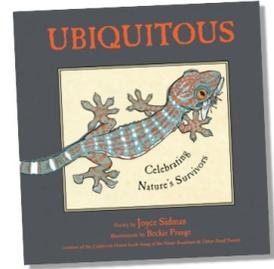


UBIQUITOUS: Celebrating Nature's Survivors

by Joyce Sidman



Reader's Guide

These suggestions are for grades 3-6

PREDICTIONS

1. Ubiquitous is a book about organisms that have survived and spread throughout the world over long periods of time. What plants or animals do you think might be in this book?
2. What is involved in "surviving"? What do **you** need to survive?
3. How do you predict some of the creatures in this book might have survived? What would be some good survival techniques?
4. Look at both the front and back cover of this book. Can you identify these "survivors"?
5. Look at the endpapers. Discuss the concept of a timeline.

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING ALOUD

1. Each of these poems features a familiar organism that your students will have encountered somewhere. Before reading each poem, ask students where they've last seen or heard of this organism.
2. Each spread in this book consists of a poem and a nonfiction note. Try reading the poem first. Ask students what images and words they liked. What is their impression of this organism? Then go on to read the nonfiction note. Ask students what interesting things they learned, and then ask them what the strengths of this organism are—how has it become a "survivor"?
3. Extra credit: The squirrel poem ("Tail Tale") is fun but challenging to read aloud, as it is basically two run-on sentences delivered in nonstop chatter. This might be a good poem to offer as extra credit for a student to master and perform for the class.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

UBIQUITOUS touches on some weighty topics. You can use this book as a springboard for classroom discussion, for student writing, or for further research:

What makes humans human?

Read both the poem and the note for "Baby." Discuss with your students this view of humans. Do they agree with it? Are there other aspects of humanity they think are important? What do they think separates us from other kinds of animals? What are our strengths? What are our weaknesses?

Extinction—why does it happen?

There have been five major extinctions in earth's history, and scientists have various theories about what caused them. Discuss with your students what their theories might be. Some scientists say there is another "extinction event" going on right now,

caused by humans. What might humans be doing to cause species extinction? What could we do to reverse this?

What makes you a "survivor"?

After reading *UBIQUITOUS*, ask your students what kinds of things they think they need to survive. After a short discussion, have them make two columns on a piece of paper, one titled "Visible" and one titled "Invisible." Ask them to jot down at least five things in each column that they feel they need to survive in their world. Suggestions might be "food" (visible) and "respect" (invisible). Continue your discussion, using their lists as a starting point.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

"Diamante Poem"

A diamante ("diamond" in Spanish) is an easy poem form that can start anyone writing. It is seven lines long with varying numbers of words on each line, in this order: 1, 2, 3, 5, 3, 2, 1. Start and end with a noun. There are many variations of this form, some specifying adjectives, adverbs, etc., some moving from one noun to its opposite. The following is an open-ended version:

1. Read the poem "First Life". Discuss interesting or vivid words in this poem, what images it evokes. Then read the nonfiction note and talk about how the first noun relates to the last noun.
2. Choose a subject to write about—maybe try a group poem first, about an animal. Start with the name of the animal ("tiger") and use the next five lines to describe this animal—what it looks like, how it moves, etc. End with another noun that shows us the animal in a new way ("shadow").
3. Have each student choose his or her own subject to write about.

"Letter Poem"

In a letter poem, the poet speaks directly to the subject of the poem. Many students respond to this form because it's not that different than writing a note to a friend.

1. Read "The Mollusk That Made You". Who is talking? Who is he/she talking to? Discuss with students the metaphors and vivid language. Have students identify the questions within the poem. Ask them what questions they would ask a shell, if they could.
2. Brainstorm some interesting objects from nature—or better yet, take a nature walk. Have students soak in the sights, smells, and sounds of the outdoors. Have each student choose a subject—a tree, a dragonfly, the wind—looking at it closely and noticing it with all of their five senses. Tell them to imagine that they can speak to their subject and have a conversation with it. What questions would they ask?
3. Write the letter poems. Use this form if you wish: start with a compliment, then ask at least one question, then end with a wish (Dear Wind, you are invisible but strong. Where do you sleep? I wish I could ride you like a horse!).

"Mask Poem"

Mask poems are first-person poems that take the voice of the object they are about,

so you get to pretend to be anything you want! They are wonderful for getting students to use their imaginations and see the possibilities of poetry.

1. Read "Scarab." Ask students about the images/mood of the poem: how does this creature describe itself? How does it see the world? How is its view of itself different from our view of beetles (especially dung beetles!)? Now read "Tail Tale" and ask all the same questions. How are these two animals present themselves different?
2. Choose any object from the classroom—a stapler, a water bottle, an eraser. Hold it up and have students brainstorm metaphors for it: what does it look like? Sound like? How does it behave? If it were alive, how would it view the world? What would it dream about doing?
3. Have each student choose an object either from their desks or the classroom, and do the same sort of brainstorming.
4. When students are ready to write, ask them to take the voice of the object: they will "become" the book or clock or marker. They will use their brainstormed ideas to tell the world what it's like to be a book, clock, or marker! "I am a round white eye with black lashes" (clock).

SCIENCE / MATH ACTIVITIES

Other "Ubiquitous" Organisms

There are many other organisms that could be considered ubiquitous, and some have been successful for long periods of earth's history. Here is a list of other organisms your students could study, answering the questions: Where does it live? How does it survive in lots of places? What makes it successful? How long has it existed?

Groups of organisms that are widespread:

Viruses
Algae
Mosses
Legumes
Ferns
Grasshoppers
Dragonflies
Cyclothones (fish)
Nematodes (round worms)

Species that thrive among humans:

Pigeons
Canada geese
Rats/Mice
Deer
Rabbits
Finches (including English sparrow)

Personal Timeline

The earth's history, with its billion-year periods, is difficult to comprehend in a visual

way. Personal history can be the same way. In this exercise, students will learn how to apply scale to the events of their own lives.

1. Look at the endpapers of UBIQUITOUS and then read the "Illustrator's Note" at the end of the book. Discuss with your students how Beckie Prange used string to represent the passage of years, and the concept of "scale."
2. Have each student brainstorm a list of important events from their lives (learning to walk, moving, birth of sibling, etc.) with the dates these events occurred. Help from home is useful!
3. Give each student a long piece of ribbon, yarn, or string, and a tape measure. Decide on the scale of your timelines, perhaps one inch = one year. Have students measure out the appropriate length, cut, and glue their string onto paper. Strings can be glued on straight, or in a curved pattern.
4. Using the tape measure, students can then accurately mark out when each event in their lives took place, and label it on their timelines.
5. When timelines are finished, have each child reflect on which periods in their lives were exciting, important, or difficult for them. As an added activity, have your students project their timelines into the future, predicting what they will be doing ten, twenty, and thirty years into the future.

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