

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Tarzan of the Apes

by

Edgar Rice Burroughs

Book Information

Edgar Rice Burroughs, Tarzan of the Apes
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Set amidst the colors and sounds of the African jungle, the story tells of a boy raised by an ape and how he learns to survive in the jungle.

Topics: Adventure, Survival; Animals, Misc./Other; Classics, Classics (All); Continents, Africa; Natural Environments, Jungles

Main Characters

Alice Clayton (Lady Greystoke) Tarzan's delicate mother

Jane Porter the American girl with whom Tarzan falls in love

John Clayton (Lord Greystoke) Tarzan's father; a good, brave man

Kala the female ape who adopts Tarzan

Professor Porter an absent-minded but well-educated man; Jane's father

Robert Canler a man to whom Professor Porter owes money; he wants to marry Jane

Sabor a lioness

Tarzan Lord and Lady Greystoke's son, who is raised by apes in the jungle

Terkoz a jealous male ape who fights with Tarzan for leadership of the tribe

Tublat Kala's mate, who dislikes Tarzan

W. Cecil Clayton the successor to Lord Greystoke; Tarzan's cousin

Vocabulary

anthropoid the type of ape that is closest in characteristics and development to humans

arboreal located in the trees

denizens the creatures or people who inhabit a particular place

patriarch the highest ranking male who rules a group

propitiate to gain the favor of

Synopsis

The story begins in 1888 with a young British officer, John Clayton, and his new wife, Alice, on a ship bound for an African outpost. On their voyage, however, the crew mutinies and takes over the ship. Because John helped their leader, Black Michael, earlier on the trip, John and Alice are allowed to live. Since John and Alice are witnesses, however, they are put ashore on an uninhabited beach to stay until they are sought out by the British government.

John builds a home for them there, and soon Alice gives birth to a son. However, the family's circumstances grow worse, as Alice goes crazy after an ape attack and dies about a year after her son is born. Soon after his wife's death, John is killed by the leader of a great tribe of apes. The baby is then adopted by a female ape who had just lost her own infant.

Named Tarzan by the apes, the boy grows up to be exceedingly strong and intelligent. Indeed, his intelligence is one of the only reasons he survives, as the male apes of the tribe want to get rid of him. However, after discovering the cabin on the beach and the tools it contains, especially a knife, Tarzan is able to defend himself quite well against any aggressor. He even wins the role of the king of the apes, but he eventually becomes bored with it and turns it over to a competitor.

Tarzan teaches himself to read and write English using the materials he finds in the cabin. He also discovers the existence of a tribe of cannibals from whom he steals arrows and food, and he takes pleasure in terrorizing them.

One day, new creatures appear on the beach -- white people who, like Tarzan's parents, have also been abandoned by mutineers. Tarzan is drawn to them and immediately becomes their secret protector and benefactor. Although he is able to

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write them notes, he cannot speak to them since he has never heard the language, and they do not believe he authored the notes. Meanwhile, a French ship pursuing the mutineers comes to the rescue of the stranded party. Tarzan falls in love with Jane, one of the stranded passengers. When Tarzan rescues Jane from a vengeful bull ape, she finds that she loves him in return. However, Tarzan does not return to Jane after going in search of a French officer kidnapped by the cannibals, so Jane and her companions assume he has died or returned to the wild, and they set sail for America.

Meanwhile, Tarzan has been nursing D'Arnot, the Frenchman, back to health and, in return, D'Arnot has been teaching Tarzan how to speak. Upon returning to the beach and finding the ship gone, Tarzan resolves to follow Jane to America, and his new friend offers to help him both monetarily and by teaching him how to be civilized. The two friends arrive in Paris, where D'Arnot arranges for a fingerprint check to confirm what he believes: that Tarzan is the son of John Clayton, Lord Greystoke.

In the meantime, Jane is being pressured to marry one of her father's creditors, a situation she had hoped to avoid when her father had found treasure on their quest. He had found a rich treasure, but it was stolen from him, and so she finally agrees to marry Mr. Canler to save her father's dignity. Suddenly, Tarzan appears and, as before, rescues her from her plight as he brings her father's treasure. He reveals that he was the man with whom she fell in love on the beach, and though she is overjoyed, in a moment of recklessness, she decides to marry Tarzan's cousin, Cecil Clayton. Tarzan does not pressure her to change her mind and, although he has the proof that would allow him to claim his rightful title of Lord Greystoke from his cousin, he chooses to remain silent in the interest of Jane's happiness.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

What does Kala do with her baby when she adopts Tarzan, and why is this important?

Kala places her baby's body in the crib from which she took Tarzan. This is important because the skeleton causes Tarzan to believe that it is the Greystokes' child and, therefore, he cannot be related to the people or events that are connected to the cabin. As a result, he does not realize his true heritage for a long time.

Literary Analysis

What is the author's purpose in describing some of the complaints the apes brought before Tarzan for resolution?

The author's purpose is probably to make the apes seem more human. The problems that they bring to Tarzan are very similar to the problems that people face as well. Having to contend with these challenges also allows the author to show Tarzan's wisdom through the ways he handles the disputes.

Inferential Comprehension

How are Lady Alice and Kala alike? How are they different?

First of all, the two mothers are alike in that they both are very dedicated to their children. Both of them are young and, among their species, they are considered to be attractive. However, Kala is quite a bit more hardy than Lady Alice and is far more assertive and strong willed than her human counterpart. Furthermore, Kala seems to be almost indifferent to her mate's desires and commands. Lady Alice, on the other hand, is much more devoted to her husband and generally does not dispute what he tells her.

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Constructing Meaning

How are the apes in Tarzan's tribe personified throughout the story?

The apes are given individual names based on their personal characteristics, with which they refer to each other. They actually speak to one another and are shown to argue and reason with each other. Their actions are motivated by such human emotions as love for a child, thirst for power, revenge of an insult, and determination to get one's desires.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization Have the students create a family "jungle tree," in the form of a mobile, depicting the major characters in the story and demonstrating the relationship they have with one another. One of the goals of this project is for the students to make their mobile resemble a jungle tree with all its interwoven vines and branches.

Comparing and Contrasting *Tarzan of the Apes* is a fictitious story in which an orphaned human child is raised by animal foster parents in the wilderness. There are, however, documented cases in which a child is found who has actually been raised by animals. Have students research the factual cases and present their findings to the class. Then initiate a class discussion regarding the information presented and how it relates to *Tarzan of the Apes*. Is *Tarzan of the Apes* realistic? Why or why not?

Identifying Reading Strategies Because of the time period in which the story is set, the story includes many words that are not commonly used in today's speech such as "barkantine" and "onerous." As a well-educated man, Professor Porter uses many scientific terms and sophisticated words in his speech, such as "quadruped" and "paucity." As the students read the story, have them list the words with which they are not familiar and write the definitions they infer from the context clues. Then have them look up the actual definition of the words and write

those under their own definitions, being sure to document the dictionary they have used as their source. As a class, have the students assemble their own class dictionary of the words that they have defined and researched.

Responding to Literature One of the characteristics that Tarzan develops by living with the apes is a heightened awareness of his senses. He is much more observant and in tune with his surroundings than the average person is. Divide the class into five small groups and assign each to develop a station that will test one of the five senses. After the stations have been completed, let the students try out the different stations to see how observant they are. Other classes may also be invited to the room to go through the stations as well.