



## The Last Dance Teacher Notes

### Synopsis

*The Last Dance* is a simple yet emotive story of ten Australian animals that face the possibility of extinction.

The plight of each animal is revealed across a double page where the combination of descriptive text and vivid illustrations creates a powerful portrait of the lives of these endangered animals.

The stories themselves are brief and inspire as many questions as they do points of discussion. Fortunately, the author includes a glossary in which she succinctly outlines the location and habitat of each animal along with details of what threatens their existence. For the younger reader, this offers just enough information on the topic of endangered animals without overwhelming them on this complex topic.

The story's length belies the layers of learning it offers. From the rich, expressive vocabulary it introduces, to its use of modern poetry, to the distinctive nature of indigenous art and the enormous variety of Australian landscapes, *The Last Dance* demands to be read again and again.

### Topics

- Endangered animals
- Animal habitats
- Indigenous art
- Geography
- Language
- Poetry





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### Questions/Comprehension

What does the expression, '*the last dance*,' mean?

Why do you think the author chose this expression?

What are some reasons you can think of to explain why the trees in the Cockatoo's habitat are dying?

What are trappers and what might they want with the Spotted-tailed Quoll?

How do you think the ocean in the Turtle's habitat became so polluted with oil?

Why might the Swift Parrot find it hard to find blue-gum nectar?

Are there any words in the story that you are unfamiliar with?

Have you heard of or seen any of these animals?

How do you feel after reading this story?

Do you know of any other animals in Australia or the world that are endangered?

Now that we've read a little bit more about the things that have made these animals endangered species, can you think of anything we can do to make sure these animals don't become extinct?

Do you think this is a fiction or non-fiction book? Can you give a reason for your answer?

### Activities

List the geographical locations of each endangered animal. Assist students to find and mark these locations on an enlarged map of Australia and its surrounding seas. If exploring 'endangered animals' as a unit or work, use the map to flag the locations of other animals studied.

Investigate the animal habitats identified in the story. List the features of each habitat in a table for discussion and comparison. Have students choose one of the endangered creatures and create a diorama of its habitat. Students should ensure that the threat to the habitat is represented.



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### Activities

Consider the verbs used to describe the movement of each animal in the story - hunts, shuns, perches, slides, scurries, swims, races, soars & swims. Invite students to mimic these movements as the teacher re-reads the story.

Print a picture of each endangered animal and fasten onto a headband. Play a game of Who Am I? Encourage students to use questions that include the location, habitat and threat to the animal as well as the animal's distinguishing features and mode of movement.

Discuss the Zoo's role in protecting endangered animals. Visit the zoo with the purpose of finding one or more of the endangered animals identified in the story. Arrange for a keeper to talk to students about the zoo's conservation programme discuss its efforts with one particular species in detail. As an extension activity, investigate one of the animal conservation campaigns organised by the zoo.

Use the investigation into animal habitats to design and create a zoo for the endangered animals in the story. Assign one endangered animal to a small group of students who will be responsible for designing the perfect enclosure for that animal. Use dioramas to create the 3D zoo.

Write a letter from the perspective of one of the endangered animals to the community, detailing the threats to its existence, how they feel about their habitat and endangered status and what the community can do to help. This may be used as an assessment task at the conclusion of the unit.

Go online to find a crossword or word find generator and assist students to create their own puzzle about the endangered animals in the story. Some suggested sites are:

<http://www.armoredpenguin.com/crossword/>

<http://www.discoveryeducation.com/free-puzzlemaker/>

<http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/crossword/>