

Love Wildlife

WILDLIFE-AT-RISK: STORIES OF SNAKES

LESSON #3 FOR GRADES 6-8

The following offers one of five lesson plans that pair with the five-part **Wildlife-at-Risk** video series by Sandy Pines Wildlife Centre.

Use the accompanying **Wildlife-at-Risk: Stories of Snakes Workbook for Lesson #3** to complete the lesson.

Ontario Curriculum Links

Grade 6 Language Media Literacy

Specific Expectations: 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 2.2, 3.3, 3.4

Grade 6 Science Understanding Life Systems

Specific Expectations: 1.1, 2.1

Grade 7 Language Media Literacy

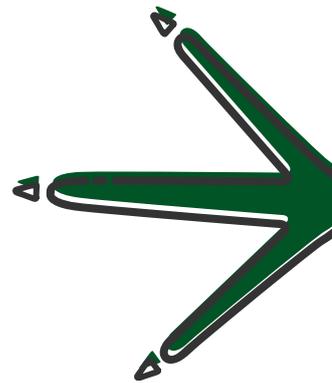
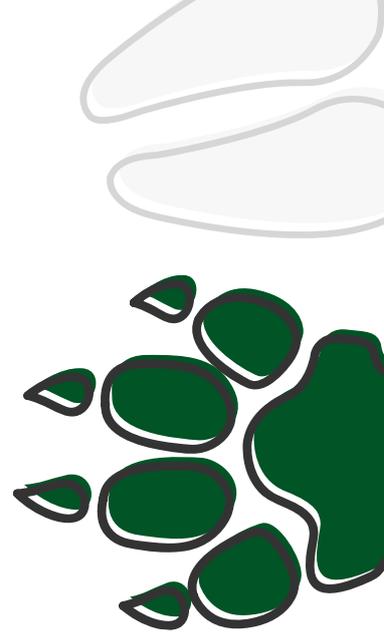
Specific Expectations: 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 2.2, 3.3, 3.4

Grade 7 Science Understanding Life Systems

Specific Expectations: 2.1, 2.5, 3.8

Grade 8 Language Media Literacy

Specific Expectations: 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 2.2, 3.3, 3.4



LESSON 3

STORIES OF SNAKES



SHARE 25 MINUTES

Watch **Wildlife-at-Risk Episode 3: Stories of Snakes** by Sandy Pines Wildlife Centre on YouTube.

FORGIVING YOURSELF

Invite students to form pairs and choose who will be Partner 1 and Partner 2. Ask all Partner 1's to form a circle facing outward. Then have Partner 2's make an inward facing circle around the first circle, so they are facing their partners.

Explain that they will be given a series of questions to respond to. Partner 1 will have 1-minute to respond and then Partner B will have 1-minute to respond. After each partner has shared, the outward facing circle will rotate clockwise so a new pairing is formed. Ask students a new question and invite them to each share for 1-minute again. Repeat until the following questions have been responded to:

- Name an animal that brings you joy. Why might this be?
- Name an animal that you are fearful of. Why might this be? If you are not fearful of any animals, choose an animal that a family member fears.
- Describe a time in your life when you were treated unfairly by someone.
- Describe a time when *you* treated someone unfairly.
- Describe a time when you treated a wild animal unfairly.

After this activity, students may feel guilt or shame around their harmful actions. Take time to offer a forgiveness practice. Invite students to find a comfortable space in the room and close their eyes if it feels safe and comfortable for them. Students may wish to place a hand on their heart and start by taking two deep breaths. Invite students to silently repeat the following phrases to themselves:

May I be happy. May I be kind to myself. May I forgive myself for any harm I have caused. May I remember my goodness. May I love and accept myself just as I am.

Repeat the phrases once more. Invite students to take two deep breaths and then gently open their eyes. You may wish to post the name of the school counsellor or contact information for other student wellness support somewhere in the classroom, should students feel stuck in a sense of guilt or shame.

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Remote Learning Adaptation: This exercise can be done in a virtual classroom, where students are placed in virtual rooms of 2-4 students and take turns responding to the questions. Alternatively, students may wish to complete the exercise with a member of their household.

CONNECT 100 MINUTES

MATERIALS NEEDED: OBJECTS FROM HOME, IMAGES OF SNAKES

As humans, we make many assumptions in our daily lives, based on information we've gathered from past experiences. These experiences might include personal encounters, what we see in the media, or what we hear in conversations.

STORIES ABOUT OBJECTS

Invite students to bring two items to class: a meaningful object from home and an image of a snake. The image can be a cartoon, a screenshot from a movie, a photograph, a comic, or any other image. Place objects only on a table and have each student choose an object that is not their own

Once students have an object, use the prompts on **Page 2** in their **Workbook** to examine it and create a short story with words or pictures about this object.

Half the class will then share their story with the person who brought in the object. After listening, the person who brought the item will tell the actual story of the object – What is it? What does it mean to them? How close was the student in getting the story right? How did it feel to hear a false story about this meaningful object? As a whole class, invite a few students to share what assumptions they made about the object that turned out to be untrue. Repeat the exercise with the other half of the class.

STORIES ABOUT SNAKES

Next, invite students to place all snake images on a table and have each student choose an image that is not their own.

Once students have an image, use the prompts on **Page 3** in their **Workbook** to examine it and and create a short story with words or pictures about the snake.

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Invite students to swap stories with a classmate and read them through. Ask students how many of the stories had a positive representation of the snake (i.e., they were kind, they were helpful, etc.). How many stories had a negative representation of the snake (i.e., they were mean, out to get people, biting people, etc.)? Ask what assumptions were made about the snake and the situation. Ask how a negative representation might affect snakes.

STORIES FROM A SNAKE'S PERSPECTIVE

Have students re-write (or re-draw) their stories from the perspective of the snake, where the snake is shown in a positive way. Students can use prompts on **Page 4** of their **Workbook** to format their story. Invite students to share these stories with younger children at the school. Students may wish to assess the effects of a positive story, by asking the younger students how they feel about snakes after the story is read. Ask the authors if *their* feelings on snakes have changed in any way after re-writing their story and sharing it with younger students.

Remote Learning Adaptation: In a virtual classroom, students can take a photo of their meaningful object and send it to their teacher along with an image of a snake. Photos can then be randomly distributed to students, such that every student receives an image of an object and an image of a snake. Stories can also be typed and shared virtually.

NURTURE KINSHIP 100 MINUTES

MATERIALS NEEDED: LIBRARY ACCESS, BOOKS, DEVICE WITH INTERNET

REPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN MEDIA

On Turtle Island, challenges for snakes-at-risk include habitat loss and fragmentation, road mortality, *and* the intentional harm by people. The media plays a large role in how wildlife are treated, where negative or misleading images can cause misunderstanding and harm. Media can also influence how *people and whole communities* are treated.

Watch the video on YouTube titled '**Project 562: Changing The Way We See Native America**' by visual storyteller **Matika Wilbur** from the Swinomish and Tulalip peoples. Matika shares about an ongoing project that focuses on positive representation of Indigenous peoples in the media.

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After watching the video ask students how a positive representation or story of Indigenous peoples in media might affect their communities. How might the treatment of Indigenous peoples change? If wildlife like snakes were represented positively in media, how might the treatment of wildlife change?

WHAT'S IN YOUR LIBRARY?

Take students to visit the school library (or local library) and search for books that feature Indigenous peoples. The librarian may be able to assist in gathering books for the class in advance.

Students will choose 2-4 books that feature Indigenous peoples and answer the questions on **Pages 5-6** of their **Workbook**. If there is a lack of books that feature Indigenous peoples, ask students why that might be (noting the attempted erasure of Indigenous peoples from Turtle Island). After surveying books, invite students to answer the questions either orally or in writing on **Page 7** of their **Workbook**.

Next have students look for books that feature snakes, answering the questions on **Pages 8-9** of their **Workbook**. After surveying books, invite students to answer the questions either orally or in writing on **Page 10** of their **Workbook**.

As a class, put together a list of the most positive books they found on Indigenous peoples as well as snakes and a list of all the negative books they found. If there is any disagreement on which list a book belongs, offer time for discussion on why it may or may not be a harmful book.

Place students (or offer self-selection) into six small groups. Three groups will focus on books featuring Indigenous peoples. Three groups will focus on books featuring snakes. Each group will choose two different books: one book from the 'negative representation list' and one from the 'positive representation list'.

Groups will prepare a 2-minute presentation in any format they wish (i.e., powerpoint, song, skit, etc.) to advocate for the replacement of a harmful book with a positive book in the library. Students may wish to use their responses to the questions on **Pages 7 and 10** of their **Workbook** to help guide their presentation content. Invite the librarian to attend the presentations and anyone else who may have the ability to add and remove books at the library.

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Reiterate to students that the way people and wildlife are represented in media matters. They have a responsibility to ensure the images and text they share of people or wildlife are truthful, respectful, and fair.

LOVE WILDLIFE 120 MINUTES

MATERIALS NEEDED: CAMERAS (CAN BE ON A CELLPHONE), DEVICE WITH INTERNET, BOOKS

Students can have a significant influence on how their families perceive wildlife, taking them from having negative reactions and interactions with wildlife to having more positive feelings.

GET TO KNOW A SNAKE

Show the YouTube video titled **The Gray Ratsnake (formerly Black Ratsnake): Ontario Wildlife Video Series** by Ryan M. Bolton.* Students will then answer the questions on **Pages 11-12** of their **Workbook**.

Have students carefully choose an image of a Gray Ratsnake that positively represents the snake. Ask students to note the name of the photographer and save the photo for later.

***Note:** Students are welcome to choose a different snake-at-risk preferably found in or near their community. Library access may be required for their research.

PHOTOS OF SNAKE HABITATS

Place students in pairs (or offer self-selection) and take students into the schoolyard or neighbourhood with one camera per pair. Ask students to search the area for features that snakes need in their habitat, based on the list they generated during their research. This might include rocks, underground access, a sunny place to bask, trees, water, and sources of food. Each student will take a few photos of different habitat features.

Remote Learning Adaptation: Students may wish to work independently, meet a classmate in a safe public place in their community, or go outside with a member of their household.

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Social Media Captions

Students will now prepare to post their favourite habitat photo on social media, alongside the image they chose of their snake-at-risk. After selecting the habitat photo they wish to use, students will create a caption for the post using the format on **Page 13-14** of their **Workbook**. Students will swap their captions with a partner for their review, to confirm that the snake is positively represented in both images and text.

Assist students in posting their photos and captions on a social media platform of your choosing (consider using a school or classroom account to have all images in one place). Ensure all photos have credits to the photographers in the caption.

SURVEYING ATTITUDES TOWARD SNAKES

Invite students to survey their family or students in another class to see how they feel about snakes using the prompts on **Page 15** of their **Workbook**. Then have students show them the social media posts and ask them to read through at least 5 captions. After looking at the social media posts, have students survey the same participants again, asking them the same set of questions.

Invite students to share the results of their survey in class. Did any survey participants change their attitude toward snakes after reading the social media posts?

Remind students that even if no one immediately changed how they feel about snakes, students have helped tip the scales of media representation toward a positive view of snakes that models care and compassion rather than fear and harm.

REFLECT 15 MINUTES

Invite students to answer the reflection questions on **Page 16** of their **Workbook** either orally or in writing.

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Lesson Sources

Forgiving Yourself, Stories About Snakes, Stories from a Snake's Perspective

Baraz, J. & Lilyanna, M. (2016). *Awakening Joy for Kids* (pp. 172). Parallax Press.

Lundy, K. (2020). *Teaching Fairly in an Unfair World* (pp. 59-60, 63-64, 169). Pembroke Publishers.

Selby, D. (1995). *earthkind: A teacher's handbook on Humane Education* (pp. 125-127). Trentham Books Limited.

Representation of Indigenous Peoples in Media

Wilbur, M. (2014, January 28). *Project 562: Changing The Way We See Native America* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JrRBQEQr3o>

Get to Know a Snake

Bolton, R. (2013, January 4). *The Gray Ratsnake (formerly Black Ratsnake): Ontario Wildlife Video Series* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPeGSrLICJs>

Credit

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**TD Friends of the
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Sandy Pines Wildlife Centre is a registered charity that rehabilitates sick, injured, and orphaned wildlife in southeastern Ontario. We are located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek and Haudenosaunee.

If you are in conflict with wildlife or find a wild animal who may need care, please call us for advice at 613-354-0264 or contact your nearest wildlife hospital.

Donate at sandypineswildlife.org to support our work.

