

Putting News in Context Seeing the Big Picture

Teacher Andrew Ragan calls articles such as “Saving Africa’s Gorillas” (pp. 6-7) “kid magnets.” Students zero in on them because of their subject matter, the images, and the dilemma—in this case, animals, extinction, and habitat destruction. He uses students’ heightened interest in such topics to generate lively class discussions, fun activities, and student action.

Ragan teaches American history and current events to seventh- and eighth-graders at Allendale Columbia School in Rochester, New York.



Andrew Ragan

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OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- build a classwide knowledge base on gorillas by sharing information
- draw conclusions about gorilla habitat and reinforce geography skills
- compare per capita GDP to make deductions about the plight of African gorillas
- analyze information in the article, perform additional research, and strengthen writing and presentation skills

#1: Brainstorm to Build a Knowledge Base

Before reading “Saving Africa’s Gorillas,” ask students to share their knowledge about gorillas. Write responses on the board. Use prompts to establish location, food, habitat, gorilla types, characteristics, and cool facts. Announce that this lesson will focus on mountain gorillas.

#2: Extrapolate From Geography

Use Google Earth or a topographical map of Africa to “fly” to the Virunga Mountains (on the bor-

ders of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda). Explain that most remaining mountain gorillas live in this area. Can students draw conclusions about the mountain gorilla’s habitat from the images or the topographical map? (high elevation, heavy vegetation, rain forest)

#3: Speculate Using Statistics

Have students use *JS’s World Affairs Atlas & Almanac* (Oct. 13 & 20, 2008) to find the per capita GDP of the DRC (\$300), Rwanda (\$900), and Uganda (\$900). How do these numbers compare with those of other African nations? (lower than most) What might cause such extreme poverty? (natural disasters, drought, overpopulation, war, etc.) What effect might such poverty have on gorilla populations?

#4: Make Comparisons

After reading the article, have students compare their knowledge about gorillas with the facts in the story. Any surprises? What did students get right from their earlier deductions about mountain

gorillas? What surprised them the most? Discuss other aspects of the article you wish to emphasize.

#5: Visit Mountain Gorillas

Bring mountain gorillas to life in your classroom by using video, DVDs, or online video clips. See “Useful URLs” at scholastic.com/juniorscholastic for video or check your local library for DVDs.

#6: Take Action

A handful of organizations provide aid for mountain gorillas and other great apes. After receiving your administration’s approval, have students research the various groups and choose one to support with a fund-raising activity (car wash, returnable can-and-bottle campaign, penny collection). Some organizations to check out include:

- African Wildlife Foundation
- Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International
- International Gorilla Conservation Programme
- Wildlife Conservation Society (Web sites for all these organizations are listed in “Useful URLs” at scholastic.com/juniorscholastic.)