by Annette Payne

Grade levels: K-5  
Subject areas: science, visual arts, music, language arts  
Key concepts: endangered species  
Skills: research, awareness, understanding, empathy  
Location: indoors and outdoors  
Time: teacher preparation, schoolwide, 2 months; related classroom activities/preparation, 1 month; theme week activities, 1 week

As children begin to develop a personal connection with the natural world, they may become deeply committed to sharing their environmental concerns with others. As teachers, one of the best ways we can help students to do this is to organize a series of special activities and events focused on a theme of particular interest. This article describes a project in which a school community cooperated in planning and carrying out a week of schoolwide and classroom activities focused on the theme of endangered species. Most of the planning guidelines and many of the activities are readily adaptable to other themes.

Getting organized

No matter what the topic, a schoolwide theme requires organization and cooperation. Here are a few tips for getting started:

* Begin by sending flyers around inviting staff to join an organizing committee, and talk to people informally about what you are proposing. The more staff on board, the less work for everyone in the long run. This should be done early: about one or two months before schoolwide activities begin.

* The initial meeting should be a brief brainstorming session. At subsequent meetings you can make concrete decisions and set definite dates.

* Plan on having several committee meetings. Let committee members decide what needs to be discussed, when meetings will be, and how long they should be. Make up an agenda for each and stick to it, leaving time at the end for new business. Pass out a copy of the minutes to every staff member — even those who are not on the committee, as they appreciate knowing what is going on.

* People often find working with others makes a task more enjoyable, and the job is shared more evenly. Consider working within the committee in grade-level groups or with “reading buddy” classes.
Act as consultants, not directors. The organizing committee should work on planning schoolwide activities and leave classroom activities related to the theme up to individual teachers.

As schoolwide events are planned and scheduled, post a calendar in a prominent place in the staff room to help keep everyone organized.

**Announcing the theme**

Include your plans and activities in the school’s daily announcements during the weeks leading up to the theme week. This not only increases interest and participation among students and staff but also serves as an educational tool. In our school, pairs of reading buddies took turns making the announcements every day for four weeks before the final bash. Everyone learned a great deal about endangered species from these announcements. Students gave facts about their class’s adopted animal as well as general information about endangered species. They read poetry and played songs. Grade 4 students, along with their senior-kindergarten reading buddies, played a question-and-answer game called “Animals in Jeopardy.” The game was so popular that “Animals in Jeopardy” became the name of our school theme.

**Classroom animal research**

Every class chose an endangered animal as their symbol, and students became experts on that particular species. The methods of research used to gather information about their animal were decided by individual teachers. Some classes read stories and others did group research projects. While the organizing committee encouraged the selection of endangered animals native to North America, individual classes had autonomy in choosing their species and thus we had elephants along with humpbacks.

After sea turtles made from painted paper plates appeared outside the Grade 1–2 room, imaginatively crafted animals began to show up outside other rooms all over the school. Polar bears were clothed in soft white cotton balls, elephants were sponge-painted to highlight the texture of their wrinkled skin, paper replicas of tole loggerhead shrikes — one of our local endangered species — sat on real hawthorn branches, and wolves watched warily from masks. Each class was given a box to decorate to look like its adopted animal. All of the boxes were then stacked into a totem pole and placed in the entrance of the school to greet visitors.

**Time-is-running-out murals**

Because we are losing species so quickly — at a rate of one to three each hour — a Grade 4 class decided to give us a concrete illustration. The students made three murals representing the three main biospheres of sky, land, and water. The murals were put up on a wall in the hallway, and every student in the school was invited to contribute a small drawing of an endangered animal. Accompanying the mural was a clock, and, each hour, a student from the class moved the clock forward and took off one of the animals. It took very little time for all the species to disappear. The empty murals communicated a sense of loss, and a banner reading “We Are Gone” was placed across them.

**Animal riddles**

Each day, students in each grade-level division were given an endangered species riddle to solve. These were made up by the teachers on the committee. Students put their answers in a box and, if they correctly answered the riddle, their name would go up on a chart in our “Hall of Fame.” The riddles for the primary grades were quite easy to solve, and after a day their “Hall of Fame” chart was almost full. The Grades 4-6 riddles were a little more difficult and it took about three days before their chart was full. The Grades 7-8 students’ riddles were a real challenge for staff as well as students and no one solved the first one! This activity was a great success. After the first day, students formed crowds every morning around the Hall of Fame bulletin board to read the daily riddles and the previous day’s results.

**Elective days**

**Grades 1-4:** Teachers organized a full day of activities, and their six classes rotated through them. The half-hour activities included:
Endangered species zoo trip

Students in Grades 5 and 6 discussed zoo issues and then visited a large zoo for a guided tour of endangered species and a presentation on the topic of species interdependence. In the afternoon, the students were given a zoo checklist and, working in groups, were required to observe and assess the condition of a specific animal and its habitat in the zoo. The experience increased students’ awareness of zoos and led to some interesting discussions and debates.

Taking action

One way for students to increase their awareness and become actively involved in protecting endangered species is to “adopt” an animal. Although adoption of native endangered species was encouraged, students at our school chose to adopt an elephant and a black rhino, along with a humpback whale. They raised funds for this effort in the following ways.

Elephant Bake Sale: The Grade 7 and 8 students had a bake sale and raised enough money to adopt an orphaned African elephant. Although rumors were flying that they were going to adopt an elephant and put it in the zoo, the money really went to the Kenya Wildlife Fund, where 100 percent of it was used to buy food for orphaned elephants. The students were very proud when they received their adoption certificate and pictures of “Imenti” the elephant.

Humpback Adoption Agency: Grades 2, 3, and 5 students got together to open an adoption agency for humpback whales. They chose candidates for adoption from several whale portfolios. Students who donated 25 cents could vote on the whale they wanted to adopt and their name went into a draw for one of eight wildlife bookmarks. Enough money was raised to adopt three whales.

Animal Coin Walk: We laid down animal footprints to mark off each meter along the lines on the gym floor. Students placed their change on the line and at the end of the day had collected 44 meters of coins. Combined with the money raised from a cupcake sale, they had
够到赞助一只黑犀牛，“Scud”，通过肯尼亚野生动物基金会，并成为0.4公顷（1英亩）的加拿大荒野的守护者通过世界野生动物基金会。

**Closing ceremony**

在我们“动物在危险”周的最后一天，我们带来了环保阅读、音乐和幻灯片展示，展示了我们活动的全貌。到周末，学生们意识到了，由于人类活动，我们正在失去宝贵的东西。但是，学生们也意识到，他们可以是全世界教育他人并找到解决方案的努力的一部分。

**Annette Payne**

教于 Pope John Paul II School in Lindsay, Ontario.

**Notes**


**Resources**

**Wildlife adoption**

许多组织都有野生动物收养计划，支持他们的工作，保护濒危物种和受到威胁的物种。检查由当地保护组织管理的项目，或者联系以下的国家和国际组织:


**Zoo checklists**

以下组织提供免费的检查表，学生可以用来评估动物园动物的条件:

- **People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals** <www.peta.org>.

**Information on endangered species**

- **Canadian Nature Federation**: kit available at 1-800-267-4088 or at <www.cnf.ca/species/>.
- **Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada**: list of endangered species at <www.cosewic.gc.ca>.
- **Friends of the Earth** <www.foe.org>.
- **Species Survival Commission of the World Conservation Union**: <www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/>.
- **World Wildlife Fund** <www.worldwildlife.org> or <www.wwf.ca>.