# Writing a Creative Non-Fiction Story

*Activity Based on*

*Sounds of the Savanna*

## I.  Introduction:

Using *Sounds of the Savanna* as a model, with this activity students will research an animal that was a character in the story. After modeling the process and writing a story cooperatively as a class, students will create a research document keeping record of bibliography. Once research is completed, students will create a fact-based fictional story in which the animal experiences day in the savanna. (It is suggested that regardless whether students choose a predator or prey, the prey wins—predators are not successful most of the time and we all want to root for the underdog).  This activity may be spread over several class periods with the possibility of some work being done as homework. The activity may also be extended to include writing a non-fiction five paragraph essay. Grades 4-6.

## II.  Concepts:

A.  Creative non-fiction gives information in an engaging manner.
B.  Creative non-fiction is based on fact and must be strictly researched.
C.  Difference between fact and "based" on fact
D.  Research includes research for the story as well as for the illustrations.
E.  Sources must be reputable.
F.  Proper attribution

## III. Skills:

A.  Researching a subject for general mastery
B.  Researching details to expand subject
C.  Organizing researched material
D.  Writing creative non-fiction
E.  Developing a bibliography

**IV. Materials Provided:**
**(**http://www.terrycjennings.com/Teacher-Resources-Sounds.html**)**


- A. Internet Resources
  - 1. Cheetahs
    - a. http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/cheetah/.
      Accessed 6/20/15
    - b. http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/AfricanSavanna/Facts/fact-cheetah.cfm
      Accessed 6/20/15
    - c. https://www.awf.org/wildlife-conservation/cheetah
      Accessed 6/20/15
    - d. http://cheetah.org/about-the-cheetah/for-kids/
      Accessed 6/20/15
  - 2. Lions
    - a. http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/animals/lion/
      Accessed 6/20/15
    - b. http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/african-lion/?source=A-to-Z
      Accessed 6/20/15
    - c. http://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/greatcats/lionfacts.cfm
      Accessed 6/20/15
    - d. http://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/lion
      Accessed 6/20/15
  - 3. Hyenas
    - a. http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/hyena/?source=A-to-Z
      Accessed 6/20/15
    - b. http://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/spotted-hyena
      Accessed 6/20/15
    - c. http://www.bioexpedition.com/spotted-hyena/
      Accessed  6/20/15
  - 4. Gazelle
    - a. http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/gazelle/
      Accessed 6/20/15
    - b. http://www.livescience.com/27545-fun-facts-about-gazelles.html
      Accessed 6/20/15
    - c. http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/AfricanSavanna/Facts/fact-dama.cfm
      Accessed 6/20/15
    - d. http://www.outtoafrica.nl/animals/enggrantsgazelle.html
      Accessed 6/20/15
  - 6. Zebra
    - a. http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/zebra/
      Accessed 6/20/15
    - b. http://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/zebra
      Accessed 6/20/15
    - c. http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/AfricanSavanna/Facts/fact-gzebra.cfm
      Accessed 6/20/15

7. Wildebeest
    a. http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/wildebeest/
       Accessed 6/20/15
    b. http://www.outtoafrica.nl/animals/engwildebeest.html
       Accessed 6/20/15
    c. http://www.bioexpedition.com/wildebeest/
       Accessed 6/20/15
8. Vervet Monkey
    a. http://a-z-animals.com/animals/vervet-monkey/Vervet Monkey Classification and
       Accessed 6/24/15
    b. https://www.awf.org/wildlife-conservation/vervet-monkey
       Accessed 6/24/15

B. Sample Internet Research Highlighted - Highlighted version of A for teacher.
C. Sample Research Document - Important facts from gathered from B for teacher
   or for handout to students in lieu of their reading A.
D. Sample Outline - Relevant facts from C grouped under headings for teacher or
   for younger students.
E. *Vervet Monkeys' Day* - Sample Creative Non-Fiction Story using vervet monkey
   Research (by Terry Catasús Jennings)

## V. Pre-Writing Discussion

A. In this activity students will be creating a story based on an animal's experience
   in prey/predator interactions in the African savanna.
B. Discuss with students the difference between non-fiction and fact-based fiction or
   creative non-fiction:

| Non-Fiction | Fact-Based Fiction/Creative Non-Fiction |
| --- | --- |
| Totally based on facts | Made up story |
| Writer's work is based on research, including interviews | Writer's work is informed by research, often including interviews. |
| Goal is to inform | Goal is to provide information in a fun way. |
| Normally includes quoted material | Does not normally include quoted material other than dialogue. |
| Bibliography is included in the work | Bibliography is kept by the author/publisher to prove accuracy. |

C. Read *Sounds of the Savanna*
  1. Pick out facts in the story that would have been part of the research.
      a. About the life in the savanna
      b. About the animals
      c. Point out how the research *informed* the writer.
  2. Pick out features from illustrations that would have resulted from research.
      a. Python and Milky Eagle Owl are pictured but not mentioned
          (1) They are animals which live in the savanna and prey on vervet monkeys and spiny mice respectively.
      b. Zebras use facial grimaces to indicate danger this is shown but not mentioned.
  3. Consider when the author is "in the head of" the animals
      a. How did research inform the author in those cases?
          (1) Knowing what the animals eat, and how they behave, the author can write a story about a particular animal or group of animals.
              (a) The wildebeests "talk" to the lioness.
          (2) Knowing how sound works allows the author to use it in the story.
              (a) Sound being refracted over water due to temperature changes.
      b. Is some of what the author portrays just plain common sense?
          (1) It is reasonable to say that when the lioness returns to her den, she hears purring sounds.
  4. Consider images in *Sounds*
      a. Dawn kisses the grasslands
      b. Monkeys skitter
      c. Spiny mice scurry through golden grass
      d. She makes not a sound, padding quietly
      e. Soft purrs greet her ears
  5. Consider how author gives a sense of passing time.
  6. What details bring reader into the story?
      a. Where did author find those details?
          (1) In research
      b. What provided the thread of the story?
          (1) The passing of time throughout the day was the thread of the story.
      c. Do you find the thread in your research or your imagination?
          (1) For *Sounds* book, the thread was time because author wanted to cover many instances of prey/predator interactions and the sounds they make.
          (2) Students may find the thread of their story to be the animal they choose to follow on their research or they may have a thread or plot already in mind before.
      d. What was the hook of the story?
          (1) Possible answer "A lion roars."
              (a) Now reader wants to know what will happen when a lion roars.
          (2) Suggest to students that as they research, they will want to look for possible hooks.
              (a) Something that will want to make the reader keep on reading.

8. What was the point of view of the story?
   a. Omniscient—all knowing
   b. Allows author to know what is happening everywhere, including in the heads of characters.
   c. If the point of view is one of the characters, the reader can only learn what that character knows, experiences and sees at that time.
      (1) If a student chooses the point of view of one animal, they can only relate what that animal sees and experiences.

## VI. Pre-writing Preparation

A. Have students choose the main character of their stories
   1. Three choices:
      a. Animals for which research information is provided in this package (IV.A.)
         (1) Predators:  Cheetah, Lion, Hyena
         (2) Prey:  Gazelle, Zebra, Wildebeest, Vervet Monkey
      b. Animals for which teacher gathers information
      c. Animals for which students gather information
   2. These animals illustrate very vividly, prey/predator interaction.
B. Discuss research method.
   1. Obtain information on the internet or in library book.
      a. Discuss using only reputable internet sources (.org, .edu, .gov)
                  Or
         hand students information on chosen animal provided in this packet. (IV.A)
      b.  Discuss using only reputable internet sources (.org, .edu, .gov)
   2. Ask students to highlight pertinent information on the Research Document.
      a. Students will be using the research to write a story about prey and predator interaction and use of sound in the African Savanna. Some information on the research will not be relevant to the story.
      b. Model this concept using the Internet Research on vervet monkeys. (IV.A.8)
      c.  Sample highlighted documents are provided for the eight animals listed above for teacher use.
      d.  For younger students use the Sample Research Document rather than the raw data from the internet.
C. Create a research document from the highlighted material.
   1.  Now that students have a better idea of the subject, they should note that not all data will be relevant to writing the story. In any research it is important to ignore unnecessary material.
      a. Data on vervet characteristics, food they eat, predators and interesting details will be useful. These facts will inform the students' writings.
      b. Data on where do vervet monkeys live is not relevant—we already know the monkeys in this story live in the African Saanna.
      c. It is not important to know how many vervet monkeys live in Africa.
   3. Model this task using the Sample Research Document for vervets.

D. Create an outline from the research material.
    1. Decide on several groupings/headings for the data.
        a. Model this for students using the vervet monkey data.
        b. Possible groupings:
            (1) Notes for illustrations
            (2) Special Features
            (3) Communication
            (4) Babies
            (5) What they eat
            (6) Who are their predators
            (7) How do they get away from predators/How do they hunt
        c. Groupings can be changed as the outline develops.
        d. Cut and paste information from Research Document under the appropriate heading. (add quotes)
            or
        Paraphrase material using students' own words
        e. Model this task using the Sample Outline for vervet monkeys.
        f. Review students' outline and make suggestions for improvement.
E. Write a story about the bear collaboratively with the classroom (*Vervet Monkey's Day* is provided as a teacher's model)
    1. Consider the following with your students for the first paragraph and lead the class in developing a story line that follows the facts.
        a. What happened first?
        b. How would the vervets react to this?
        c. What details can we include in this paragraph to inform the reader and bring the reader in?
    2. For subsequent paragraphs, continue in the same manner
        a. What happened next?
        b. How would the vervet react to this?
        c. What details can we include in this paragraph to inform the reader and bring the reader in?
    3. Consider a way to convey a feeling of urgency and fear during prey/predator interactions.
        a. Short choppy sentences or run on sentences.
        b. Adjectives that leave reader breathless
    4. Consider a way to convey the feeling of relief when the predator leaves.
    5. Use *Sounds of the Savanna* illustrations as additional information on the setting.

## VII. Writing the story
A. Students will write a story which tells what happened to an animal on a day on the savanna..
    1. Use strong verbs. Give good descriptions. Use interesting facts.
    2. Use images
    3. Denote the passing of time
B. Review first draft with student and make suggestions for improvement.

**VIII. Critique Group (optional)**
   A. Group students with a buddy to critique the work.
   B. Have critique buddies use the sandwich method.
      1. Thank you for letting me read your work
      2. This is what I liked
      3. This is what I wish could be different
      4. This is what I enjoyed about reading your work
         a. This last one is more general
   C. Model Critique group interactions using the collaborative story about the bear.


**IX. Critique students' work and make suggestions for improvement.**
   1. Line Edits
   2. Sequencing
   3. Hooks
   4. Interest

**X. Rewrite**
   A. Save last story under a new date (Naming convention:  TITLEYYMMDD, e.g. Vervet 150305).
      1. Never throw away a story. May need to use parts of previous stories.
   B. Make grammatical and spelling changes suggested if they are correct.
   C. Consider other suggestions.
      1. Give the comments a chance to settle in. Even if you don't like them, consider them seriously.
      2. May or may not want to take critique's suggestions
         a. Do they make sense?
         b. Do they make the story better?
         c. Do they agree with vision of the story or give a better vision?
      3. Most of the time if a critiquer says something doesn't work, it doesn't.

**XI. Illustrations**
   A. Have students use notes from the research to draw the setting and any animals, people in the story.
   B. If they use photographs, get permission if necessary and include attribution in bibliography.
   C. Public domain pictures don't need permission

**XII. Bibliography**
  A. Have students develop a bibliography. While a bibliography is not published in a creative non-fiction story, writers must keep their bibliography and their source material in case writer's accuracy is questioned.
  B. Different school districts may require different styles. Below are sample Chicago Style entries.
      1. Book:  Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin, 2006.
      2. Website:  McDonald's Corporation. "McDonald's Happy Meal Toy Safety Facts." Accessed July 19, 2008. http://www.mcdonalds.com/corp/about/ factsheets.html.

**XIII. Extend the Activity to Non-Fiction.**
  A. Using the research developed for the creative non-fiction story, have students write a non-five-paragraph essay on how the prey animal protects itself from predators, or how the predator hunts prey.