

# ENDANGERED SPECIES CURRICULUM

## GRADES K – 12

### Endangered Symbols

In this lesson, students explore the importance of protecting endangered species, the historical and social significance of animals as cultural symbols in various countries around the world, as well as the effect that humans have made on the population and natural habitats of these animals. It is appropriate for all ages and adheres to McRel Academic Content Standards.

### Academic Content Standards

This lesson plan may be used to address the academic standards listed below. These standards are drawn from Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education: 2nd Edition.

### Objectives

Students will:

1. Explore the use of animals in cultures around the world.
2. Understand the importance of protecting endangered species.
3. Investigate the ways in which animals have been used as traditional symbols in cultures around the world; analyze the current status of these animals in their native habitats.
4. Create an "Animals around the World" exhibit to display research findings both artistically and textually.

### Resources / Materials:

pens/pencils

computer access to [www.glogster.com](http://www.glogster.com)

resource materials in which information and images of "symbolic animals" can be found (geography-related periodicals such as National Geographic, computers with Internet access, global history textbooks, mythology books, library reference books)

### Activities / Procedures

1. WARM-UP/DO-NOW: brainstorm a class list of endangered species and the countries in which they live.
2. Explain to students that they will be exploring the ways in which certain animals have been important to different cultures and societies around the world, as well as analyzing the current status of these animals in their native habitats. They will then create posters of endangered animals to display in the classroom for other classes to visit.
3. Divide students into pairs or small groups of three, and have each select one of the endangered animals listed on the board. Then, using all available resources, each group researches the significance of their assigned animal as a cultural and historical symbol in as many cultures as they can, addressing the following for each culture that they identify (written on the board for easier student access):

- Characteristics that the animal represents

- History of this animal as a cultural symbol
- One example of a myth, story or legend associated with the animal
- The environmental and economic benefits of protecting the animal
- The population status of the animal in the native habitat of this culture
- How human interaction with the environment in which this animal lived or lives has impacted the status of the animal (including past and current preservation efforts)

4. WRAP-UP/HOMEWORK: After completing their research, each student group develops a poster on [www.glogster.com](http://www.glogster.com) about the cultural and historic importance of their animal around the world. The display should address all of the above criteria for each example of a culture in which this animal is a symbol, and should include, for each culture, an artistic and a written component in order to expound upon these criteria. Encourage students to adhere to the aesthetic standards and methods of each culture they explore. In a later class, have students present their artwork and display as an "exhibit" around the classroom, and invite other classes to visit your "Animals Around the World" exhibit.

### **Further Questions for Discussion**

- Do you think animals are protected today more/less than the past?
- Do you think animals are treated differently in different parts of the world?
- Why do you think that animals revered by one culture might be feared or loathed by another (such as western versus eastern perceptions of the mythical dragon)?
- Is there a connection to ancient cultural animal symbols and our modern tradition of assigning animals or birds to cities and states? Why or why not?
- Are there certain animals that appear in different cultural traditions or myths around the world?
- Do you think an animal's cultural or historical significance affects its status in the modern world in terms of its population and conservation efforts? Why or why not?
- What are the environmental, medicinal, economic and cultural benefits of protecting endangered species?
- Why is it important to recognize Endangered Species Day?

### **Evaluation / Assessment**

Students will be evaluated based on participation in class discussions, group research, and thoughtful artistic and written pieces exploring the cultural and historic significance of animals around the world.

### **Vocabulary**

revered, symbolizes, mythical, folklore, wetlands, paddies, stragglers, expanse, habitat, tally, extinct, reintroduction, surveyors, irrigation, itinerant, lumber, hummock, eking, proximity, comeback, endangered, egalitarian, descendants, bodes, plight

### **Standards**

#### Grades 6-8

Geography Standard 10 - Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics. Benchmark: Knows ways in which communities reflect the cultural background of their inhabitants.

Geography Standard 14 - Understands how human actions modify the physical environment.  
Benchmarks: Understands the environmental consequences of people changing the physical environment; understands the environmental consequences of both the unintended and intended outcomes of major technological changes in human history.

Geography Standard 18 - Understands global development and environmental issues.  
Benchmarks: Understands how the interaction between physical and human systems affects current conditions on Earth; understands why different points of view exist regarding contemporary geographic issues.

Language Arts Standard 1 - Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process. Benchmarks: Uses style and structure appropriate for specific audiences and purposes; writes expository compositions.

Language Arts Standard 4 - Gathers and uses information for research purposes. Benchmarks: Uses a variety of resource materials to gather information for research topics; determines the appropriateness of an information source for a research topic; organizes information and ideas from multiple sources in systematic ways.

#### Grades 9-12

Geography Standard 8 - Understands the characteristics of ecosystems on Earth's surface.  
Benchmarks: understands how relationships between soil, climate, and plant and animal life affect the distribution of ecosystems; knows ecosystems in terms of their biodiversity and productivity; knows the effects of biological magnification in ecosystems; knows the effects of both physical and human changes in ecosystems.

Geography Standard 10 - Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics.  
Benchmarks: Knows how cultures influence the characteristics of regions; understands how human characteristics make specific regions of the world distinctive; understands how evolving political and economic alliances may affect the traditional cohesiveness of world culture regions; knows the role culture plays in incidents of cooperation and conflict in the present-day world.

Geography Standard 14 - Understands how human actions modify the physical environment.  
Benchmarks: Understands the role of humans in decreasing the diversity of flora and fauna in a region; understands the global impacts of human changes in the physical environment.

Geography Standard 18 - Understands global development and environmental issues.  
Benchmarks: Understands why policies should be designed to guide the use and management of Earth's resources and to reflect multiple points of view; understands contemporary issues in terms of Earth's physical and human systems.

Language Arts Standard 1 - Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process. Benchmarks: Writes compositions that are focused for different audiences; Writes compositions that fulfill different purposes; writes expository compositions.

Language Arts Standard 4 - Gathers and uses information for research purposes. Benchmarks:  
Uses a variety of news sources to gather information for research topics; synthesizes  
information from multiple research studies to draw conclusions that go beyond those found in  
any of the individual studies.

*Adapted by Cathy Sheafor from a lesson plan in the New York Times.*