

Elsa the Koala

TEACHING NOTES



BEFORE READING

- As a class look closely at the cover and title and discuss what you can learn about a book from its cover. What type of story do you think this will be? (The photographic cover suggests nonfiction, but the title could suggest fiction.)
- Discuss conventions of nonfiction (table of contents, glossary, page numbers, title, photographs/pictures, diagrams, and labels) and fiction (setting, plot development, conflict, descriptive language, themes, point of view, characters, characterisation).
- Where do you think this story might be set, and what makes you think this?
- Read the writing on the back cover: What is the purpose of a back-cover blurb?

DURING READING

- Chart what students already know about koalas. Add additional facts located during subsequent research or as you progress through the text.
- Create a vocabulary wallchart to record new and interesting words as they are encountered in the text or in wider reading.



AFTER READING

TEXT TYPES

- Look closely at different kinds of nonfiction and discuss where this book fits with them.
 - **Traditional nonfiction** includes writing that gives readers an overview of an entire topic. It is great to use to gauge interest in or to begin researching a topic. Readers who don't need specific details but who want to get a general feel for something will enjoy traditional nonfiction.
 - **Expository nonfiction** is great for investigating a specific subject. It takes a unique point of view and examines a specialised concept. Readers who want an entertaining look at a specific topic will gravitate towards expository nonfiction.
 - **Narrative nonfiction** is a true story written in the style of a fictional story.
 - **Browsable nonfiction** allows young readers to explore topics of interest in a fun way, without the stress of longer chapter books. Based on the popular magazine format of quirky, fun facts that many young readers love.
- If possible, gather a range of information texts on koalas and have students examine these, comparing and contrasting them to this text. Discuss how authors have treated the same subject matter differently.
- Ask students to write a fictional narrative about a koala. Discuss how their story will differ from the approach used in this book. Highlight that the knowledge they have gained about koalas from this book could help them to write a fictional piece.

COMPREHENSION

Test knowledge gained from reading the book by asking:

- What type of animal is a koala?
- Where do koalas live?
- Why do koalas sleep so much?
- Why have koalas become endangered?
- What is pap and why do koalas need to eat it before they start eating gum leaves?
- How did Elsa's keeper prepare her to go back into the wild?
- How did Hayley know when Elsa was ready to go back into the wild?
- What important work is done by The Australian Reptile Park?

ANIMAL CLASSIFICATION

- Create a class diagram of animal classifications, identifying what traits they have in common:
 - **vertebrates:** fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals (marsupials, placentals, monotreme)



- **invertebrates:** including sponges, flatworms, jellyfish, starfish, shrimp, snails, spiders, and scallops.



- Ask students where Elsa would sit in this diagram and why.

THE AUSTRALIAN REPTILE PARK

- Have students research The Australian Reptile Park and discuss why it is such an important Australian institution.
 - See <https://www.reptilepark.com.au>
- Ask students to find out what other Australian animals are endangered and to prepare a fact file on an endangered animal of choice.
- Students could also create illustrated posters of their animals of choice, aimed at drawing attention to their plight.
- If possible, arrange for students to visit The Australian Reptile Park or an animal conservation group to see firsthand the important work they do.
- Celebrate **Save the Koala Day**, organised by the Australian Koala Foundation, on **September 30 each year**.





KOALA FACT FILE

DESCRIPTION

- Koalas are short and stocky animals with dense, woolly fur.
- They have large, flat, black noses.
- Koalas in northern parts of Australia are much smaller than those in the south. And they are a slightly different colour (light grey in the north and brownish grey in the south).
- Koalas have very sharp claws, excellent for climbing trees. They also use them to defend themselves.
- Koalas are mainly nocturnal and spend their days asleep in the forks of trees.
- They are solitary animals and very territorial. Fights can be extremely violent as opposing koalas scratch and bite each other.
- Male koalas have a scent gland they use to mark trees to attract females. The gland is in their chest and oozes a clear, oily, musky smelling liquid.
- Koalas make loud, grunting and growling noises when they are mating, annoyed or staking territory.



HABITAT

- As their diet is limited to gum leaves, koalas are only found in eucalypt forests.
- These forests are found in eastern Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria, as well as the far south-eastern part of South Australia.
- They do not make any type of nest or shelter.
- Koalas spend all their time in treetops unless they are moving from tree to tree. They climb down to walk to the next tree.
- They are at their most vulnerable when they are on the ground as they may be run over or attacked by dogs.

DIET

- Koalas only eat eucalyptus leaves.
- Eucalyptus leaves contain toxic compounds. To be able to eat these leaves, koala joeys need to first eat a runny form of their mums' poo. Called pap, it gives joeys the bacteria they need to be able to digest the leaves.
- Of the many hundreds of eucalypt species, koalas eat around 40 on a regular basis.
- Only three or four eucalypt species will make up the bulk of their diet.
- Due to their poor diet, koalas are lethargic and inactive to save energy. They can sleep for 20 hours a day!

REPRODUCTION

- Most koalas mate between the months of October and January.
- A mother koala is pregnant for around 35 days.
- Then, a jellybean-sized baby climbs up into the mother's backward-facing pouch and attaches to a teat.
- Koalas reach sexual maturity at the age of three or four years of age.
- Joeys stay in their mothers' pouches for about six months.
- Then, the babies climb onto their mothers' backs and ride around in safety for a further six months.
- They live for 16 to 18 years in captivity, but probably much less in the wild.

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by Aussie Ark

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