

LESSON: Understanding Gorilla Talk

Story Reference: *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Humane Heroes Volume I*, Story 6, "Creating a Happy Gorilla Family"

Lesson Description: Students read a story about the dynamics of a young gorilla family as it comes to accept four new baby gorillas who have arrived from other zoos. Through this story of inclusion and acceptance, students observe the power of nonverbal communication among gorillas. Students identify the careful methods caregivers at the American Humane Conservation-certified Pittsburgh Zoo used when introducing new animals to existing animal families and the cooperation that occurred between various zoological institutions in order to find a new home for the baby gorillas. In addition, students practice nonverbal communication in a role-playing exercise.

ELA Alignment:

- Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

Lesson Objectives:

- Determine how animals and humans express their feelings through nonverbal communication.
- Identify similarities in the ways that human families and animal families care for each other.

Materials:

- Notebook paper for taking notes
- Sticky notes (three per student)

Resource Links:

- "Creating a Happy Gorilla Family" additional online resources:
<http://www.chickensoup.com/ah/volume-1/story-6>

Introduction: Define "Humane" (7 minutes)

- Introduce the story by telling students they will read about animal caregivers who are considered Humane Heroes.
- Have each student individually write down his or her definition of the word "humane." Ask the class what they notice about this word. (Encourage students to recognize the "human" in the word "humane.")
- Discuss whether the word "humane" applies only to interactions between humans.

Read and Analyze: Explain the procedures in animal introduction and observation (15 minutes)

- Prior to reading “Creating a Happy Gorilla Family,” hand out a sheet of paper for note-taking to each student. Tell students that as they read they should write notes on what the caregivers did to ensure that the baby gorillas would be welcomed by their new gorilla family.
- After reading the story, ask students to create a list of behaviors that helped the caregivers understand how the gorillas responded to each other.
- Lead a discussion with the following questions:
 - *How did the baby gorillas show their feelings in the beginning of the story?*
 - *How did Mimbo respond to the new baby gorillas? How did he show his feelings toward them?*
 - *What are other ways the gorillas may have responded to each other?*
 - *How did the caregivers “listen” to the gorillas?*

Guided Practice: Role-play a gorilla family unit receiving a newcomer (15 minutes)

- After reading the story, ask students the following questions:
 - *Why was it necessary to take extra safety precautions when introducing the baby gorillas to the established gorilla family?*
 - *What were some of the risks?*
 - *How was the role of the caregiver critical to the introduction process?*
- Tell the students that they will have an opportunity to demonstrate how new animals might be introduced to an established family unit. Organize students into groups of five to seven. Have each group divide themselves up into the following roles: one group member will play the role of a newcomer gorilla, one group member will play the role of an animal caregiver, and the rest of the members will act as an established gorilla family. The student groups will use actions instead of words to role-play the process of the newcomer’s introduction to the family. After the role-play, direct students to discuss the following questions:
 - *How did the gorillas show they were friendly, welcoming, angry, or threatened?*
 - *In what ways are human families and gorilla families similar? In what ways are they different?*

Closing: Humane Heroes (8 minutes)

- Remind students that they each defined the word “humane” at the beginning of the lesson. Ask the students to go back and read their definitions.
- Give each student three sticky notes and ask students write on each sticky note one reason why the caregivers at the Pittsburgh Zoo are humane heroes.
- Once students are finished, invite them to share their reasons with the class.