

Questions and Suggestions for further learning

An ABC of Baby Animals by Sarah Prince

This book is designed to not only introduce young children to the letters of the alphabet, but more importantly, to the sounds they make. I also wanted to present them with beautiful artwork and some incredibly cute baby animals!

Features of the book include:

- The long and short vowel sounds
- The hard and soft sounds of 'C' and 'G'
- Upper and lower case letters on every page
- Easy to read text with 'a' shaped A's and 'g' shaped G's

(Children learn to write a and g, yet computers use a and g's – very confusing!)

- Large sepia toned images on uncluttered pages
 - Soft muted colours for babies
 - Fun facts about each animal
 - Footprints of every animal

(Although I did make up the unicorn prints, I couldn't find them anywhere!)

Be sure to read slowly, point things out in the pictures, and pronounce the *sounds* instead of the letter *names* throughout the book (see my ABC video for a more detailed explanation). Give babies time to look and take in what they are seeing. Toddlers often like to rush ahead but asking them questions will calm things down a bit, get them thinking, and help them realise it's not a race! Get the 3-5 year-olds to think a bit deeper and guess what letter, or what animal might be coming next.

As with all my 'Questions and Suggestions' pages, I have included dozens of examples here, but don't think you have to ask them all, or do the actions in one sitting. These lessons could last for weeks! **Don't let too many lessons and learning interfere with the fun!** Some questions are obviously aimed at older children, but with babies both ask *and answer* some fun questions along the way.

The front cover

When reading a book to any age child begin with the front cover. Read the title and the names of the author and illustrator, explain how one wrote the words and the other drew the pictures. Although in this case it is just me! If there is a picture on the cover, talk about that too. Ask older children what they think the book might be about just by looking at the cover.

The inside cover

Turn to the inside cover and say (or sing!) the alphabet together pronouncing the *names* of each letter, *not* the sounds this time. Be sure to pronounce the letter Z as a 'zed' instead of the American

pronunciation ‘zee’ (unless you’re in America of course!). You could ask older children which letter their name starts with as well as other names they might be familiar with.

Panda bears!

Talk about the panda on the title page and his furry little feet, you could even count his toes! Then discuss the pandas you see when you turn the page. Point out how they are different from the panda on the cover, one is sitting up and the other is waving! Is it the same panda do you think?

The dedication page

You can read the dedication page and explain what that is. That authors and illustrators often write a book for someone else, with a child, or a friend, or a loved one in mind. In this case Sue Hill is a wonderful friend and work colleague of mine, a brilliant Professor in the field of early childhood education. She loved ABC books and had a huge collection of them and Hugo Hill is her enormous, adorable poodle who once ate one of my boots – chewing it up into tiny little pieces!

Puppies and kittens!

Talk about how cute the puppy and kitten are and how the puppy has his tongue poking out! The puppy is my cousin’s dog called Megsie and the kitten’s name is Berry! Ask the children if they know a puppy or a kitten that look like that. Do you have a puppy or a kitten at home? Or a dog or a cat? What are they called? What would you call their cat or dog if you had one?

Using the fact pages

Jumping ahead to the fact pages located at the back of the book, there are a number of ways you can choose to use these pages. If reading to babies, you might like to read them first and become familiar with some of the facts before hand, so you can talk about them as you read. With toddlers and older children however, you could turn to the fact pages as you read, saying something like, ‘Let’s see what the fact pages have to say’. That way you are demonstrating how to make better use of the book, how books have different sections, and how to use them, and what facts actually are. Alternatively you could not interrupt the ‘story’ and instead read the facts altogether at the end.

A for apes and anteaters!

Read the text, emphasising the *long A sound* when reading the word apricot and the *short A sound* with the word apple, do the same when you turn the page – use the *long A sound* for the *ape* and the *short A sound* for the *anteater*. Point out the ‘big’ A and the ‘little’ a (or the upper case and lower case letters, whichever term you choose to use) and how different they are.

Focus on the pictures, for instance, talk about how this little ape looks like he’s laughing, or point to the sharp claws of the little anteater.

Finally, get the kids to thump their chests like apes and pick fleas off one another! Or stick their tongues out like an anteater and pretend to lick up ants!

For older children (**when I say older children I mean 4 and 5 year-olds**) you could explore the different types of apes there are and the differences between apes and monkeys. Talk about them being wild animals that can be extremely dangerous, yet very loving toward one another. Investigate the different types of ant eaters there are in the world – they come in all shapes and sizes. We have our own ant eaters here in Australia – the spikey echidna!

B for bears!

Read the text and point to the words as you do - **you don’t always have to do this but make sure you do sometimes!** Remember to pronounce the B *sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the ‘big’ B and the ‘little’ b.

Focus on the picture, point out ‘This little bear cub is all white, what sort of bear might he be?’

Finally get the kids to see if they too can hold their foot in one hand while their leg is still straight and if you’re brave enough to make a complete fool of yourself – show them how you can’t!

For older children you could have a lot of fun finding out about the different bears there are, where they live, what they look like and what they eat. Talk about the famous bears there are e.g. Paddington Bear, Winnie the Pooh, Baloo from *The Jungle Book*, etc. Finish your exploration of bears with a Teddy Bear's picnic.

C for cockatoos and civets!

Read the text, emphasising the *hard* C sound when reading the word *car* and the *soft* C sound with the word *city*, do the same when you turn the page – use the *hard* C sound for the *cockatoo* and the *soft* C sound for the *civet*. Point out the 'big' C and the 'little' c and how they look exactly the same, but one is just smaller than the other.

Focus on the picture, talk about how this baby cockatoo has hardly got any feathers yet and how cute this little civet baby is!

Finally, get children involved by squawking like cockatoos and flapping their wings, or cleaning their whiskers with their little paws like a civet!

For older children you could explore some of the amazing parrots and cockatoos there are in the world, we are lucky enough to have lots of them in Australia. Have fun watching some videos of them singing and talking. Ask the children what they would teach their cockies to say if they had one. Also explore the kind of civets there are. I'd never heard of them when I wrote this book, but there are lots of them – African ones, Asian ones, some with stripes, some with spots!

D for ducklings!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the D *sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the 'big' D and the 'little' d. For older children you could turn back and compare the little 'b' and 'd' and see if the children can see what's different about them.

Focus on the picture, point out how cheeky this little duckling looks and how tiny his wings are and how he hasn't got any feathers yet!

Finally, get the children to waddle about and quack like ducks! Or sing the song *Five Little Ducks* and do all the hand movements together!

For older children you could have a lot of fun finding out about ducks. There's lots of different varieties living all over the world. There are heaps of famous ducks from books and movies – get the children to do their best Daffy Duck impersonations! There are rhymes and poems about ducks, or perhaps the best fun would be to play a game of *Duck, Duck, Goose!*

E for emus and elephants!

Read the text, emphasising the *long* E sound when reading the word *enormous* and the *short* E sound with the word *egg*, do the same when you turn the page – use the *long* E sound for the *emu* and the *short* E sound for the *elephant*. **When the animal is a familiar one, get the children to finish the sentence for you, 'E for... elephant! Or is it a butterfly? Are you sure it's an elephant? How can you tell?'** Point out the 'big' E and the 'little' e and how different they are.

Focus on the pictures and talk about how stripy this little chick is and how he only has three toes – How many toes do you have?' Point out how cute the baby elephant is. Point out how big his ears are and how long his nose is. Show me your ears, are they big like that?

Finally, get the kids to put their hands behind their back then bob down like an emu finding lots of seeds to eat. Have them swing their long elephant trunks arms, then lift them up and trumpet like an elephant as loudly as they can!

For older children you could have a lot of fun finding out about emus and elephants! There are a surprisingly large number of story books about emus the most well-known being the delightful *Edward the Emu* and *Edwina the Emu*. As for elephants well you could spend a lifetime researching elephants. There are so many beautiful, beautiful books about elephants and what extraordinary creatures they are. Playdough elephants are super fun and easy for even the

youngest of children to make. There are movies to watch and discuss that the children will already be familiar with e.g. *Horton Hears a Who*. I won't reinvent the wheel here, there are 100s of elephant activities online to do, that people far cleverer than me have invented, so have a look online and see what you can find.

F for foxes!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the F *sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the 'big' F and the 'little' f.

Focus on the picture and ask the children what this little fox cub is doing. What happens when you yawn? Does your tongue stick out like that? When do we yawn? Do we yawn when we're happy, or when we're sleepy? Perhaps this little fox cub is yawning because he's spent the whole day playing and now he's getting ready for bed!

Finally, get the children to run about on all fours like fox cubs and wag their tails as they do! Then get them to yawn, curl up in a ball and go to sleep!

For older children you could find out all you can about foxes, Arctic foxes are particularly amazing as their coats turn white for winter. You could read the wonderful A.A. Milne poem, *The Three Foxes* about three little foxes, 'who didn't wear stockings, and they didn't wear socksies!'

Again there are some totally cute foxes to make out of paper plates and toilet rolls, so have a look online for those. And there's a heap of picture books about foxes as well.

G for guinea pigs and giraffes!

Read the text, emphasising the *hard* G sound when reading the word *green* and the *soft* G sound with the word *giant* (you could also ask the children what a giant might be and what green things can they see around the room). Do the same when you turn the page – use the *hard* G sound for the *guinea pig* and the *soft* G sound for the *giraffe*. Point out the 'big' G and the 'little' g and how different they look. This would be another good opportunity to get the children to finish the sentence for you, 'G for... giraffe, that's right!'

Focus on the picture, point out how this guinea pig has long straight fur but others have curly fur. Does anyone have a guinea pig for a pet? Talk about how happy this little giraffe looks, ask them what he might be laughing at? Does anyone have a giraffe for a pet?

Finally, get the children involved by wriggling their noses like guinea pigs and letting out some happy guinea pig squeaks and squeals! Then ask to see their best giraffe impersonation making sure they poke out their long black giraffe tongues!

For older children you could read one of my favourite books together *Olga da Polga* by Michael Bond, the same author who brought us *Paddington Bear*. It's a chapter book so it will take a while but it is a complete delight! Guinea pigs are sweet little things that make lots of high pitched squeaks and squeals when they are happy! Again there are a squillion giraffe books and activities online. Most kids will be very familiar with Melman from *Madagascar*, talk about how funny it is that he is on love with Gloria because she's a hippo! Perhaps get some old tissue boxes for the kids to walk around in like Melman did! There's even an International Giraffe Day – who knew!

H for hippopotamuses!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the H *sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the 'big' H and the 'little' h. Discuss how long the word hippopotamus is, count the letters. Go back to the word fox and count those too. Ask what else do we call a hippopotamus e.g. hippo!

Focus on the picture and ask the children to count how many toes he has. Talk about how hippos can sleep underwater, ask if the children can sleep underwater too!

Finally, get the kids to fold their arms across their chest, one on top of the other, then open them wide like big hippo jaws and snap them shut!

For older children you could find out some of the unusual real life hippo habits or read some of the Hazel Edwards books starting with *There's a Hippopotamus on my Roof Eating Cake!* Or the beautiful true story *A Mama for Owen*, where Owen, an orphaned baby hippo is adopted by a giant tortoise! This could lead to finding out about other unlikely animal friendships or some even more amazing and unusual human/animal friendships!

I for ibexes and iguanas!

Read the text, emphasising the *long* I sound when reading the word *ice* and the *short* I sound with the word *igloo*, do the same when you turn the page – use the *long* I sound for *ibex* and the *short* I sound for *iguana*. Point out the ‘big’ I and the ‘little’ i and how the little one has a dot above it.

Focus on the pictures and talk about how this little ibex seems to be looking at his tail, and how long the iguana’s toes and tail are!

Finally, get the kids to use their fists like hoofs and prance about like an ibex. Get them to wag their little ibex tails and look at their bottoms when they do! Ask them what they know about lizards and if they have ever seen one. Get them to dart about the room like lizards, looking left and right to find some bugs to eat!

For older children you could find out some fun facts about ibexes and others from the goat family. There are some amazing videos of them climbing up vertical cliffs and dam walls. You could collect some photos of their different horns – some of which are huge! Iguanas are also extraordinary creatures that live in many wild places around the globe. They come in all sorts of colours, they can run extremely fast, climb trees and swim underwater! Some grow as long as a man, they love to sunbake, and if their tails fall off, they can grow a new one!

J for jaguars

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the *J sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the ‘big’ J and the ‘little’ j. Talk about how the little one has a dot above it too. What other letter had a dot above it – do you remember?

Focus on the picture and ask the children if they can count the number of spots. Start counting together and see how far you get! ‘Oh that’s a *lot* of spots, far too many for me to count!’

Finally, get them to slink about like a big cat and grunt and growl like a jaguar! (You might have to look it up, it’s not the same as a lion’s roar!)

For older children you could explore the big cats of the world, how different they look and where they live. Again talk about how wild and ferocious they are, yet show great affection with their cubs. There are soooo many big cat related stories, movies, activities, have a quick look online and pick a just a few. If you have access to some face paints, stripy tigers and spotty jaguars are surprisingly simple to do and look fantastic – the kids will love it!

K for koalas

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the *K sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the ‘big’ K and the ‘little’ k and how they are nearly the same, get them to look closely and find the difference. This would be another good opportunity to get the children to finish the sentence for you, ‘K for... koala, that’s right!’

Focus on the picture and talk about how cute he is with his fluffy ears and how his strong claws are holding onto that branch!

Finally, get the children to pretend they are koalas and *very* slowly eat some gum leaves for lunch (or lettuce leaves might be much safer!). They could also grunt like a koala!

For older children you can find so many books, both fact and fictional ones, about koalas. For instance, there’s the old *Adventures of Blinky Bill* by Dorothy Wall, or the much more modern *Koala Lou* by Mem Fox. Discover how koalas only eat gum leaves, that there are hundreds of gum trees, but koalas can only eat three or four kinds of gum leaves, meaning they can’t just

live just anywhere. Find out all about marsupials most of whom carry their young in pouches. Discover just how many Australian animals are marsupials (there's a *LOT!*).

L for Llamas!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the *L sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the 'big' L and the 'little' l and how they are nearly the same, get them to tell you what the difference is.

Focus on the picture and talk about what big eyes a baby llama has and how their mothers hum to comfort them. See if the children can hum, perhaps hum a song together, then ask 'What does your Mummy do to comfort you?'

Finally, get the children to pretend they have long necks like a llama and strut about the room!

For older children you could find out just how popular llamas (and alpacas) are by going online to look up llama activities, there's even a National Llama Day. I had no idea they were so popular. Honestly there are hundreds of llama related things to do! You can make cut outs of llamas and decorate them with wool, ribbons, pom poms, and as much colour as you can. Look at how the Incas use llama wool for their clothes and hats and the amazing colours they create.

M for mice!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the *M sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the 'big' M and the 'little' m.

Focus on the picture and ask the children what this little mouse is doing. 'Is he nibbling on a little piece of cheese or is he cleaning his whiskers do you think?'

Finally, get the children to pretend they are little mice and get them to scurry about the room. Talk about the word 'scurry' and how it differs from running. Make sure they clean their whiskers!

For older children there are a million trillion mousie things to do. There are paper mice, playdough mice, woolly mice, walnut shell mice, pinecone mice, the possibilities are endless! You can find some very famous mice online – Mickey and Minnie of course, there's also Stuart Little, Angelina Ballerina, so, so many and if you include rats then there's even more!

N for numbats!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the *N sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the 'big' N and the 'little' n and how different they are. Talk about how similar the 'mmm' sound and the 'nnn' sound is. Show the children how your lips are together when you say the 'mmm' sound and apart with the 'nnn' sound.

Focus on the picture and ask the children 'What is a numbat? Does anyone know?' Talk about his stripy bottom and long furry tail!

Finally, using the fact pages at the back of the book, talk about how the numbat likes to eat termites, which are a bit like ants and that he has a long sticky tongue to pick them up! Get them to poke their tongues out and pretend to pick up termites. Talk about how numbats go 'tut tut tut' when they get frightened and get the children to do the same.

For older children this is the opportunity to find out about the little-known numbat, one of our unique Aussie animals. The numbat is like an ant eater but only eats termites. I haven't read it myself, but from images online *Nelly the Numbat* looks like a beautiful hide and seek adventure book for kids. Numbats are the State animal emblem for Western Australia, which could lead to all sorts of lessons about other State animals, flowers, birds, butterflies, flags etc. you could also look at the fact not all marsupials have pouches, that numbats have a soft furry layer skin that folds over the babies to protect them.

O for okapis and otters!

Read the text, emphasising the *long O sound* when reading the word *open* and the *short O sound* with the word *orange*, do the same when you turn the page – use the *long O sound* for the word

okapi and the *short O* sound for the word *otter*. Point out the ‘big’ O and the ‘little’ o and how they are almost identical. What is different about them?

Focus on the pictures and talk about what a strange looking animal an okapi is, how he has a stripey bottom like a zebra, a funny stumpy tail, and a face a bit like a giraffe. Also talk about the otter baby and how he looks like he is waving! Talk about the facts in the back and how they tell you that otters sleep on their backs in the water and hold hands so as not to drift apart.

Finally, get the children to get down on all fours and try to look at their bottoms like the okapi is doing. Get the children to lie down and pretend to be sleeping otters and hold hands with one another so they stay together. They might have to make loud some snoring noises to show they are asleep!

For older children this is an opportunity to look at a map of the world and talk about where we live and where okapis live. That they only live in one very small country on Earth and hide deep in thick rainforests. They are particularly good at hiding and have a strong sense of smell and hearing, which means they hear people coming and can easily hide. You could explore what other animals live in rainforests. Otters on the other hand are not quite so elusive and so there are a lot of activities and books about otters. Otter habits are incredibly cute: how they sleep floating on their backs; how they hold hands when they sleep; how the babies sleep on their mother’s tummies in the water; the way they *love* to play even as adults; the way they crack shellfish open with rocks; they can even juggle rocks! Otters are *really* cute!

P for pandas!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the P *sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the ‘big’ P and the ‘little’ p and how they are the same.

Focus on the picture and ask the children what they know about pandas and how you can see this one’s furry feet. Count his fingers and toes and talk about the black patches on his eyes.

Finally, get the children to roll on their backs and show you the bottom of their feet! Get them to take their shoes off and count their toes!

For older children pandas are a very popular, well for all aged children really, and adults for that matter! Again use your map to show the children they only live in one country, namely China, deep in the bamboo forests. There are countless panda activities to do and loads of fact and fiction books to explore. Steve Antony has a whole series of Mr Panda books to choose from. I’ve never made it, but there are recipes online for black playdough, so playdough pandas would be super easy to make, although you could just use white with other colours and make some rainbow pandas instead! You could also extend your learning to talk about red pandas which look quite different to their giant panda cousins.

Q for quokkas!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the Q *sound* (ie k+w) not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the ‘big’ Q and the ‘little’ q and how different they are. Talk about how similar the little p and little q are and how the q is just a backward p! English is so confusing!

Focus on the picture and ask the children ‘What is a quokka? Does anyone know?’ Talk about his happy face and why they might be called the happiest animal.

Finally, using the fact pages at the back of the book, talk about how the quokka is like a mini kangaroo with a pouch to carry their babies. Get the children to hop about like a kangaroo.

For older children look on your map and discover they only live on tiny islands off the coast of Western Australia, mainly Rottneest Island. Gather some pictures to show the children why they are known as being so happy, but remind children they might look happy, but they are still wild animals and can bite! You could make a chart of the kangaroo family to see how big each one is e.g. wallabies, tree kangaroos, pademelons, quokkas, bettongs etc. You could also explore what nocturnal means and find out what other animals only feed at night.

R for rabbits!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the R *sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the ‘big’ R and the ‘little’ r and how different they are. This would be another good opportunity to get the children to finish the sentence for you, ‘R for... rabbit. Rabbit!?! Are you sure? Are you sure that’s not an elephant!’

Focus on the picture and ask the children what they know about rabbits and if any of them have a rabbit for a pet. Talk about what other pets the children have.

Finally, get the kids to hop about like bunnies and clean their whiskers with their paws!

For older children there are of course dozens of story books and movies about rabbits and cute baby bunnies to explore e.g. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, *The Flopsy Bunnies*, *Little Grey Rabbit*, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, *Guess How Much I Love You*, etc. You could have a look online and discover the different kind of rabbits there are in the world. The little bunny in this book is a lop-eared rabbit, but the children will be fascinated to see pictures of the giant Flemish rabbit – they are *HUGE!* Making bunny ears with young children is always popular, or using some simple rabbit cut outs – on one side give them some eyes, a black nose and some whiskers, and on the other side a white cotton ball tail.

S for seals!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the S *sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the ‘big’ S and the ‘little’ s and how they the same, that one is just smaller than the other

Focus on the picture and talk about how big the seals eyes are and count how many claws they have. Ask them if they know what sound a seal makes.

Finally, get the kids to flap and clap their hands together and bark like seals. Changing the words of *The Wheels on the Bus* to *The Seals on the Bus* is the most fun ever! If you’re keen for an epic sing-a-long you could make up a verse for every animal in the book, although you might have to make up some okapi, civet and xerus sounds!

For older children you could talk about how this is a baby harp seal which have beautiful soft, white coats to help them hide in the snow while their mums go off to collect food. You could explain how harp seals recognise their babies by their smell – I’m glad humans don’t do that! I’ve never made them but I’m pretty sure a playdough seal would be easy to make for even the youngest of children!

T for tapirs!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the T *sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the ‘big’ T and the ‘little’ t and how different they are.

Focus on the picture and talk about this little tapir’s funny nose and all his stripes and spots!

Finally, using the facts in the back, get the children to pretend they are tapirs having a mud bath!

For older children this is a good opportunity to look at how different some babies look from their parents. Tapir babies are very stripy and spotty, but as adults they are just plain brown. Emu babies are also very stripy but as adults are just brown. Can you think of some other animals that look very different from their parents? Go online to discover where tapirs live and use your world map to show the children where places like India are. Talk about their weird noses and how they look a bit like an elephant seal or really small elephant trunks! You could cut out a big brown tapir mummy, then make some baby tapirs out of brown card and get the children to either paint or glue on some white stripes and spots.

U for unicorns and upside-down orangutans!

Read the text, emphasising the *long* U sound when reading the word *uniform* and the *short* U sound with the word *umbrella*. Ask the children if they know who wears a uniform e.g. people in the police force or the army, or doctors and nurses. Who else wears a uniform? Ask the children what an umbrella is used for. Use the *long* U sound when reading the word unicorn and the

short U sound for upside-down. Point out the ‘big’ U and the ‘little’ u and how they are nearly the same, but not quite!

Focus on the pictures and ask the children what they know about unicorns (probably more than you!). Ask them if they know what animal is hanging upside-down. Then talk about orangutans and how they have bright orange hair!

Finally, get the children to prance about like magic unicorns. Then get them to look through their legs and see the room from upside-down like the orangutan!

For older children there are dozens of stories you can read and activities you can do regarding unicorns, in fact you will be well and truly sick of unicorns by the time you finish! Make some simple cardboard cones and get the kids to decorate them, add some elastic so they can all have unicorn horns. Then make some tails out of coloured cloth, ribbons, wool, rope, paper, whatever you can find. Go online and find out some facts about the amazing orangutans. Use your map of the world to show the children where Borneo is and how small the areas are in which they live. Talk about how like humans they are and how they are part of the ape family (like the little gorilla at the beginning of the book). There are some beautiful videos online of baby orangutans with their parents and talk about how they behave just like we do sometimes! There are also videos of orangutans making friends with kittens, dogs, children, and ducklings!

V for vultures!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the *V sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the ‘big’ V and the ‘little’ v and how they are the same just one is bigger than the other.

Focus on the picture and talk about how fluffy this little vulture is as his grown-up feathers haven’t come through yet. Explain how his neck will stay bald and only his body will have feathers.

Finally, get the children to squat down and flap their big wings and make squawky vulture noises!

For older children there are a number of movies with vultures in them that they will be very familiar with. For example, *Ice Age 2* has the singing and dancing vultures and *Horton Hears a Who* has the hapless Vlad! Find out the different kinds of vultures there are in the world and where they are found. Talk about how we don’t have any vultures in Australia. Find out just how big they can be and how wide their wingspan is. Measure out on the floor (or a wall) just how wide their wings are. Get the children to lie down on the floor (or stand by the wall) and spread out their arms to see if they’re ‘wings’ are as wide as a vultures!

W for wombats!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the *W sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the ‘big’ W and the ‘little’ w and how they are the same just one is bigger than the other.

Focus on the picture and talk about how cute this little wombat is. Point out his sharp claws and ask what they might be for.

Finally, get the children to waddle about like wombats and pretend to dig up the carpet with their sharp claws to make one of their big, long tunnels!

For older children there are some truly beautiful books about wombats – *Sebastian lives in a hat*, *Diary of a Wombat*, *Wombat Stew*, and the most divine *Wombat Divine*. All of which come with loads of learning activities. You could make a giant mural of grass, leaves, and sand to make a wombat habitat. Make some wombat cut-outs then using textas, paint, or wool scraps to decorate them glue them to your landscape. An online investigation will show children just how amazing these animals are, how their hard back ends stop predators biting their bottoms! How they have backwards facing pouches and most importantly how they poop in cubes!

X for xeruses!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. This is a tricky one, for even though the X sound, which is usually pronounced either as k+s (as in fox) or e+k+s (as in x-ray), in this case is

pronounced as a ‘zzz’ sound (as in zebra), **zzz + e (as in egg) + rus**. Which will be far too complicated to explain to your young audience, so you might just have to cleverly brush over this one until they get a bit older! But at least look at the ‘big’ X and ‘little’ x and talk about how they are nearly, but not quite, the same.

Focus on the picture and talk about how he is a type of squirrel from Africa and eats seeds and nuts. Finally, tell the children how squirrels stuff nuts into their cheeks to carry them. Get the children to puff out their cheeks and pretend they have collected lots of nuts to take back to their nest.

For older children there are quite a few xerus-y things online to discover. First of all there are four different kinds of xerus all of which come from Africa, but point out they are a ground squirrel, so instead of living in trees like they do in Europe and America, they dig burrows underground. Use your map of the world to show children where Africa is. They live underground because it is much cooler, and sometimes they use their tails to shade themselves from the sun! Although not officially about xeruses, you could also look at books about squirrels (there are so many of them!) Golden oldies include *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin* by Beatrix Potter and *Squirrels* by Brian Wildsmith. Or there are lots of modern ones as well including Melanie Watts’ series about *Scaredy Squirrel* or *Those Darn Squirrels* by Adam Rubin. Movies to share together could include the *Ice Age* series with Scrat the squirrel constantly trying to save his acorn!

Y for yaks!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the Y *sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the ‘big’ Y and the ‘little’ y and how they are nearly, but not quite, the same.

Focus on the picture and talk about how a yak looks a bit like a cow, but they are bigger and fatter with much thicker fur because they live in very cold countries where it snows a lot!

Finally, drape towels or thick coats over the children and get them to plod about the room on all fours like big fat yaks! Talk about how plodding is different from walking. Tell them the boys are called yaks, but the girls are called naks!

For older children you could listen to the old song by The Coasters from 1959 called *Yakety Yak!* About all the chores a teenager has to do around the house! Which could lead to what chores need doing in your house. But be warned it’s a fun song but *incredibly* annoying! Explore all the things the Tibetans use yaks for e.g. their meat, their super soft fur, their milk and delicious yak butter, even their poop is used for firewood! Talk about the difference between yaks and cows and how yaks need their thick fur to live where it’s so cold.

Z for zebras!

Read the text and point to the words as you do. Remember to pronounce the Z *sound* not the letter *name*. Look at the differences between the ‘big’ Z and the ‘little’ z and how they are nearly the same. This would be another good opportunity to get the children to finish the sentence for you, ‘Z for... zebra. A zebra? Are you sure it’s not a horse, how do you know it’s a zebra?’

Focus on the picture and talk about zebras, horses, and donkeys. That zebras have stripes and a sticky-up mane, and donkeys have much bigger ears!

Finally, get the children to prance about like zebras, paw the ground, and make some zebra noises (you might have to look this up they sound more like dogs than horses or donkeys!)

For older children you must of course talk about the most famous of zebras – Marty from the *Madagascar* movies. If your children have already seen it, see if they can remember some of the scenes from the movie, and what made them laugh the most. If it was summer in Australia and they were my kids, I’d have them outside squirting water from their mouths like the zebras did in the movie, but this might gross some parents out. I’ll leave you to work that out!

Include the Children’s names as you read

As you read be sure to stop along the way and ask if anyone here has a name that starts with the letter J, or P, etc. For names that start with a vowel, or a C or a G, then sound out each name and get

the children to work out if their name starts with a long or a short sound or a hard or a soft sound. If you have a name like *Audrey* that will be a bit tricky because in this case the A doesn't have a short or a long sound!!

Make it a memory game

Before you re-read the book each time, make it an opportunity to play a memory game. Ask the children, what kind of animal starts with a D? (using the *sound* of the letter not the name). Or what animal had spots? Which one had stripes? Randomly open the book so only you can see the pictures and describe what you see and get the children to guess what it is! Or you could swap and get the children to describe an animal and get you to guess what it is!

Make letters out of other things

When children begin to hold textas and crayons etc. and start to show an interest in writing letters and stories, give them *lots* of opportunities to practice. Often using pen and paper is not enough. Get them to draw letters in the sand pit, make letters out of plasticine. They could use their whole bodies and make them all together on the floor, or just use hands and arms, but be sure to take photos so the children can see the results. Making letters out of sandpaper or other rough materials, gives the children some hands-on textures to trace. Colouring letters then cutting them out, not only gives children more letter practice, but learning to use scissors is important for hand-eye coordination, and for strengthening those little finger muscles needed later for writing.

Endless animal activities

Obviously there are endless opportunities for further learning by coming up with a million and one different activities associated with each animal. The Internet of course is your best friend on this one, but also display lots of books, stuffed toys, photos, make use of clay or plasticene. There are activities to suit every age group and ability level – be creative!

Make a list of male, female, and baby names of animals

Draw up some columns on a large sheet of paper and make a list of as many animals as the children can remember from the book, then look back through to see which ones were forgotten. In the next column write down what we call the males, then a column for the females, and finally a column for the babies! You could also draw, collect photos, or cut out pictures of the different animals to add to your page. You won't be able to find male and female names for all of the animals, but that's ok!

Make a book of animal collectives

Make a book of animal collectives e.g. a *gaggle* of geese, a *flock* of sheep etc. Again, draw, use photos, or cut out groups of animals for each page. This could extend into soooo many animal lessons. Such lessons could last for weeks, for instance, you could look at elephants. Go online to see how the Indians decorate elephants for various festivals. Then get a giant roll of paper and make a big, long mural that the children can work on together. Draw a big parade of elephants all linked trunk to tail and get the children to decorate them with paint, coloured paper, ribbons, flowers, all sorts of things! This could extend into an exploration of India, looking at the animals, the food, the fabrics, the languages, the festivals etc. culminating in your own mini Indian festival!

So many books about animals

More games and activities could stem from reading other stories about the animals that appear in this book. I won't list any fact books here, because there are literally hundreds of thousands, but some books and authors of fictional animal books that spring to mind include:

Alison Utterly's *Little Grey Rabbit* and many, many more.

Beatrix Potter's *Mrs Tiggy Winkle* and many, many more.

Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and many, many more.

Mem Fox's *Time for Bed* and many, many more.
Ann Paul's *If Animals Kissed Goodnight* and many, many more.
Eric Hill's *Where's Spot?* and many, many more.

Other animal stories include:

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you See?; *Night Animals*; *Dear Zoo*; *If I Ran the Zoo*; *Gotta Go Buffalo*; *Goodnight Gorilla*; *One Woolly Wombat*; *Bear Snores On*; *Sebastian lives in a Hat*; *Diary of a Wombat*; *Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy*; *Olivia*; *Guess How Much I Love You*; *Wombat Stew*; *Animalia*; *Who Sank the Boat? Does Kangaroo have a Mother Too?*, etc. etc. etc.!

So many movies about animals

While I love watching kid's movies and so much learning can come from them, **parents and teachers need to be acutely aware that many movies have some incredibly scary scenes for young children.** *Barnyard* for instance is such a fun movie, but the coyotes are truly frightening. *Paddington Bear* is adorable, but Nicole Kidman's character (who does not appear in any of the books by the way) is quite terrifying. Often characters are really mean and nasty to one another (*Rugrats* is a classic example), or violence is cleverly disguised as humour (the old *Bugs Bunny* and *Roadrunner* cartoons are good examples). Having said that, some great movies about animals include:

Madagascar

Horton hears a Who (this one has Vlad the vulture!)

Ice Age 2 also has vultures

All the *Ice Age* movies feature Scrat the squirrel which is like a xerus!

There's also:

Peter Rabbit; *Zootopia*; *Sing*; *Paddington*; *Barnyard*; *The Jungle Book*; *The Secret Life of Pets*; *Shaun the Sheep*; *Open Season*; *The Lion King*; *Babe*; *Born in China*; *Kung Fu Panda*; etc. etc. etc!
There's also the *Dr. Dolittle* movies (make sure you watch the original with Rex Harrison it's by far the best!)

So many songs about animals

There are loads of action songs and sing-a-long songs that little kids love. Singing and dancing and movement provide so many important opportunities for learning e.g. coordination; hand-eye coordination, balance, memory, recall, rhythm, rhyme, language skills, listening skills, strengthening the large muscles of the limbs, the small muscles of the hands, and the muscles of the tongue and mouth – essential for speech, they are lots of fun and introduce children to humour as well. Songs about animals include:

The Seals on the Bus (instead of *The Wheels on the Bus!*); *Over in the Meadow*; *Five Little Ducks*; *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*; *Five Little Speckled Frogs*; *Galumph Went The Little Green Frog*; *Old MacDonald had a Farm*; *The Ants go Marching*; *We're All Going to the Zoo Tomorrow: The Animals Went in Two by Two*; *The Unicorn Song*; *I Bought a Cat*; *There was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*; *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*; *Would you like to Swing on a Star?* etc. etc. etc!