

Batty about Bats

by Jeanette Larson

"Sleep All Day, Stay Out All Night . . . No Wonder Kids Love Bats" proclaims a poster available from Bat Conservation International. Kids are indeed intrigued by bats, and there are plenty of books to help them understand and appreciate these amazing animals. Introducing children to bats or expanding their existing knowledge can be done through formal class lessons, informal library reading, or simply by providing materials for independent research. While a study of bats could take place anytime during the year, October, with the celebration of Halloween, is an especially opportune moment. However, in much of the U.S., bats will have migrated to warmer climates or will be in hibernation by late fall, so late spring or summer is also appropriate, especially if bat watching is to be a part of the curriculum.

Whether you choose to read bat stories aloud, encourage a student's interest by recommending a novel that features bats, or use nonfiction books to teach specific areas of the curriculum, once you and your students start, you will definitely go batty!

Books for Younger Readers

Ackerman, Diane. *Bats: Shadows in the Night* . Photos by Merlin Tuttle. 1997. 30p. Crown, \$18 (0-517-70919-8).

K–Gr. 3. The author accompanies Merlin Tuttle, the director of Bat Conservation International, on a learning adventure to see the 20 million bats that live at Bracken Cave in San Antonio, Texas.

Appelt, Kathi. *Bats around the Clock* . Illus. by Melissa Sweet. 2000. 32p. HarperCollins, \$15.95 (0-688-16469-2).

Preschool–Gr. 2. Appelt and Sweet's charming bats first appeared in *Bat Jamboree* (HarperCollins, 1996) and *Bats on Parade* (HarperCollins, 1999). They're back, and this time they are on American Batstand, a rock-and-roll program for bats hosted by Click Dark. Lively illustrations will have the audience's toes tapping along with the bats' as youngsters learn to tell time with the clocks that tick off the hours on each page.

Berger, Melvin, and Gilda Berger. *Screech! A Book about Bats* . 2000. 40p. Scholastic/Cartwheel, paper, \$3.99 (0-439-20164-0).

Gr. 1–3. This easy-to-read science book dispels many myths and misconceptions about bats and offers a comprehensive basic introduction to the subject.

Cannon, Janell. *Stellaluna* . 1993. 48p. Harcourt, \$16 (0-15-280217-7).

Preschool–Gr. 2. A baby fruit bat is separated from her mother after being attacked by an owl. Landing in a bird's nest, Stellaluna must learn to behave like a bird in order to remain safe, in this story of friendship and homecoming. An audio version of *Stellaluna* is on David Holt's recording *Stellaluna and Other Bat Stories* (Windy City Audio, 1995).

Cole, Joanna. *The Magic School Bus Going Batty: A Book about Bats* . Illus. by Bruce Degen. 1996. 32p. Scholastic, paper, \$3.50 (0-590-73872-0).

Gr. 1–4. The Magic School Bus turns into a "bat bus" to learn about echolocation. The kids temporarily become bats in order to learn about these creatures. The field trip shows the class that bats are wonderful animals, but is Ms. Frizzle really a vampire?

Davies, Nicola. *Bat Loves the Night* . Illus. by Sarah Fox-Davies. 2001. 32p. Candlewick, \$15.99 (0-7636-1202-2).

Preschool–Gr. 3. The nocturnal world of bats is beautifully recreated in this story of one bat’s evening adventure. Secondary text adds factual information about bats and their habits.

Davol, Marguerite W. *Batwings and the Curtain of Night* . Illus. by Mary GrandPré. 1997. 32p. Orchard, \$15.95 (0-531-30005-6).

Preschool–Gr. 3. The Mother of All Things made the world, but the day is too bright. So that bats, owls, and other nocturnal animals can hunt, she creates the dark night—adding stars to provide just the right amount of light. This satisfying and original creation story is enhanced by illuminating pastel illustrations.

Dragonwagon, Crescent. *Bat in the Dining Room* . Illus. by S. D. Schindler. 1997. 32p. Marshall Cavendish, \$15.95 (0-7614-5007-6).

Preschool–Gr. 2. A poetic tale of a bat that strays into a restaurant is told in loosely rhyming text accompanied by pencil-and-watercolor illustrations. A young girl keeps her wits and helps the frightened bat find its way back outside.

Earle, Ann. *Zippering, Zapping, Zooming Bats*. Illus. by Henry Cole. 1995. 32p. HarperTrophy, paper, \$4.95 (0-06-445133-X).

Preschool–Gr. 1. Part of the Let’s-Read-and-Find-Out Science series, this book helps children learn to appreciate bats, and strives to eliminate common fears and misconceptions. The author includes fun facts, brief profiles, and plans for a simple bat house.

Gibbons, Gail. *Bats*. 1999. 32p. Holiday, \$16.95 (0-8234-1457-4); paper, \$6.95 (0-8234-1637-2).

Preschool–Gr. 2. An informative and intriguing look at the characteristics and habits of a wide variety of bats is provided in this easy-to-read nonfiction picture book. Gibbons includes clear diagrams of bat anatomy and explains the process of echolocation.

Glaser, Linda. *Beautiful Bats*. Illus. by Sharon Lane Holm. 1997. 32p. Millbrook, paper, \$7.95 (0-7613-0340-5).

Preschool–Gr. 2. The life and habits of a little brown bat are described through a simple story. The book includes a relatively lengthy “bat facts” section with answers to common questions about bats.

Goble, Paul. *Iktomi and the Boulder*. 1988. 32p. Orchard, paper, \$6.95 (0-531-07023-9).

Preschool–Gr. 3. Iktomi, a spider trickster in Lakota folklore, gets into trouble as he tries to defeat a huge boulder. Many bats help him, but they are changed into small stones, which explains why today the plains are covered with these pebbles.

Hall, Katy, and Lisa Eisenberg. *Batty Riddles*. Illus. by Nicole Rubel. 1997. 48p. Puffin, paper, \$3.99 (0-14-038724-2).

Gr. 1–3. Easy-to-read riddles about bats are accompanied by colorful illustrations. The jokes are corny enough to drive kids (and the adults around them) batty.

Johnston, Tony. *Desert Song*. Illus. by Ed Young. 2000. 32p. Sierra Club, \$15.95 (0-87156-491-2).

Preschool–Gr. 2. The mysterious world of a desert night is revealed through rich words and pictures as bat wings lap, coyotes howl, and the sounds of insects bring the poetry of the desert to life. Young’s collages with paper and rich, deep paint colors provide a panoramic view of the habitat, from close-ups of insects to vast desert landscapes. This lush book will be useful in both science and language arts classrooms.

Markle, Sandra. *Outside and Inside Bats*. 1997. 40p. Simon & Schuster/ Atheneum, \$16 (0-689-81165-9).

K–Gr. 2. The anatomy of bats is described in detailed but simple, easy-to-understand language accompanied by clear and colorful photographs. Children will find the inside views particularly intriguing.

McNulty, Faith. *When I Lived with Bats*. Illus. by Lena Schiffman. 1998. 48p. Scholastic, paper, \$3.99 (0-590-04980-1).

Gr. 2–3. A 10-year-old girl learns about bats during a summer stay at an old farmhouse where a colony of bats lives in the barn.

Moore, Eva. *The Truth about Bats*. Illus. by Ted Enik. 2000. 70p. Scholastic, paper, \$3.99 (0-439-10798-9).

Gr. 1–3. Bats are introduced through this Magic School Bus chapter book as Ms. Frizzle and the kids travel across the country to learn about bats.

Navarro, Laura. *Don Sabino, el Murciélago de la Ciudad /Don Sabino, the City Bat*. Illus. by Juan Sebastián. 2000. 48p. Bat Conservation International, paper, \$8.95 (0-292-75569-4).

Gr. 1–3. A wise old city bat helps two lost forest bats adapt to urban life in this bilingual tale. Facts about bats appear at the end of the book. Renowned Mexican artist Juan Sebastián uses black-and-white drawings to illustrate the third tale in Navarro's series of books featuring bats as main characters. Frequently asked questions and recommendations for further reading are included.

Quackenbush, Robert. *Batbaby Finds a Home*. 2001. 48p. Random, \$11.99 (0-375-90430-1); paper, \$3.99 (0-375-80430-7).

Preschool–Gr. 2. Batbaby and his family have to find a new place to live after losing their home to a construction project. Every place they find is either too loud or already occupied, until they discover a bat house made by some caring people. Scientific facts about bats follow the story, in this sequel to *Batbaby* (Random, 1997).

Books for Older Readers

Cooper, Ann C. *Bats: Swift Shadows in the Twilight*. 1993. 64p. Roberts Rinehart, paper, \$7.95 (1-879373-52-1).

Gr. 3–6. This activity book published by Roberts Rinehart in conjunction with the Denver Museum of Natural History offers readers the opportunity to make a bat box, a popup bat cave, and a miniature book while learning about bats.

Gilson, Jamie. *It Goes Eeeeeeeeeeeeeee!* Illus. by Diane de Groat. 1994. 68p. Clarion, \$15 (0-395-67063-2); paper, \$4.95 (0-618-05155-4).

Gr. 3–6. When several kids in Mrs. Zookey's second-grade class spot a bat in a field, the new boy, Patrick, shares a lot of misinformation about bats. But two bats are living in Dawn Marie's garage, and she has learned enough about them to debunk Patrick's theories. In this realistic depiction of an elementary school environment, Gilson skillfully weaves fact with fiction.

Greenaway, Frank. *Amazing Bats*. Photos by Jerry Young and Frank Greenaway. 1991. 32p. Knopf, \$11.99 (0-679-91518-4).

Gr. 2–6. In the Eyewitness series format, Greenaway provides a lot of photographs and illustrations in explaining facts about bats.

Hamilton, Virginia. *When Birds Could Talk and Bats Could Sing* . Illus. by Barry Moser. 1996. 72p. Scholastic/Blue Sky, \$17.95 (0-590-47372-7).

Gr. 4–6. Two of the African American folktales in this collection of eight stories explain why bats are ugly and why they don't sing, respectively. The stories are written in a lively style and end with a simply stated moral. Detailed full-page watercolors imbue the characters with a lively energy.

Jarrell, Randall. *The Bat-Poet* . Illus. by Maurice Sendak. 1964; reissued 1996. 48p. HarperCollins, \$13.95 (0-06-205084-2); HarperTrophy, paper, \$6.95 (0-06-205905-X).

Gr. 3–6. This classic fable tells of a little brown bat who discovers how exciting the world can be during the daytime. Embracing the wonders of the world, the little bat expresses himself through poetry. Though he is captivated by the wonderful things he sees, the bat-poet also feels lonely; none of his fellow bats will stay awake to share the daylight with him. Sendak contributes delicate pen-and-ink drawings to Jarrell's poetic fable.

Oppel, Kenneth. *Silverwing* . 1997. 160p. Simon & Schuster, \$17 (0-689-81529-8); Aladdin, paper, \$4.99 (0-689-82558-7).

Gr. 4–8. By looking at the sun a young bat, Shade, defies an age-old edict imposed on all bats. Forced to leave his nest, Shade is separated from his colony and faces an extraordinary journey of survival. Oppel naturally weaves facts about bat behavior into the story. This animal fantasy continues in the sequel, *Sunwing* (Simon & Schuster, 2000).

Pringle, Laurence. *Bats! Strange and Wonderful* . Illus. by Meryl Henderson. 2000. 32p. Boyds Mills, \$15.95 (1-56397-327-8).

Gr. 2–6. Detailed and accurate illustrations present information about a wide variety of bat species. The text offers clearly written, kid-friendly facts about bats' biology, habits, ecology, and life cycle. Evening and night scenes are used to present the subject dramatically.

Stuart, Dee. *Bats: Mysterious Flyers of the Night* . Photos by Merlin D. Tuttle. 1994. 48p. Lerner, paper, \$7.95 (0-87614-631-0).

Gr. 3–6. Many of the world's species of bats are introduced, accompanied by clear photographs taken by one of the leading experts on bat biology.

Sway, Marlene. *Bats: Mammals That Fly* . 1999. 48p. Watts, paper, \$6.95 (0-531-15943-4).

Gr. 2–5. Readers get a close look at 14 bat species on four continents, with information on how they fit into the rest of the animal kingdom. This title is part of the *Animals in Order* series.

Wilson, Don. *Bats in Question: The Smithsonian Answer Book* . Photos by Merlin Tuttle. 1997. 192p. Smithsonian Institution, \$55 (1-56098-738-3); paper, \$24.95 (1-56098-739-1).

All ages. In a question-and-answer format that is accessible to young and old, this book provides a lot of information about bats. The book includes 134 color photographs, making it a great resource for classrooms and libraries.

Withrow, Sarah. *Bat Summer* . 1999. 160p. Groundwood, \$15.95 (0-88899-351-X); paper, \$5.95 (0-88899-352-8).

Gr. 4–8. Bored because all of his friends are gone for the summer, 12-year-old Terence becomes fascinated by a girl who believes she is a bat. When he starts hanging out with her, Terence discovers friendship and a better sense of self.

Zindel, Paul. *Night of the Bat*. 2001. 176p. Hyperion, \$15.99 (0-7868-0340-1).

Gr. 5–7. Jake’s father, a bat biologist, is in great danger when Indian workers begin to disappear from an Amazon rain forest expedition. With all of the trappings of Zindel’s other horror stories, including a giant vampire bat, this story plays into a lot of misconceptions but also provides some interesting information about the Amazon rain forest.

Activities

- Use the subject of bats to introduce science concepts such as taxonomy (the classification of plants and animals), endangered species, and the scientific method. For example, Sway’s *Bats: Mammals That Fly* examines how bats fit in with other creatures in the animal kingdom and how they relate to other mammals. The scientific name for bats is *Chiroptera*, meaning “handwing,” and students will be fascinated to see how the “fingers” in a bat’s wing really do resemble hands.
- All bats can be divided into two categories: megabats and microbats. Challenge students to look at what characteristics (other than size) differentiate the two categories. For example, megabats tend to live in the tropics and eat fruit and nectar; microbats live in cooler climates and mostly eat insects. All of North America’s bats are microbats.
- Half of the bat species in the United States are endangered; invite students to research endangered species and find out which bats are among them.
- Ask local animal control officials or scientists where you might observe bats in your community, and go bat watching. (It’s best to watch for bats right after sundown.) Remember, just like other mammals, bats can carry rabies. Although the likelihood of any bat having rabies is very small, if you are going bat watching, remind students never to touch or pick up a bat.
- Some children may be fearful of bats or have misconceptions about them. Myths about bats include: Bats will get in your hair, Bats are blind, and All bats have rabies. Use some of these misconceptions to compare bat mythology with scientific reality. Books of folktales, such as Hamilton’s *When Birds Could Talk and Bats Could Sing*, can serve as springboards to these conversations.
- Adopt a bat for your classroom through Bat Conservation International (BCI) for \$15. Raise the funds through a classroom project (for example, cut out bat shapes or silhouettes, sell them to sponsors, and hang the silhouettes in your classroom). Send the funds to BCI, P.O. Box 16260, Austin, TX 78715-2603. You will receive an 8-by-10 inch photo of the adopted bat, an adoption certificate, species information, and a Batty about Bats bumper sticker.
- To demonstrate echolocation and how sound waves bounce, ask younger students to form a circle. Have one child play the “bat” and move to the center of the circle, closing his or her eyes. Have another child in the circle ring a bell. Can the “bat” point to the source of the sound?

Professional Resources

- Bernard, Robin. *Bats: Complete Cross-Curricular Theme Unit*. 1998. 32p. Scholastic, \$8.95 (0-590-10617-1).

This theme unit includes hands-on activities, projects, and games for inclusion in curriculum for grades one through three.

- Tuttle, Merlin D. *Educator's Activity Book about Bats*. 1991. 62p. Bat Conservation International, paper, \$11.95 (0-292-70833-5).

Tuttle provides 18 games, crafts, and other activities, along with in-depth information on bats, for teachers and librarians working with children ages 4–10.

Web Connections

- *Zoo Atlanta's Raising E-e-e-gore!* at <http://www.basicallybats.org/kids/egore.html> (<http://www.basicallybats.org/kids/egore.html>) tells the story of Sue Barnard, assistant curator of herpetology, and how she rehabilitated a baby bat in order to release it into the wild.
- *U.S. Fish and Wildlife* at <http://endangered.fws.gov/bats/bats.htm> (<http://endangered.fws.gov/bats/bats.htm>) provides information about bats in the United States, including the six endangered species that live here.
- *A to Z Teacher Stuff* at <http://www.atozteacherstuff.com/themes/bats.shtml> (<http://www.atozteacherstuff.com/themes/bats.shtml>) offers links to lesson plans and thematic units related to bats.
- *Bat Conservation International* at <http://www.batcon.org> (<http://www.batcon.org/>) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to bat conservation, research, and education initiatives. It offers posters, bookmarks, videos, books, curriculum guides, and other items to help teachers and librarians.
- *Bats Curriculum Index* at <http://wings.avkids.com/Curriculums/Bats/> (<http://wings.avkids.com/Curriculums/Bats/>) offers thematic lesson plans for bat study.
- The *Contra Costa County (California) Office of Education* Web site at <http://www.cccoe.k12.ca.us/bats/> (<http://www.cccoe.k12.ca.us/bats/>) offers a thematic resource for teachers and students in areas such as literature, science, and art as they study bats.
- *Education World* at http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson031.shtml (http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson031.shtml) provides lesson plans for bat activities across many aspects of the curriculum.

Jeanette Larson is youth services manager for Austin Public Library in Texas. The library's youth services mascot is a bat named Echo.