

Animal Menagerie

- animal poetry
- description
- alliteration
- structured writing

A Lower KS2 Activity by Roger Stevens



Home for Nervous Newts

In Norris Nutshell's Home for Nervous Newts
You will find
Nigel Newt, hiding under a rock
Norman Newt, swimming all alone
Narissa Newt
Reading a book
Nigella Newt, cooking a meal for one
And Frank Frog
Wondering how he got into this poem by mistake

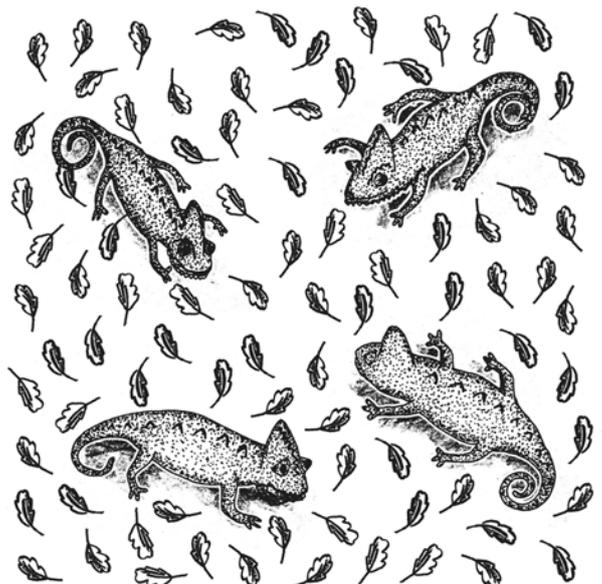
Roger Stevens



Chameleon Enclosure

In Camilla Cupcake's Chameleon Enclosure
You will find
Cathy Chameleon
Constance Chameleon
Colin Chameleon
And Chloe Chameleon
But only if you look
Really
Really
Hard

Roger Stevens



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Most children love animal poems, so this activity is ideal for lower juniors. It's also easily adapted to different ages and abilities; I've used it successfully with less confident children from Year 2 to gifted and talented pupils in Year 6. It's easy to deliver and needs no advance preparation.

Getting started

On the board or on a flip chart write 'In Mr Magoo's Amazing Zoo you will find...'

Beneath this, draw a line down the middle of the board and ask the class to suggest an animal that might be found in a zoo. Write the suggestion in the right hand column. Ask for five more suggestions and encourage some variety rather than, say, six different kinds of big cat.

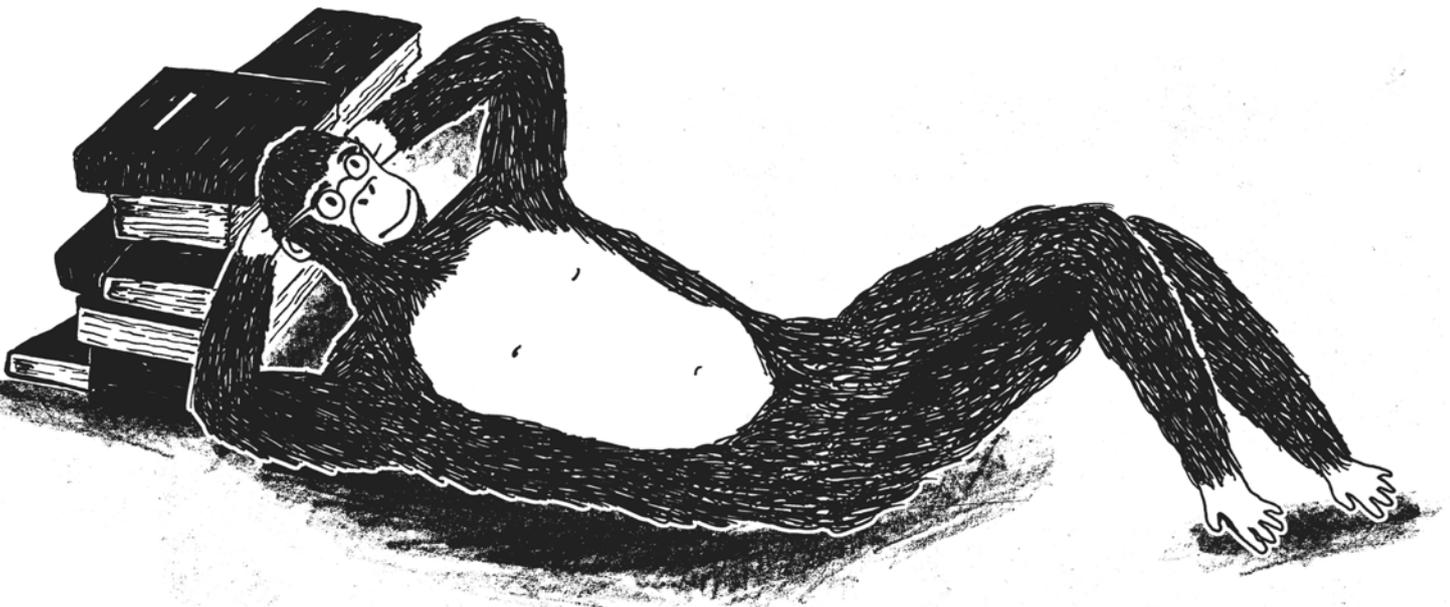
Now ask the class for an adjective to go with each animal. Write down the first adjectives the children give rather than prompting them for interesting ones. You're going to make

You should now have something like this:

Silly	Monkey
Lazy	Lion
Tall	Giraffe
Eight-legged	Octopus
Slithery	Snake
Ferocious	Rhinoceros

Explain that together everyone in the class has written a poem!

*In Mr Magoo's Amazing Zoo you will find
A silly monkey
A lazy lion
A tall giraffe
An eight-legged octopus
A slithery snake
And a ferocious rhinoceros*





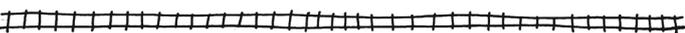
Now ask the children if they agree that the poem is actually rather boring and challenge them to think of ways to make it more interesting.

Discuss ways to do this with the class. The children's ideas will, to a degree, depend upon their age, ability and confidence. Ask them to suggest new adjectives. At first, ideas may be slow in coming and you may have to prompt them. Suggest that a 'tall' giraffe is not very interesting because it's very obvious. Of course giraffes are tall, just as elephants are big, or lions are fierce. Can they think of more interesting adjectives?

You could suggest that the children use alliteration (already employed in the list above in 'lazy lion', 'slithery snake'). Where appropriate, change or improve what you have already written on the board. Now we may have... a 'mischievous monkey', a 'lazy lion', a 'ginormous giraffe', an 'oily octopus', a 'slithery snake' and a 'bored bear'.

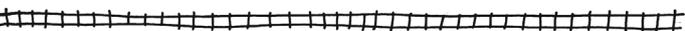
Other suggestions might be:

- To think of other human-built places where animals might be found. For example, Mr Magoo's Pet Shop, Farm, Safari Park and so on. The animals the children choose would need to fit the new theme.
- To change Mr Magoo's name. How about Peter Porter's Pet Shop or Fenella Fortune's Farm?
- Rather than keeping just the name of the animal and its description, to give it something to do as well. For example, 'A mischievous monkey swinging from a tyre', 'a lazy lion lying in the sun'.



Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of the same sounds at the beginning of words. Remember: it's the sound that makes something alliterative, not the letter e.g. a kicking cat.



Writing the poem

Now ask the children to have a go at writing their own poem. Remind them that this is a first draft and that they shouldn't worry about neatness and spelling at this stage (that will be important later) but just to concentrate on their ideas. Make sure they understand the instructions below (especially that they think of a list of animals before moving on to think of adjectives) and ask them to:

- Think of where the poem will take place (zoo, pet shop, farm, etc).
- Make up the owner's name (Mr Magoo, Professor Plum, Betty Butler, etc) or use their own name in an interesting way (Anielka's Aquarium, Lou's Zoo, Dabbah's Home for Lost Dogs).
- Draw lines down the page to make an appropriate table.
- Decide which six animals they want to use and write them in the right-hand column.
- Add the adjectives in the left-hand column and go on from there, adding activities if they want to in subsequent columns, depending on how detailed you want the poem to be.

Once you and they are happy with the poem, write it out neatly on paper or in a book they can keep.

Developing this idea

As well as being run quite comfortably with Year Two children, this activity could be developed for use with more confident, more able or older children. Here are a few suggestions.

- List more than six animals.
- Find more than one adjective for each animal.
- Have the animals doing more than one activity.
- Create different descriptions and activities but for the same type of animal (like my chameleon enclosure and nervous newts).
- Use numbers. Ask the class to remember when they were toddlers and read lots of picture books to teach them to count. Maybe they have younger brothers and sisters who read these picture books.

You might end up with something like:

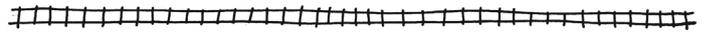
One mischievous monkey

Two tired toads

Three thoughtful thrushes...

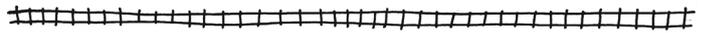
- Use rhyme. This can be quite tricky for some children, but encourage them to try if they want to. Discourage them from using a word just because it rhymes. Explain that it has to make sense, too. They might find it easier to find rhymes for the actions of the animals, rather than their actual names.
- Use simile or metaphor, for example 'a rhino like a runaway tank', 'a boulder of a bear'.

You will have other ideas. And so will your class. One of the delights of this activity is that pupils will often come up with suggestions that you haven't thought of. I was doing the activity with some very bright Year Fives and one of them decided to list 26 animals, arranged alphabetically. Ingenious!



Metaphor

A metaphor is a phrase that describes something by stating that it is something else: e.g. the traffic jam is a snail moving down the road.



Now try this

For making and adapting list poems: 'Ten Things Found In A Wizard's Pocket' by Ian McMillan and 'Younger Brother' by Trevor Millum. Both found in *The Works*, Ed. Paul Cookson (Macmillan Children's Books, 2010).

A more widely used example is 'The Magic Box' by Kit Wright from *The Magic Box: Poems for Children* by Kit Wright (Macmillan Children's Books, 2013).



POET'S TIP

The poem examples for this activity show how you can play with this format and have fun. Yes, you can use poetry for teaching alliteration, simile, metaphor and spelling – it is a useful tool for all of that – but I believe playing with poetry is of far greater value. From working with classes over the years I have seen that it motivates children to read and write and builds their confidence in using language. So do bear in mind that activities like this one should, above everything, be fun.