

WORLD
BOOK
DAY

AGES
5-8

AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR MASTERCLASSES

NOTES FOR TEACHERS & LIBRARIANS

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EmpathyLab

MATT HAIG HOW TO SPEAK LIKE AN ANIMAL



BEFORE WATCHING THE VIDEO AND READING THE EXTRACT:

GET IN THE ZONE!

In his film, Matt Haig says that one of the great things about writing stories is that it allows you to go into the minds of other people, and sometimes even into the minds of animals!

Ask children to imagine that, like Evie, they have the power to communicate with animals. They are going to carry out a short interview, in pairs, with an animal of their choice – whether it is a Dolphin, a Humpback Whale, a Tiger, or a Cat – children can choose their favourite animals or whatever animals they prefer!

In pairs, they should create short interviews with their chosen animals. They should consider what danger(s) their animals face, e.g. relating to their habitat, food,

water and survival. They should also consider how their creatures might feel. What would their message to human beings be if they could give one?

AFTER WATCHING THE VIDEO AND READING THE EXTRACT:

Taken from pages 1–4 of Evie and the Animals (you can download the extract at worldbookday.com/online-masterclasses/how-to-speak-like-an-animal).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Evie is described on page 1 as liking all animals, not just the ‘cuddly ones’. Why do you think this is important?
2. How does Evie know so much about ‘the animal world’? Why is this impressive?
3. What is your favourite of the ten facts that Evie knows about animals, listed on pages 2–3?
4. What is Evie’s ‘very special skill’? Why is this described as ‘unusual’?
5. What does the word ‘empathy’ mean? How might Evie’s skill help her to empathise with animals?
6. Would you like to possess Evie’s skill? Explain why or why not?
7. Why do you think Evie has only told her dad about her skill? Why do you think Evie’s dad is cautious about telling other people about it?
8. How does the author Matt Haig end the first chapter on a mysterious or intriguing note?
9. If you could have one ‘supertalent’ what would it be and why?

FUN ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1: PORTRAIT OF AN ANIMAL

Matt Haig talks about how we are in a very important time for the planet and the environment, so it is important to have a great deal of empathy for the animals that we share the Earth with.

- Consider: what is your favourite animal in the world? It might be that you choose one of the animals mentioned in the text. Note: it can't be a cat or a dog! Follow in Evie's footsteps and choose something wild, exotic and strange!
- Paint or draw a portrait of an animal leaving some space so that you can label it afterwards and write about any threats that your animal faces. Once your painting has dried, write a few words labelling it with what makes your chosen animal so special and why you have chosen it.

ACTIVITY 2: ANIMAL PERSPECTIVES

Matt Haig explains that in Evie and the Animals, Evie has a very special skill: she can hear the thoughts of animals.

- Imagine what pets might say to their owners if they had the chance. Write a letter from the perspective of a pet to your owner. In your letter, you may wish to include descriptions of what it feels like to be a pet, what makes you happy or sad, what makes a good owner, or what you would change about your living conditions or routine if you could.
- Read some of these letters out as a class. Discuss any common ideas or themes that come up. Consider issues such as what makes a good owner? How might the world change if we could communicate with animals?

ACTIVITY 3: KINDNESS STORYBOARDS

Matt Haig explains that one of the main things he loves about his character Evie is that she cares about the world. She cares so much about the world and animals, she can hear from the animals themselves.

- Think about how your traits, characteristics, and talents help to make the world a better place for humans and/or animals. Then, try to think of an example of a time you have shown one of these traits.
- Create a storyboard showing step-by-step how this trait or talent had a positive impact on people, animals, and/or the environment. Underneath your sketches, write a few words explaining what is happening at that stage in the story.
- Swap your storyboards with a partner so that you can learn from each other's experiences.

SHARE A STORY

Can you think of any other stories that have asked you to think more deeply about nature and the world around you? What are they? How do these stories inspire you to take action and protect the environment? Create a reading list of books that everyone should read if they care about the planet. Share your lists with your classmates, friends and family. Perhaps you will discover books that you have never heard of. Which do you want to read next?

SPARK YOUR IMAGINATION...

AN INSPIRING SHARE A STORY CHALLENGE FOR YOU from Matt Haig...

Write a story from the perspective of an animal! It can be any animal; it can be your pet, an animal you've seen on the street, in the zoo, on holiday, or on the television – it can be a fish, a seahorse, or a humpback whale! Try to put yourself in your chosen animal's shoes as much as possible. Share your short animal stories with your friends and family members – can they guess which animal you have chosen?

DID YOU KNOW?

There are more brilliant Masterclass films and resources featuring amazing authors and illustrators over at worldbookday.com/online-masterclasses. Don't miss out, download them today!