

# Inquiry Curriculum context planning

**Title:** Orang-utan Island

1) **Context:** The head of charity called (need to establish this) set up to help the plight of orang-utans in Borneo has received a letter from a landowner. It appears that the person concerned is beginning to be aware that many orang-utans are struggling to survive on owned lands in the Far East. Furthermore, the owner has been advised, by conservationists to set aside a piece of land or an island which could be set up as a conservation rainforest where orang-utans can be reared, rehabilitated and later released into the wild. However, it is not just a question of collecting them and then releasing them. Many of the orang-utans are in a pitiful state - some have been taken in by local families who have become very attached to them; others have lost parent orang-utans and need urgent attention; others have lost their habitat through log cutting as well as the planting of palm trees for oil. Many of these apes have lost weight and need to be nursed back to health.

## 2) Main Curriculum areas:

- Geography-contrasting places. Humans affecting habitats.
- Science-caring and nurture of animal species, habitats and environmental issues.
- Writing: Reports, use, creating and researching non-fictional texts.

## Overview:

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**Theme:** Animal care

**Age Range:** years 4/5/6

**Main Curriculum Focus:** Literacy, ICT, Science and geography

**Inquiry Question:** What are the responsibilities people have to safe guard animals in jeopardy? How can humans coexist with apes?

**Expert Team:** Ape conserving team.

**Client(s):** Timber production cooperative who are producing sustainable wood for trading.

**Commission:** A team of expert orang-utan conservers are needed to advise on the relocation of apes in distress in forest areas, for example, transporting to a safe reserve.

## Steps in:

1. The teacher has images of orangutan on the board/ICT. These images are of healthy and happy apes NOT depicting any horror images.
2. T: 'I was wandering if we could take on and imagine a really responsible job for a while, concerning the lives of these creatures.' [Class discusses and responds. C:'What would we have to do? Are we really going there? They are those monkey things... Orangutans...Yes that's it.....I like them.....'] T: 'Well taking on the job would mean a lot of travel (in our drama minds) to a place where the u't's are under threat not because anyone is being horrible or anything-it's just that they need the logs of the trees to sell to lots of folk to make useful things. Trouble is that the UTs live in the forests they are using for wood.'
3. Class discussions and conclusions follow. Class: 'I think they should look after them... yes and give them a good home.....yes and take care of them a bit more.'
4. T: 'Well that's exactly what we are being asked to do-take care of UTs who have lost their homes as well as those who have been used as pets by people when the mothers lose their babies or they get lost. Local people bring them up like their own children, you know?' Class: 'That's not fair..... 'we should take them all back to the forest'...'the people may not want us to have them.....' 'maybe the orangutans would want to stay with the people if they have been looked after nicely'.....'thats still not fair'
5. T: 'Well let's see what we can do. There is a way, using our imaginations where we can help. I could represent someone from this situation for us who has a tricky job to do so I wondered if you thought that it OK then I could actually be someone who needs some real clever thinking about these creatures we seem to care about.'
6. The following strategy shifts from talking about the matter to actually creating the now time we want the drama eyes of the children to be opened.) T:'By the way the landowner is away on other business and has asked me to convey his plans to you-see what you think....' This language functions as a pretext for the class and brings them closer to the dramatic action to come in strategy 7.
7. Teacher has a pair of glasses and a leather case with authentic files. T: 'if I put these on would you agree that I represent a person in the situation here and now?' Class: 'You are not really the person then, just pretending?' T: 'Well it's more than pretending as I will try my best to portray the person in a way that is real.' Class: 'OK'
8. Teacher places glasses on and is about to pick up the leather bag when the class get the giggles! T: 'Well.....look what's happened!'(Taking off the spectacles and placing the bag down and away.) I think the excitement got us! That's fine as it was our first attempt! Shall we try again? Class: 'Yes please!' T: 'OK-so was it the glasses or the bag that got us the giggles?' Class: 'The glasses.' T: 'Right I shall remember not to put them on too early for us then.'
9. This time the teacher picks up the bag first, then takes the glasses out of his pocket and then puts them on. The class are watching carefully.

## Steps in continued:

10. T: (as if talking to himself) 'I think this is the place-there must be a way in somewhere-maybe the people **have to be careful** who they let in?'  
This set of words signs 'secrecy' on the part of the responsible team, the tensions of dangers that may come but not known just yet! This is a useful device in the first sequence, as the class feel the tensions rising and this holds them into the work.
11. Teacher now addresses the class again as class-this is done by the removal of the glasses again! T: 'Well what about that-I thought there were eyes watching me from windows.....maybe the ape conservers have a worry about newcomers?' C:'Yes-we are worried that you might want to know where to trap apes, or .....want information about where we keep them.....T: 'Well I'm not surprised. You could get all sorts of people I suppose. So how do I get to talk to you so you can work me out a bit?'  
Class: 'You have to press the button and we can talk to you but you can't see us though.' T: 'Oh I know those things-you have to talk to a small microphone and they let you in if they are satisfied that you are OK?' Class: 'Yes that's what we have on our door.' T: 'Well, I had better have a good answer to your questions or I'll never get in? Shall we start then?'
12. Class: 'You can ring again then someone will talk to you through the mike.'
13. T: (Putting on glasses and picking up bag and obeying the instructions of the class!)  
'Good morning. I have an urgent message from my employer concerning orang-utans on his land. May I talk to your team?'
14. Class: 'We have to ask you a few questions first-do you mind?' T: 'Not at all-what would you like to know?'

The class now have a major part to play in their dramatic representation of orang-utans. The steps here are an example of what can happen when the shift in the power to influence is relinquished by the adult so that the class can create their own contexts followed by teacher who can intervene by creating the need for visual texts for example or the environs of this ape reserve. There will follow lots of embellishments by the teacher and the class so that the elements of their creations together can be seen emerging in the form of written and drawn outcomes. For example in no time at all in the first steps with the class in Thurrock CP we had pictures of our work on the walls that we were proud of, signs of how to get around the centre, restrictive notices for people who were not staff, as well as offices and vets stations needed for all the great apes to survive. Mantle of the expert is driven by 'tasks' but we have to understand that the tasks are often visual or aural as well as written. For example, in this sequence, the class were asked if they collected evidence of their past work. The class said they did-so the task was born, the creation of past cases they were proud of and those they were sad about. This lead to a lot of discussions, then planning and drawing their centre together with large paper, writing up case histories together which meant they had to agree their teams and so on. Once the work get a head of steam so to speak, all curriculum tasks can flow FROM the work as well as INTO the work.

## **Possible further activities:**

- Traditions of the Borneo Indian tribes as we will need to make contact and be tactful about our demands.
- Eating habits of great apes in transit and the best way to transport them to a reserve.
- We will need to consider our shelter in the jungles as well as the medical steps we will have to take to remain healthy.
- The sequences of classroom experiences for the class can be planned as follows:
  1. The contact and 'contract' between the agent for the wood producing firm and the orang-utan team is established as well as defining the reserve and its workings. This is achieved through mini tasks set by the class and teacher. Remember the teacher is in 2 places in her head! One in the fiction and one out of the fiction.
  2. The next stage is to define the commission needing to be taken up-through discussions with the agent and further clarification questions from class. Teacher uses the point of view of agent her as well.
  3. Depending what happens with the class interest in their created reserve, it may be that they carry on with case histories, imagining and behaving as if they have apes to look after-where found, diagnoses, age, gender, approximate time for release into the wild, other features known so far.
  4. There will be a time when the planning for the journey to Borneo is needed to see the wood plantation in operation. Here the resources will be visual most probably, with film, pictures and maps to refer to in order to make the best plan possible. Many questions will arise-need for immunisations, where to live in a temporary shelter, what resources would need to be taken, location and language of the local people etc. These questions alone will need much time to fathom out.
  5. Dramatic moments throughout will be the source of investigations-for example-safe ways to manage the transport and temporary capture of great apes. For the literacy work, the class can create their own safety booklet for the team outlining an illustrating best practice, as well as illustrating worst practices. Again, this task alone will take effort and time to accomplish. It is in these tasks that the teachers makes the demands of quality achievements on the class by using initial drafts and working these up to high endeavour examples of writing. Such tasks well managed, urge boys in particular to review their work for tight quality control. In the meantime, creating an orang-utan website may also be in embryo leading to ICT standards rising as there will be a need to put our work as orang-utan conservers in the 'public' domain (i.e. the school website).