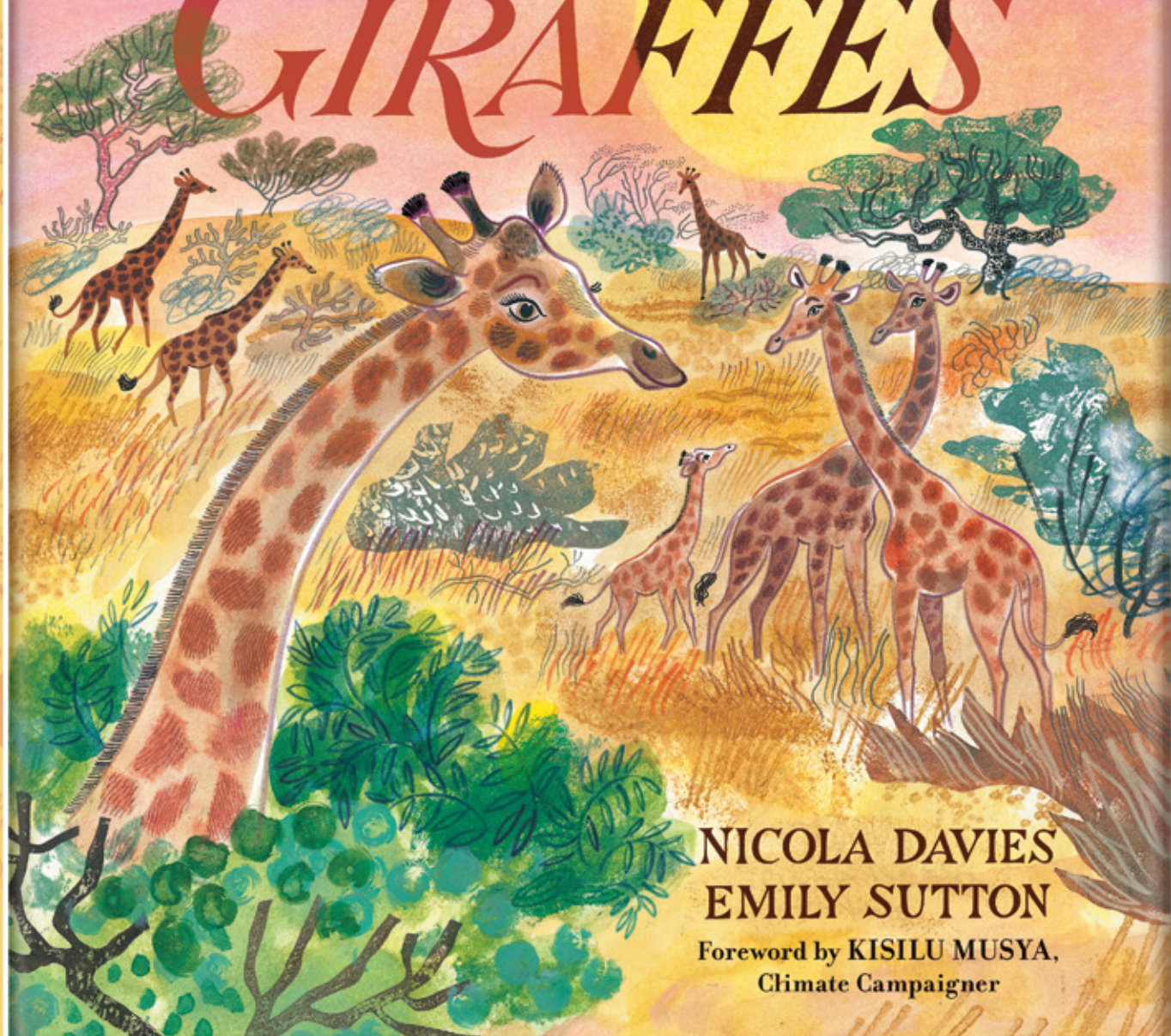


TEACHERS' NOTES

PROTECTING THE PLANET

THE SEASON OF GIRAFFES



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Foreword by KISILU MUSYA,
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These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.

These notes have been written with children in Years 2-4 in mind, but this book could be read to younger children with a curiosity for geography, conservation, wildlife or the environment. The book could also be used with older children as a stimulus for research or information writing. You will need to differentiate discussions and activities alongside the age and experience of your own children.

Before Reading:

- This is an important book that illustrates the startling and devastating changes that climate change has brought about in the rural communities of many African nations. For so many children this short but compelling story will act as a starting point for learning about the impact of climate change and what can be done to reverse its effects.
- It is important that the children understand that this book is inspired by the actions of a Kenyan farmer turned documentary maker. Either before reading, or once your class is familiar with the story, introduce them to Kisilu Musya, his family and the documentary they have made with Julia Dahr, via the [Thank You For The Rain website](#). Here you will find the trailer for the film, and information on the ways in which you can support their charity.
- Make sure you are familiar with the information at the back of the book that gives extra details about climate change, giraffe conservation, and how people can help. You may want to present the children with this information while you are reading the book to help them understand the context.
- Ideally, equip yourself with a globe or a map of the world to support the children in understanding where the story is set.
- Although there is a lot to be learnt from this book, it is important that the children have an adequate amount of subject knowledge to really understand and enjoy the story so you may wish to give the children some time to find out more beforehand. Look at the list of further reading at the end of this resource and gather together books that will support the children to understand the global and environmental issues raised in the book. Atinuke's book *Africa, Amazing Africa*, also published by Walker books, is the perfect companion text, as it explores the unique nature and nations of Africa and is useful for finding out about Niger (the setting of the story), and the picture book *Lots*, also by Nicola Davies and illustrated by Emily Sutton, is a simple, clear and effective way of providing children with an understanding of the diversity of life on Earth, and how the actions of humans can impact on the flora and fauna of our planet.

Reading aloud and key talking points:

- Open the book at the vibrant yellow and red end papers – do this before showing children the front cover or revealing the author and title. Ideally, display an image of the endpapers on your white board so the children can see the details. Ask the children:



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- What can you see?
 - What do the images and shapes remind you of?
 - How do you feel when you look at the endpapers?
 - How do the colours make you feel? What do they tell you about the setting or subject of the book?
 - What kind of book might this be? Can you guess the genre or type of text this is?
 - What title might you give it based on the endpapers alone?
- Now show a picture of the front cover but without the text. Ask the children how the front cover picks up on some of the ideas generated when discussing the end papers. The children may have identified the outlines of giraffes which are now clearly depicted on the front cover. They may also notice that the repeated pattern of outlined irregular shapes on the endpapers match the shapes of the bushes and tree canopies in the illustration on the front cover. Finally, encourage the children to talk about the colours. Are they similar? If not, why not?
 - Before revealing the title and author, explore children's existing knowledge of the wildlife of Africa. Spend some time looking at a map of Africa and identifying where the different countries are.
 - What country names and characteristics are you familiar with?
 - Which animals might you find in Africa that don't live in other continents? Which animals would you not find in the UK?
 - What do you know about the ecosystems of Western Africa?
 - Explain the term savannah, a word to describe the desert plains of West Africa. Show the children some pictures of the savannah and ask them to compare these to the rural landscapes they know. If children are more familiar with an urban setting, show them pictures of the rural landscapes of the UK and encourage the children, who may have lived in other parts of the world, to compare the dry plains of Africa to what they may have seen, and do make the most of the experiences of any children who may have lived in or visited Africa.
 - Finally, discuss the nature of giraffes – their appearance, and how they live. Children may find it surprising that such a large animal lives on leaves and vegetation. Create a whole class giraffe fact file. This could be as simple as just recording all the facts they think they know (or can find out) about giraffes on a large outline of a giraffe. You might choose one coloured pen or post-it-note with which to write these notes initially and, as you read through the book together, you can change the colour to record new giraffe facts that the book reveals.
 - Now reveal the author, illustrator and title. The children will hopefully have read and studied other books by Nicola Davies but if not briefly introduce them to other titles she has written. Share the fact that, as well as being a children's author, she is also a Zoologist (and former presenter of the *Really Wild Show*) and has expert knowledge of the animal kingdom. She has collaborated with Emily Sutton previously for books such as *Lots*, *Many*, *Grow* and *First Book of the Sea*. You might visit their websites for more information:
 - <https://emilysutton.co/h>
 - <http://nicola-davies.com/>



- Now explore the illustration on the first spread without yet revealing the text, beginning with initial impressions of the overall image before scrutinising the details more closely:
- What is your first impression of this setting? Would you like to live there? Why? Why not?
- What are the people doing? How do you know?
- How do you think they are feeling? Why do you think that? Support the children to notice the references to farming: the tools and tilled soil.
- Why are there colourful birds in this picture? Why do they all look different from one another? What does this tell us about the 'mood' of the story? What does it tell us about the local wildlife?
- Look at the houses. Do they look like your home? How are they the same or different?
- Now reveal the first line of the text and ask the children how they think the rains make the land change colour.
- Reveal the second line of text. *Why might the birds not have been calling to one another before the rains came? Why is the Earth 'breathing'?* You may wish to discuss this personification and why Nicola Davies chooses to use it. The theme of this book is conservation: protecting the planet so it can 'live ... breathe'. Also, explore the idea that the Earth is breathing 'again'. *When did it stop breathing and why?* Discuss the fact that the word 'again' implies this is a cycle or repeating process.
- Reveal the final line. Discuss whether this matches the children's perception of 'the people' when they studied the first illustration.
- Before turning to the next spread, present the children with the line: *'Once, the season of the rain had been the season of the Giraffes'.* Ask the children what they think this line means. *Why might rain bring giraffes?* Refer them back to the vibrant birds singing in the trees from the previous page and the discussion you had about rain supporting animal life.
- Now reveal the illustration. What do they like about what they can see? Do you think this abundance of giraffes is a good thing? Why? What use are giraffes to the farmers?
- Now read the rest of the text:
 - Why didn't they notice the giraffes when they arrived? What does this tell us about how and when they arrived?
 - Why are the people pleased? What is a blessing? Why might the giraffes feel like a sign from god? To answer this children will need to understand how awe inspiring a giraffe looks because of their size and graceful movements. They are unlike any other animals and look almost mythical.
- Revisit your giraffe fact file and add anything new that they have discovered about giraffes. They might also want to add words or phrases from the text as well as comments about their feelings towards giraffes e.g. *I didn't know giraffes were so tall! I thought that farmers would try and scare them away to protect their crops.*
- Before moving onto the next text, ask the children to predict what might happen next. Focus on why the giraffes might have had to travel great distances to find food.



- Turn over to the next spread and read the first two lines at the bottom of the first page. Invite the children to add what they have discovered about giraffes from this sentence to the whole class fact file. Ask the children what other animals they know that help plants to pollinate and create seeds and eventually create new plants. The obvious answer is birds, bees and flying insects, but any animal that rubs against a plant, and then moves from plant to plant can aid pollination.
- Explore the reciprocal nature of trees and giraffes. Trees provide food for giraffes and giraffes aid pollination. If this process is interrupted there would be fewer trees and people would suffer. It is this concept that is central to the theme of the book so it is really important that the children understand this.
- Before reading the rest of the page, ask the children what would happen if the giraffes ate all of the leaves. Now read the rest of the page and explain how trees try to prevent giraffes from taking all of their leaves (thorns). Again, the relationship between the trees, the giraffes and the ants is a demonstration of the complexities of an ecosystem and how by taking one element out of this process all the organisms within it suffer.
- The giraffe's tongue is a wonderful example of adaptation, so explore this further if this is something that relates to the children's prior knowledge or interest.
- Turn over and read through the next two spreads, giving the children time to respond to what they have heard and notice in the illustrations. Then invite the children to generate some words and phrases that describe the relationship between the people and the giraffe e.g. tolerance, respect, part of everyday life, live and let live, harmony, mutually beneficial.
- The behaviour of the giraffes on these pages serves to illustrate how strange but not out of place some giraffe behaviour seems to the people. There are a number of insights into giraffe behaviour on these pages so make sure the children have time to add these to their giraffe fact file.
- Finally, ask the children what might disrupt this harmonious relationship. Focus on the final line, **The giraffes were a blessing – like the trees, the birds, the rain.** The implication of a 'blessing' is that it can be taken away, it is something special and might not always be there. The fact that the giraffes appear to be running away from the reader and off the page is an example of foreshadowing; the reader being given a visual clue that something is going to upset the balance of nature and drive the giraffe away.
- Before reading the text on this page, ask the children to compare this picture to the illustration spread at the beginning of the story, before the giraffes came. Ask the children to compare:
 - **The perspective/viewpoint.** In the first picture the reader feels that they are looking up at the village from the valley below, as if they are in the valley with the birds and the farmers. In the second picture we are detached from the village. We are looking down on it as if we are no longer part of a happy scene but rather observing something from a distance.
 - **Composition.** Nature has now given way to manmade structures ... the houses of the people are now what we mostly see...
 - **Colour.** ...and as a result the green of the trees has been washed out of the picture and rather than being in the foreground, the green that is left has been relegated to the background and is barely noticeable.



- Once you have made a comparison between the two pictures ask the children why they think this scene has changed so much.
- Now read the text. This is the first point at which the impact people have on nature is mentioned. Ask the children to identify the actions that have been taken by the people and to infer (and use the clues in the picture), to discuss the consequences.
- This is a great opportunity to discuss the larger issue of climate change and the impact humans are having on the natural world. It is more than likely that many children will already have knowledge and a viewpoint about such issues as climate change, animal conservation and dwindling resources and habitats, so open up this discussion and see where the children lead you...
- Read the first three lines and ask the children why they think the rains fail. *Is it because of the actions of the local people or is the problem more global?* Make reference to the discussion sparked by the previous spread.
- Ask the children *how might the humans and animals 'suffer'?* *What were the consequences of the land becoming baked?* *Why has the land become baked?* *What might solve this problem?*
- Now read the next two lines at the bottom of the second page and ask:
 - *What is the significance of the word 'almost'?*
 - *How will the absence of the giraffes make the situation worse?*
- Turn to reveal the illustration on the next spread but do not read the text yet. Invite the children to describe the mood of the story and whether they think it has changed. They will notice that the children are laughing, like they were at the beginning of the story, because the rain has returned. *What will the consequences of the rain returning be?* *Will the end of the drought bring back the trees, birds and most importantly the giraffes?*
- Now reveal the words on this page and ask the children to predict what the end of this sentence might be on the page turn. *What illustration do you expect to see and why?* With a partner ask the children to complete the sentence then explain why they have chosen their ending, justifying the reasoning using evidence from the story, for example:
 - *I think the trees will grow again and the giraffes will return because when the rain comes the Earth comes alive again.*
 - *I think that the world has changed and the drought has done too much damage to be fixed. The rain won't make any difference.*
- The tone of the story now changes which serves to remind us that this is a true story. This story is happening in Africa today. Giraffe numbers have fallen as they face so many obstacles to finding food and water.
- Read the passage up to the end of the line **though they were very, very few.** This is the perfect time to get out the maps or globes and look for where Niger is on the continent of Africa. If the resources are available, the children might also like to research in which countries giraffes are now extinct.
- Now ask the children what the people of Niger might have done to turn the situation around. Remind the



children of the problems that the people who lived in the village had caused e.g. killing giraffes for meat and destroying trees for firewood or to clear the land to build housing. Ask them to think about what might be done to combat these problems.

- Finally read to the end of the passage and the opposite page. Ask the children to suggest one word for how they now feel about the situation, for example are they *concerned* about the plight of the giraffes anymore? Some children might think that this is a happy ending and the problem has gone away and therefore suggest words such as '*hope*' or '*relief*'; others may realise that this is only a small solution to a much bigger problem. Remind the children that this happened in just one African nation, Niger, yet it is still a problem elsewhere.
- Read the final two spreads of the story all together then revisit the illustration on the first spread again. Invite the children to reflect on what the issues might be in transporting the giraffes to new areas in Africa. Ask them to look closely at the pictures to see if they can work out the solutions to these problems. For example:
 - the giraffes might feel stressed travelling in a truck, but they seem to have plenty of food with them to calm them down.
 - The giraffes might not settle in the new areas: there are rangers on hand to observe their behaviour and intervene if necessary.
- You might step back from the story and watch a suitable film with the children to see what actually happens when you try to move large numbers of giraffes across a continent, such as [Operation Sahel – Giraffe Conservation in Nigeria by Conservation Film Company](#).
- Now spend some time exploring the final illustration, which shows the giraffes in their new habitat, eating vegetation and drinking from pools of water on the ground. Ask the children how this compares to other pictures they like from the story as a whole and how it reflects the themes of the book. They might notice and make associations with the cheerful pink colour of the sky or the fact that the giraffes have plenty to eat again like they did at the beginning of the story.
- Finish by reading the next spread, **Giraffes and Climate Change**. These two pages supply the reader with the background information they need to really understand the plight of the giraffes in the story and how their numbers are dwindling as a direct result of climate change. The story can be enjoyed without this knowledge however, by the end of the story, it is likely that the children's interest in the issues explored in the book will lead them to want to do further research into the topic, and this is a great place to start.
- You might split the class into small groups to read through each section of the information together then present what they have found out to the rest of the class. Each group could create an infographic to represent their section of text and help them in their presentation. The children could rewrite a few sentences of text using emotive words and phrases, turning the information text into a persuasive conservation campaign.
 - Rather than giving the text to the children to read, read sections of it aloud and ask the children to make notes as you do so. Do this several times, so that the children have a chance to refine their notes. Finally, ask the children to compare their notes to a partner and in pairs write their own version of the text, from their notes, with illustrations.



After reading, you could also:

- Ask the children to share their personal responses to the story. The groups can begin to explore their responses with the help of Aidan Chamber's '**four basic questions**'. These questions give the children accessible starting points for discussion:
 - *Tell me, was there anything you liked about the story?*
 - *Was there anything that you particularly disliked?*
 - *Was there anything that puzzled you? What are the questions you would like to ask about the story?*
 - *Were there any patterns or any connections you noticed?*
- Ask the children to decide upon, then sketch, part of the story that really stands out in their mind. Emily Sutton's colour palette is very distinctive, as she often uses muted pastel shades. Provide the class with paints, pastel crayons or chalk to colour in their sketch in the style of Emily Sutton. Once they have completed their picture, ask the children to use black felt tip pen to write words and phrases from this part of the book, or their own comments about the story, over the top of the picture to create impact. These pictures could then form quite a dramatic display. Alternatively, they could write a conservation campaign slogan over the top of their picture, thinking about how it might entice others to care about the plight of the giraffes in West Africa.
- This book presents many opportunities for the children to write based on the themes of global conservation and environmental preservation. Below are some suggested starting points for writing. To get the best out of this reading experience give the children the opportunity to choose what and how they write, from a handful of options. This will encourage more authentic writing in response to what they have read.
- Invite the children to engage in information writing that expands on the ideas in the book. This could be written as a blog post or magazine article.
- Create an annotated map of the landscape in the book, using the illustrations, phrases and ideas from the story.
- Write a letter or email to someone either locally or further afield, in an influential position (politician, celebrity), to request support for a campaign of their choice. You may want to reference the work of someone like Greta Thunberg, who showed that courage and words work whatever your age or status.
- Write a first-person account (diary, postcard) as one of the children living in the village.
- Create a persuasive flier or short speech on a specific environmental issue.
- Craft a poem using some of the vocabulary and images from the book.
- Present a speech which highlights what they have learnt and includes a call to action.



Other suggested titles to further support the exploration of themes arising from the book:

- *Hummingbird* by Nicola Davies
- *One World: 24 Hours on Planet Earth* by Nicola Davies illustrated by Jenni Desmond
- *Lots* by Nicola Davies, illustrated by Emily Sutton
- *Africa, Amazing Africa* by Atinuke
- *Circle* by Jeannie Baker
- *Let's Save Antarctica: Why we must protect our planet* by Catherine Barr, illustrated by Jean Claude
- *North* by Nick Dowson, illustrated by Patrick Benson
- *Kids Fight Plastic* by Martin Dorey, illustrated by Tim Wesson
- *Can We Save the Tiger?* By Martin Jenkins, illustrated by Vicky White
- *Endangered Animals* by Martin Jenkins, illustrated by Tom Frost
- *Koala* by Claire Saxby
- *Out of the Blue* by Elizabeth Shreeve, illustrated by Frann Preston-Gannon
- *Earth Verse: Explore our Planet through Poetry and Art* by Sally M. Walker, illustrated by William Grill



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