

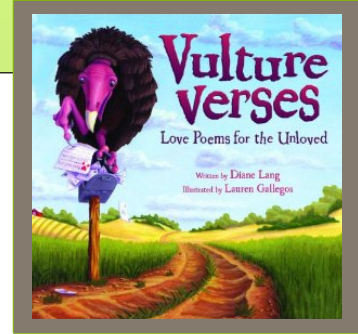
A Classroom
Reading Guide for:

**Vulture
Verses:
Love Poems for
the Unloved”**

By: Diane Lang

*Illustrations by:
Lauren Gallegos*

A Classroom Reading Guide for



Summary: The book is a collection of poems about animals that are often misunderstood or feared—such as snakes, spiders, vultures, etc.—explaining why each has a place in our natural world. The target age range is 4 – 8, it but can easily go higher.

Themes: Poetry/Verse, Environment, Nature, Animals, Understanding Differences

State Standards (California): Vulture Verses meets state English language and science standards for kindergarten through fifth grade. *

Background: Author Diane Lang enjoys talking to students about the wild animals that share our nation, state, and neighborhoods. She has discovered that many of the animals we dislike or fear are simply the ones we know the least about, from spiders, snakes, and cockroaches, all the way up to opossums and turkey vultures. The author hopes that these poems will help children learn about these unloved animals in a fun and memorable way.

Before Reading

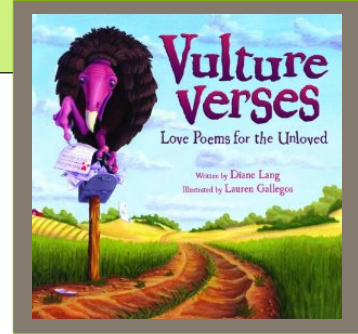
Pre-reading Focus Discussion and Questions

Before reading the book, you may want to have students discuss one or more of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

- 1. Are there animals you see often that scare you? Why do they scare you?
- 2. What do you do when you see a spider? A snake?
- 3. Do you ever feel that you are misunderstood?
- 4. Has anyone ever said anything about you that wasn't true?
- 5. Have you ever had trouble making friends because people didn't get to know you well?

Note: 3 – 5 can happen to animals, too.

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Exploring the Book: display the book cover and read the title.

Before reading the book, you may want to have students discuss one or more of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

- 1. What do you think the title means?
- 2. What does it look like is happening on the front cover of the book?
- 3. Does the turkey vulture look happy?
- 4. Leaf through the inside of the book; does it look like other books? If not, how is it different? (they might notice poem format)
- 5. What are poems?
- 6. Do you have favorite poems?

Vocabulary: What do these words mean?

scuttle	slither	carrion	critters	fritters	toil
sublime	nocturnal	marsupial	pest	appreciate	exceptions
slither	digestive	venomous	bough	sprout	pollinate
ignore	pollen	grasped	nutrients	maintaining	misunderstood
saliva	colony	inspire	scavenger	regurgitate	echolocation

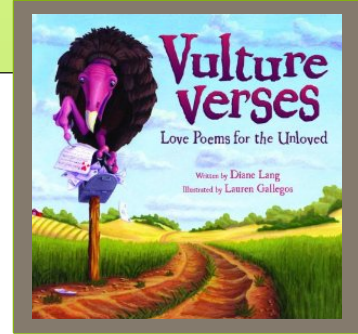
Reading and Responding

Discussion or Journaling Questions

Students' answers might come from either the words or the illustrations.

- 1. Do all these animals live in the same kind of place?
- 2. Do some of these animals look more appealing to you than others?
- 3. Which animals are your favorites?
- 4. Which animals would you like to learn more about?
- 5. What different things do these animals eat?
- 6. What animal facts surprised you the most?
- 7. What would happen if animals such as mice or rats were never eaten by other animals? What would happen if any particular type of animal had no predators?

A Classroom Reading Guide for



Writing Activities

Have students write their own poems about nature, animals, plants, water, or anything else. Remind them that poems do not have to rhyme. They just need to express the feelings of the writer.

If you want to do a rhyming exercise, ask the students to find rhymes for:

Bear	Bat	Ground	Tree	Eat
Hide	Wood	Snake	Fly	Flower
Snail	Sting	Cave	Wild	Nest
Rock	Feather	Fur	Pond	Wet

Can the students use some of their rhymes to make some short, two-line verses?

Categorizing

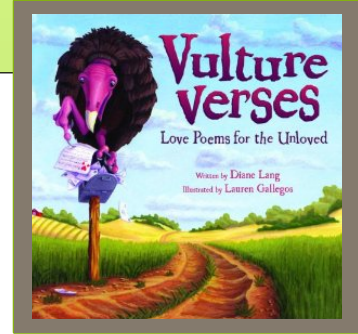
Ask students to list animals that:

live on the ground,	are nocturnal	have good camouflage
are insects	eat other animals	are eaten by other animals
are mammals	live in trees	live in our neighborhoods
are reptiles	are amphibians	build nests

Charting

Make a chart to fill in about animals and what the students know or think each animal might do for environment. You might also have a section to include how we can protect that animal, such as conserving habitat, not using pesticides, picking up litter.

A Classroom Reading Guide for



Finish the poem:

Vultures, with their bare red head,

Don't hunt live things; their food's _____

Flies recycle when they eat,

Making soil beneath our _____.

Bats don't want a crisp Dorito;

They might munch a small _____

Opossum, with his bare, pink tail,

Likes to eat a slimy _____

Snakes are friends; in fact they're nice,

Sometimes eating rats and _____

From their webs or underground,

Spiders eat the bugs _____

Recycling is on the rise,

And cockroaches might get first _____

Skunks are always in the mood

To eat the bugs that eat our _____

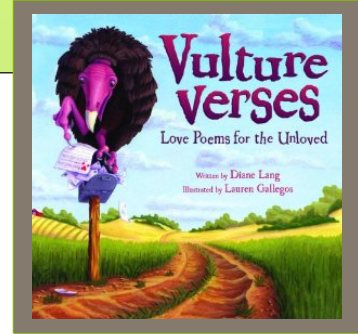
Scary creature? Please don't fuss;

It's probably a help to _____

Animals all have a worth,

With a place on this round _____.

A Classroom Reading Guide for



Activities

Spider-Rescue Race. This activity incorporates the technique needed to safely move a spider from inside a house or classroom, to outside. You'll need two small plastic spiders, two 4 x 6 cards, and two clear plastic cups, big enough to easily cover one of the spiders.

Two at a time, children will race to put a cup over one of the spiders, slip the card slowly under the spider (the spider must not be jostled enough to turn over or the child must start again), and transport it to a designated spot at least ten feet away. During transport the spider must stay upright, or the child will need to start again at the beginning.

Award Activity. Each of 13 children represents an animal in the book—by finding or drawing a picture, or making a label. The other students select which of these animals represents the best recycler, best tree-planter, etc. Recognition is accompanied by much applause, of course. You may want to have the children make blue ribbons or other awards.

<i>Best ground-based recycler</i>	<i>(cockroach)</i>
<i>Best pollinator</i>	<i>(bee)</i>
<i>Best ground-based food protector</i>	<i>(snake)</i>
<i>Most surprising pollinator</i>	<i>(mosquito)</i>
<i>Best soil-turner</i>	<i>(mole)</i>
<i>Best community member</i>	<i>(vampire bat)</i>
<i>Best tree-planter</i>	<i>(scrub jay)</i>
<i>Best insect-eating garden saver</i>	<i>(spider)</i>
<i>Best four-legged garden saver</i>	<i>(opossum)</i>
<i>Best ground-based bug eater</i>	<i>(skunk)</i>
<i>Best scavenger</i>	<i>(turkey vulture)</i>
<i>Best flying food-protector</i>	<i>(bat)</i>
<i>Best flying recycler</i>	<i>(fly)</i>

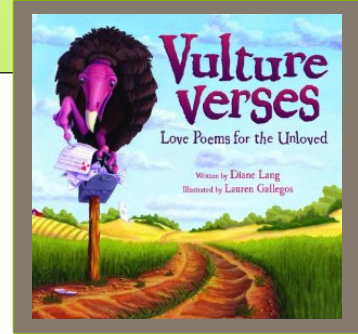
Folded fact-finder. Have students cut and fold a fortune-teller, found at the end of this document.

One-sheet book. Have students illustrate, cut, and fold a one-sheet book, found at the end of this document.

A Classroom Reading Guide for

About the Author and Illustrator

Diane Lang is a volunteer wildlife educator who leads programs at two wildlife centers in Northern California and one in Southern California. Previously she presented classroom programs for her public library, worked in the Publications Office at the Caltech, and wrote newsletters and raised puppies for Guide Dogs of America. She lives in Alamo, California, with her husband, two rats, a parakeet, and a tarantula. She claims, as well, the hummingbirds that visit the bird feeder and the squirrels that scamper through the trees. Learn more about Diane—and read more poems—at dianelang.net.



Lauren Gallegos received her degree in illustration from California State University, Fullerton, in 2009 and is a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. In the few short years since art school, Lauren has illustrated several children's books and has plans for several more. She lives with her husband in Brea, California. See more of her work at laurengallegos.com.

Resources on the Web

Exploringnature.org

<http://www.enature.com/home/>

<http://www.sandiegozoo.org/animalbytes/index.html>

<http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/index.html>

Free photos: <http://classroomclipart.com/cgi-bin/kids/imageFolio.cgi?direct=Animals>

A Few Recommended Books

Insects Are My Life, by Megan McDonald

Pond Circle, by Betsy Franco and Stefano Vitale

Slinky, Scaly, Slithery Snakes, by Dorothy Hinshaw Patent

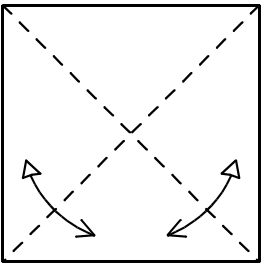
Sparrow Girl, by Sara Pennypacker and Yoko Tanaka

Spinning Spiders, by Melvin Berger

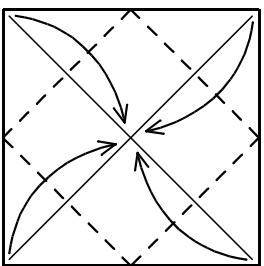
There's an Opossum in My Backyard, by Gary Bogue

Vulture View, by April Pulley Sayre

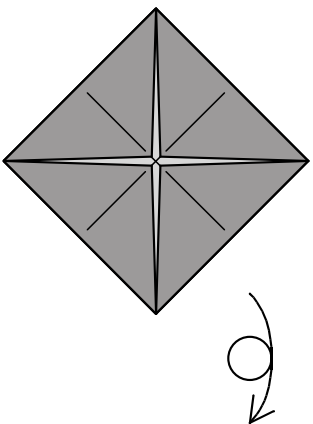
What's For Dinner? by Katherine B. Hawth



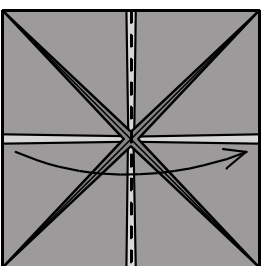
1. Begin with the plain side up. Fold the paper in half along each diagonal and unfold.



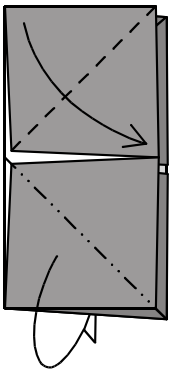
2. Fold the four corners in to the center of the square.



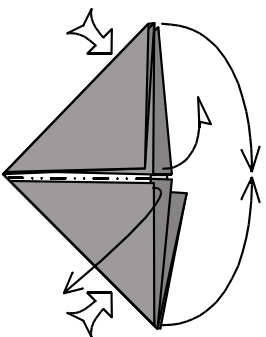
3. Turn the paper over and fold the corners in to the center again.



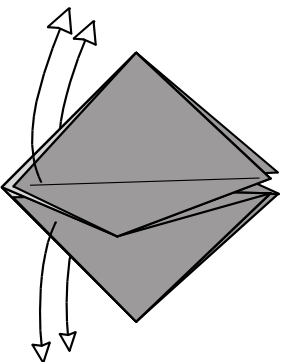
4. Fold the bottom edge up to meet the top edge.



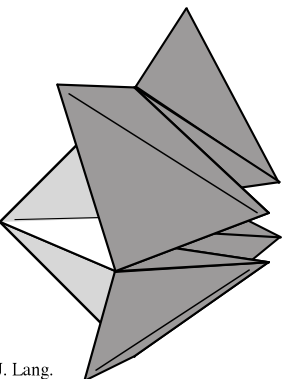
5. Fold the lower left corner up in front; fold the lower right corner behind.



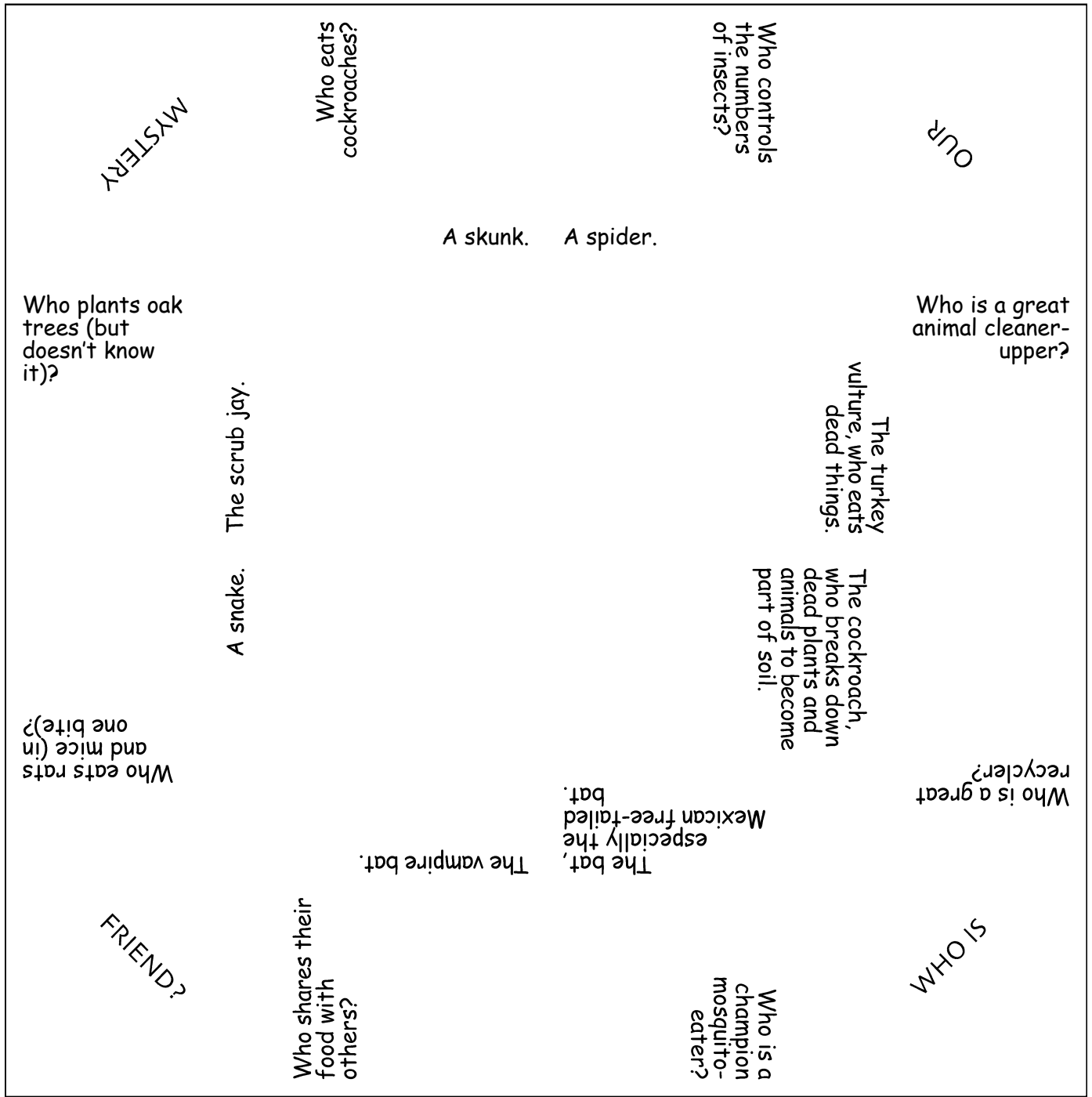
6. Open out the large pocket in the center top and squeeze the sides toward each other.



7. Make the four flaps stand straight out from each other and pull them out.



8. Finished.



Cut carefully along the outside square and fold a Wildlife Fact-Finder!

draw a favorite animal.

draw a favorite animal.

On full alert.
Helped by flies
Make healthy dirt,
Cockroaches

And moles below.
Like bats above
We didn't know,
We have friends

Snakes are helpful,
Once or twice,
Or more, by eating
Rats and mice.

Vultures lead
The clean-up crew.
Opossums do it, too—
Who knew?

Jay birds help
The oak trees grow.
Moles turn soil
Down below.

Spiders make sure
Insects can't
Form a mob to
Eat our plants.

1. Cut this instruction strip off the paper at this line.
2. Fold paper into 8 sections—4 top, 4 bottom—and unfold.
3. Cut between the dots (or fold at center and cut both halves at once;

4. Fold paper in half longwise along the line you just cut.
5. Holding both ends, push toward the middle until there is one flap

- cut to the dot only—do NOT cut to the edge).
6. Fold the four “pages” in one direction, like a book, with the title page to the front, and flatten.

facing forward, one facing back. You will have made an X shape.