



Teacher's Notes *Why?* by Lila Prap

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1. About the book

'Why?' is perhaps the most common question to come from a child's lips. Lila Prap's innovative and entertaining picture book directs this question to 14 animals and their individual quirks: why are they the way that they are?

Prap provides both playful and scientific answers, encouraging children to have fun while they learn, and in the process providing teachers and parents with plenty of learning activities that can be both amusing and productive.

Central to the spirit of the book are Prap's distinctive pastel-on-black-paper drawings, which have received acclaim across Europe, where her books have been translated into several languages.

2. Notes for teachers and parents by Alison Mitchell (Chelsea Heights Primary School, Victoria)

This book is great for young children and could very easily be used for a whole class focus, small group guided or shared reading session, or with individual children. The book lends itself to plenty of open discussion and encourages children to think about why animals are the way they are.

Why? is terrific for children who have trouble posing questions or those children who struggle to come up with imaginative answers to simple questions.

Here are some ideas for activities you could use, which I have based for use in a Literacy Program, such as the Early Years Program. They could also be used for an Integrated Studies unit on animals. I have included some worksheets, which may be reproduced for classroom use.

POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES

Before you open the book

1. Look at the cover. Ask 'what could this book be about?'
2. Encourage children to talk about the picture.
3. Discuss the meaning of fiction and non-fiction. Which do they think it is? Why?
4. What is the question mark symbol? When do we use question marks?
5. Who is the author? Who is the illustrator?
6. Look at the pictures on the endpapers inside the cover – 'what do you notice?' Discuss what they might mean. 'Do they give you a clue as to what the book may be about?'

The style and layout of the book

1. Flip through the book (without reading) and focus on the layout:
 - 'What are some of the features you notice?'
 - 'Are all the pages set out the same?'
 - 'How is the structure of this book different to other books you may have read?'
 - 'How is it the same?'
2. Look at the pictures:
 - 'How have they been made?'
 - 'Do the pictures look real?'
 - 'Are all the features of the animals correct?'
3. Discuss what pastel drawings are:
 - 'Why do you think Lila Prap chose to illustrate the book this way?'
 - 'Would the book be as interesting if photos were used instead of drawings?'
 - 'What are some other ways illustrations are made in books?'
4. Ask students to make their own picture of an animal. Can they present it in an interesting way?
5. Children could attempt their own pastel drawing on black paper.

Building on prior knowledge

1. Discuss the animals. Have the children ever seen one of these animals in real life? Where?
2. Where do you think we could find these animals?
3. Use the internet or library to research one of the animals and make a poster.
4. Read *Why?* as an introduction, or a conclusion to a unit on animals. It would be a great book to read before or after an excursion to a zoo or animal park.

5. Ask students to create brainstorm sheets for what they know about one of the animals in the book before they read it, or alternatively for another animal after reading the book. They could divide a poster page in half with a heading on each side 'What I already know', 'What I'd like to know'. They could add later - 'what I found out'.
6. A game (for children who have not read the book previously). One child reads the question aloud and then reads the possible answers (not in any particular order) including the scientific reason. The other child/ren have to guess which one is the true (scientific) explanation. The children then share their own ideas.

Using the content in the book

1. Make a cloze activity using the scientific explanations from some of the pages. (Sample Worksheet A included).
2. Make a comprehension sheet whereby the children need to read through the scientific answers thoroughly to find each answer. (Sample Worksheet B included)
3. Photocopy the questions and answers in the book, cut them out and mix up. Paste each question onto a separate sheet of paper and ask the children to stick the answers under the question they think it belongs with. You could use portions of the scientific answers in the same way.
4. Use words from the book in a weekly spelling list. Play spelling games using the animal names, e.g. unjumble the animal names, find rhyming words, look up the meanings etc. (Sample Worksheet C included)
5. Ask students to list any words they didn't know before they read the book (e.g. acacia, sunning, withered, independent etc.) and have them make a glossary of terms. Choose some words the children may be less familiar with and have them look up the meaning and use in a new sentence.
6. List or categorise words from the book (depending on the age group using the book), e.g. list all the double letter words in the book; find as many nouns, adjectives, verbs etc. as you can.
7. Copy some of the sentences and highlight words for students to substitute for synonyms or other words, e.g. Because they eat up all the *barbers* who try to trim their hair. Students may replace with *hairdressers* or *people*. (Sample Worksheet D included)

Expanding on the book

1. Come up with a list of as many other possible answers to each 'why?' question in the book. Write the responses on the blackboard.
 - You could divide the responses into categories 'silly reasons' and 'possible reasons'.
 - This activity could be done in small groups with each group given a different page as their focus. Give each group a large sheet of paper to write their answers on. Each group presents their answers to the rest of the grade.
2. Have students draw some illustrations to match the scientific conclusions given for each animal in the book.
3. Choose one of the silly answers and make an illustration for it. Make a display of these in the classroom, or put them into a 'silly solutions for simple questions' class book.
4. Make a 'who am I?' flip book using the scientific explanations given for one of the animals. E.g. draw a picture of a whale and stick a flap of paper over the top with a clue such as: "I am the biggest animal that has ever lived on earth, Who Am I?"
5. Look at the scientific reasons and ask students if they can come up with a new 'why?' question for each animal in the book. E.g. Why do zebras live longer in zoos than in the wild? Students can then begin to compile a new list of possible answers, silly and sensible!

Extension Activities

1. Ask children to make their own 'Why?' page using an animal not already in the book. Can they think of an unusual animal to use? They could come up with a series of imaginative answers to their posed question, or have other children in the group contribute ideas for them to use on the page. Students could then use an encyclopaedia or the internet to try and find a scientific solution to their question.
2. Suggest to the students that we could make a 'Why?' book using a different topic. such as people, homes or the environment, e.g. Why is the sea salty? Why do people blink? Brainstorm possible ideas with the grade. Students could undertake different topics in small groups.
3. Ask students to invent their own 'mixed up' animal. Which parts of each animal would they keep and why? Ask them to give reasons for choosing the two animals they mixed. Could they add parts from more animals? These could be presented on poster paper and used for a display.
4. Ask students to find some other books about animals and make comparisons.

Using the book in Maths

1. Look at the various shapes Lila Prap has used in her illustrations.
2. Discuss symmetry - are any of the pictures created using symmetry?
3. Students could classify the animals according to different attributes and then graph their findings. Eg. animals with hooves, animals with fur, mammals, etc..

I hope I have been able to give you a good starting point with these activities. I'm sure there are hundreds more ways you could think to use this book with your class. It is a great book that lends itself to endless opportunities for teaching and learning.

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3. About 'Lila Prap'

Lilijana Praprotnik Zupancic ('Lila Prap') was born 1955 in Slovenia where she studied architecture. She is a freelance artist, making her living in graphic design, interior decorating and writing, as well as illustrating for children.

Her picture books (featuring her signature pastel-on-paper drawings) have been published in Korea, France, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Norway, India, Greece, the USA, Canada and Japan.

Some of her work was included in the 1998 Illustrators Exhibition at the Bologna Children's Books Fair, and she was a guest author at the 2004 Frankfurt Book Fair.

She lives and works in the town of Celje in Slovenia. *Why?* is the first of her books to be published in Australia and New Zealand.

4. Interview with Lila Prap

What materials do you use in your illustrations?

Pastels on black paper.

Why did you start producing children's books?

I had to amuse my son and I remembered some funny word games that we used as children. These word games then grew into different stories and poems to amuse all children ... and to help parents, who have forgotten their childhood, to have some fun with their children.

From where do you get your ideas?

From many things—serious or satiric novels for adults, scientific books, art books, dictionaries, children's paintings and texts, everyday life ... The hardest thing is to get an idea from other people's books for children. You can only say: 'Oh, what a good book! It's a pity that I didn't have such a good idea!'

Your other books also feature animals. Why do you like drawing animals so much?

Animals, as with very small children, are the most vulnerable beings; trustful and non-hypocritical. Their destiny depends upon adult humans, who have all the power. In some way animals are the symbols for children.

Which is your favourite animal?

I like all the animals. Right now I'm very happy watching two ducks (Romeo and Julia), who decided to make a nest on our garden, and a pheasant (Alexander) who decided to live on our pine tree and has a very mysterious family life—his wife was living with him here for a month, then she went away and he stayed alone.

Do you have children or grandchildren of your own?

I have a son, named Izidor, who is studying civil engineering at the moment. He is almost two metres high!

You come from the European country of Slovenia. What is Slovenia like?

Slovenia is a very diverse country, that lies between Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia. In a small area you can find high mountains, sea coast, plains, virgin forests, lakes, limestone areas with big caves made by water, thermal springs, hills with vineyards ... In one word: almost everything except deserts and savannahs.

What sort of house do you have there? Where do you work?

I live in a suburb of Celje, a big Celtic and Roman city in ancient times and also a centre of a great dynasty in the Middle Ages. Nowadays it's an industrial town, with supermarkets and hypermarkets, like all over the world, and I'm happy to live a step away in an old villa, surrounded with trees, a small river and fields of hops. I have an attic in our house for my working space. I can see only clouds through my windows.

Do you have a pet?

At the moment I'm without pets. Our dog Dixi died a few months ago because he was very sick, and all the cats I had have mysteriously disappeared.

What are your favourite children's books?

When I was young, my favourites were *Pippi Longstocking* by Astrud Lindgren and *Pinnocchio* by Carlo Collodi. Now that I'm a little older, I collect the modern picture books that I like the most. Australian author Shaun Tan is one of my favourites.

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