Laura Kelly

Publisher: Walker and Company

THEME:

Many people are working hard to help save and protect manatees.

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

This is a true story about Sam the manatee who was rescued and nursed back to health after he got stuck in a sewer drain.

LeVar travels to Sea World in Florida for a closer look at manatees. He explores their natural habitat and assists Sea World staff as they nurse and return one to the wild. Then he tours a wetland wildlife refuge on an airboat and finds out why wetlands are important to manatees and other animals.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Discuss the concept of endangered animals and the importance of animals to the balance of life on earth. Imagine what the world would be like if some of these animals became extinct.

Before viewing the program, ask students what they know about manatees. Obtain a copy of the book and show them the cover illustration. Discuss why a manatee might be referred to as a “sea cow.”

After viewing the program, discuss with the students why a manatee is called a “gentle giant.”

Talk about why, when animals that have grown up in the wild have been hurt, it is important for them to be released back into their natural habitat once they are healthy again.

CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Brainstorm with students a list of facts about manatees that they learned from the video. Use the list as a basis for additional questions they have about these animals. With the assistance of the library media specialist, have students research manatees to find the answers to their questions. The Florida Power and Light Company has an on-line booklet, “The West Indian Manatee in Florida,” a comprehensive source of information about the behaviors and habitat of manatees, reasons for endangerment, and efforts to save them. It is available at the following URL: <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/psm/webpages/booklet.html>

A manatee is a mammal. Discuss characteristics that make an animal a mammal. Brainstorm a list of mammals. Categorize the list into mammals that live on land, in the water, and in the air. Land mammals can be further categorized by habitat, e.g., desert, rain forest, polar regions, etc.

A young manatee is called a “calf.” Have students identify other animals whose young is referred to as a “calf.” (These include: buffalo, camel, dolphin, elephant, giraffe, rhinoceros, and whale.) To further expand animal-related vocabulary, explore other terms for baby animals.

At the end of the program, LeVar visits a wildlife refuge. Discuss with students their assumptions about the purpose of a refuge. Invite a wildlife expert (possibly someone from a state wildlife or parks commission) into the classroom to describe local efforts to preserve wild animal life and habitats.

Obtain a copy of the **Reading Rainbow** feature book, *Humphrey the Lost Whale: A True Story* by Wendy Tokuda and Richard Hall. Compare and contrast this story with *Sam the Sea Cow*, which was also based on an actual happening. In particular, have students notice the similarities and differences in the two rescue efforts.

Have students research other large ocean animals (e.g., whales, sharks, dolphins, etc.) and make a chart of size comparisons. Set up the chart with a picture and statistics (length and weight) of the largest animal at the top and record information in descending order.

Based on what they learned about manatees from the program, have students brainstorm a list of words that describe the behaviors and personality of a manatee, e.g., shy, curious, gentle, friendly, etc. Have them think of other animals that share any or all of these characteristics.

Locate Florida on a map of the United States. Have students investigate other animals that are commonly found in different parts of Florida. Discuss aspects of the climate and geography of Florida that make it an ideal habitat for these animals.

Make a dictionary of endangered animals. Start with animals whose endangered status is already familiar to students. Have them research a set of basic information for each one, such as name of the animal, where it lives, reasons for endangerment, and efforts to preserve it, and record what they find on a prepared sheet. Have students illustrate the dictionary pages with magazine pictures or sketches. Discuss how dictionaries are organized alphabetically. Bind the dictionary so that pages can be added as students learn about new animals.

RELATED THEMES:

ecology
ocean habitat
animals and their young

RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:

Program #99 — And Still The Turtle Watched
Program #56 — Humphrey The Lost Whale: A True Story
Program #98 — Is This A House For Hermit Crab?
Program #67 — Jack, The Seal And The Sea
Program #88 — Seashore Surprises

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Francine Jacobs grew up on the shore of Long Island, New York, and many of her books relate to the sea and its creatures. *Sam the Sea Cow* was inspired by an incident on a fishing trip in one of Florida's coastal rivers when a manatee popped up its head next to her boat.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:

Laura Kelly owns and operates her own design and illustration business and lives in the mountains near Los Angeles with her husband.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:

MANATEES
by Emilie U. Lepthien (Children's Press)

10 THINGS I KNOW BOOKS
by Wendy Wax and Della Rowland, illus. by Thomas Payne (Calico Books)

WILL WE MISS THEM? ENDANGERED SPECIES
by Alexandra Wright, illus. by Marshall Peck III (Charlesbridge Publishing)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

JACK, THE SEAL AND THE SEA
by Gerald Aschenbrenner, English adaptation by Joanne Fink (Silver Burdett)

HEY! GET OFF OUR TRAIN
by John Burningham (Crown Publishers)

MANATEE ON LOCATION
by Kathy Darling, photos by Tara Darling (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard)

AARDVARKS, DISEMBARK!
by Ann Jonas (Greenwillow)

WORLD WATER WATCH
by Michelle Koch (Greenwillow)

V FOR VANISHING

by Patricia Mullins (HarperCollins)

MANATEES

by Sarah Palmer (Rourke)

THE MANATEE

by Alvin, Virginia & Robert Silverstein and Laura Silverstein Nunn (Millbrook)

HUMPHREY THE LOST WHALE: A TRUE STORY

by Wendy Tokuda and Richard Hall, illus by Hanako Wakiyama (Heian International)

NO DODOS

by Amanda Wallwork (Scholastic)

A PINKY IS A BABY MOUSE

by Pam Muñoz Ryan, illus by Diane deGroat (Hyperion)

**READING RAINBOW TEACHER'S GUIDE**

Program #83 — Sam the Sea Cow

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