



Teacher and Parent Activities

By
Harvey & Elaine Daniels

Welcome, Teachers and Parents...

Have you watched some Animalia episodes with kids? If so, you already know that the show is adventurous, fast-paced, and funny – and that it carries positive social messages and highlights key character traits like cooperation, persistence and creativity.

But what you may not have noticed (and this is intentional on our part) is that the show is all about *literacy*. Under its entertaining surface, each episode depicts key elements of skillful language use -- reading, writing, speaking, listening, critical thinking, and investigating. In fact, the whole series takes its inspiration from America's *national literacy standards*, as enunciated by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association.

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Every episode of *Animalia* is animated by these important ideas, and you'll see the spirit of the standards woven throughout the series. Indeed, if you've watched any of the episodes, you've seen the Core, the large orb found just inside the Great Library and maintained by Livingstone T. Lion. Because of the Core, *Animalians* can read, write, think, speak, organize their thoughts, use various forms of language, interpret their experiences and record their history. Metaphorically, the Core *is* the curriculum on which the entire series has been based. And when "corespore" erupt from the Core, the animals realize just how important each communication skill is to their very survival!

The Core holds *The Animalia Bill of Writes* [sic], a manifesto written by Livingstone T. Lion that defines all of the communication skills needed to survive in *Animalia*. Livingstone has never publicly admitted it, but *The Bill of Writes* may, in fact, have been inspired by the NCTE/IRA Standards themselves!

A major goal of the series was to help kids see that "the writing process" can be fun and useful. Alex and Zoe each keep journals, and in many episodes they are put into situations where their ability to write helps solve a problem. The

emphasis on writing has extended into these activities, along with things you can do to support reading, listening, speech, comprehension and other aspects of literacy.

The series takes viewers on a journey, beginning with Alex and Zoe arriving in Animalia, then helping solve various problems when the “corespore” erupt from the Core, and then finally helping to solve numerous problems that eventually enable a return to “our world.” While the overall experience is steeped in literacy-based experiences, we also believe each episode is a piece of *visual literature* in itself – a complex text that invites kids to engage and think about – to comprehend – on a variety of levels. We think children will enjoy every step along the way, and we know parents and teachers will enjoy the journey, too.

Welcome, grownups (and the kids who love them) to enchanting, educational Animalia!