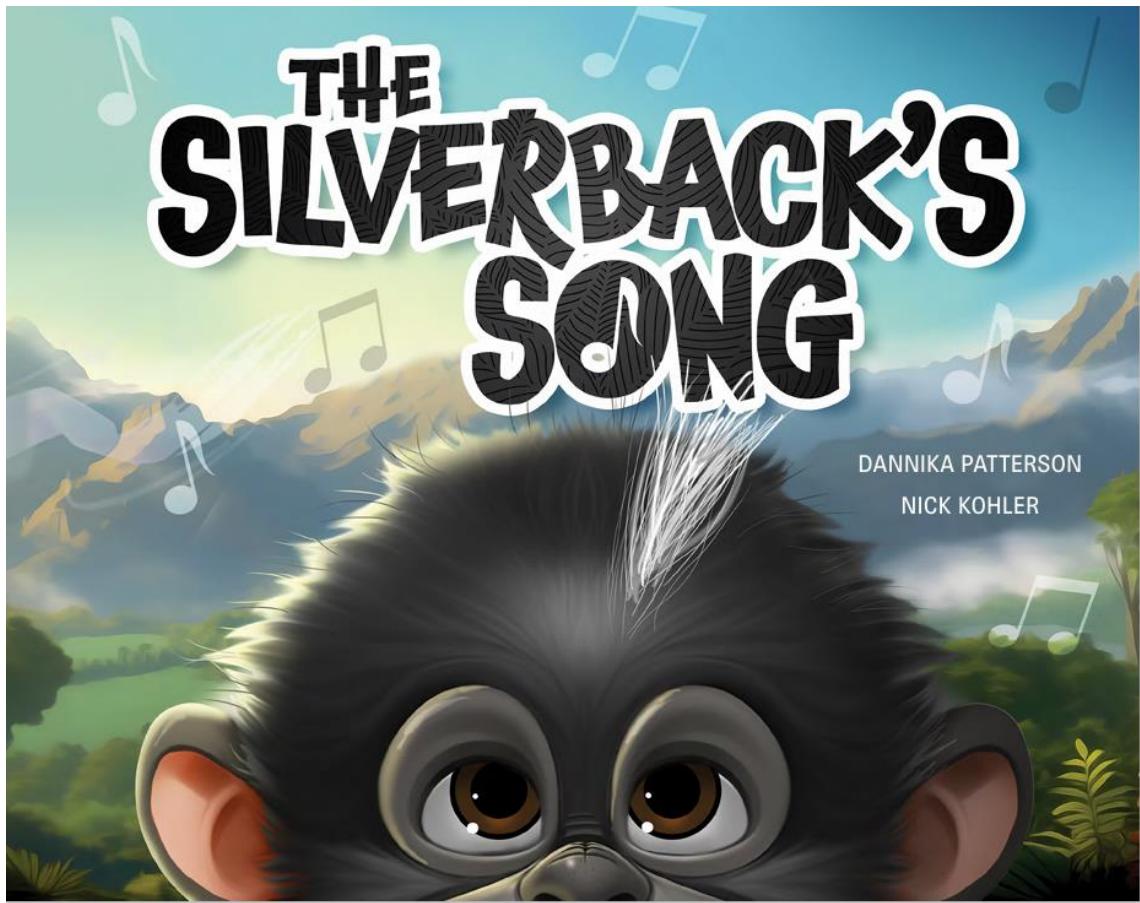


TEACHING NOTES

The Silverback's Song



Book Blurb:

'Our new one, our new one, our new one is here.'

A warm and lyrical welcome for little ones, this gentle story celebrates their growth, from birth, to becoming and belonging. Children will delight in wildlife-filled landscapes as they follow a baby mountain gorilla through the stumbles, tumbles and triumphs of growing up.

The Silverback's Song is a tribute to every loving aspect of raising a family.

Summary:

The Silverback's Song is a fictitious anthropomorphised story which reflects realistic gorilla behaviour and habitat. The illustrations in this picture book reflect the landscape, flora and fauna species found in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where this story is set.

The Silverback (in a troop of mountain gorillas) is the dominant male and will lead, protect and guide infant gorillas born into his troop (even if they are not biologically his offspring). For young children, this story will not only serve as a beautiful celebration of father figures in their lives, but also other significant male lighthouse figures: coaches, teachers, uncles, etc. It will be enjoyed all those welcoming a new arrival to their family, in celebration of every loving aspect of raising a family.

The Silverback's Song was commissioned by the Iona Old Boys Association to share their story of community and belonging. The gorilla is Iona's mascot, and is a symbol of strength, resilience, confidence, humility, wisdom and leadership. Iona's most senior Old Boys, who have marked 50 years or more since their graduation, are known as the Iona Silverbacks.

Just as the silverback in this story celebrates and nurtures the young mountain gorilla Imani (meaning 'faith'), the Iona Silverbacks nurture the next generation of Ionians so they may one day lead.

Key Concepts: Family/Extended family, Birth, Becoming, Belonging, Growth, Community, Parenting, Love, Significant/'Lighthouse' figures, Stewardship, Animal behaviour, Natural world/Nature, Africa, Mountain Gorillas, Initiation.

Age suitability: Prep to Year 4/5 [these notes reflect the span of abilities in this range and may need adjusting to suit individual classes]

Before Reading:

- Looking at the cover, students might have many suggestions/responses.
 - ✓ Do they recognise these animals?
 - ✓ What is the difference between apes and monkeys?
 - ✓ Do they know the term 'silverback'? To what does it refer?
 - ✓ Where would one find gorillas in the wild? Some students will suggest answers such as jungles, mountains, Africa and some may even know specific countries such as Congo.
 - ✓ Have any of the students heard the name Dian Fossey?
 - ✓ What responses do students have to the cover art? Can they guess how these illustrations have been created?
 - ✓ Is this a fiction or non-fiction book? How can we tell?
- Ask the children if they have ever seen a real ape and invite comments: where was it? what did they notice? Were there any young ones? Could they see any food?
- What do they know about gorillas?
- Do they have a favourite story, TV or movie gorilla character?
- Have students individually complete a K/W/L template and construct a class one which can be added to for duration of the unit of inquiry.
- Establish a class learning wall and collate the various initial reflections/responses as a starting point.
- Secure a bulk loan from the school library of related books both fiction and non-fiction for classroom free reading (see suggested list of titles on page 10)

During Reading:

- Find the (DR of) Congo on a world map. Use Google Earth to explore some terrain. Add notes to the learning wall.
- Depending on the age of the students you might touch on the humanitarian crisis in DRC and also the issues with poaching.
- Define and understand the terms:
 - **extinct**: to die out, there aren't any left alive.
 - **endangered species**: when an animal or plant species is in danger of becoming extinct.
- Closely examine each double spread before reading text, and note interesting points e.g., What mood/s and information do the illustrations convey? Consider aspects: palette/colours, use of light/dark/shadow, tone, symbolism, facial expressions, use of white space. After reading text discuss the impact of the illustrations to enhance meaning or mood.
- Begin some research into gorillas and match up facts about behaviours, diet, habitat with the text and/or illustrations. A Venn diagram might be useful here.

- Introduce or revise the term **onomatopoeia**. These words are onomatopoeic. Find others in the text and then add more suggested by students. Add these to the learning wall.

Hummed p.1	Chuckled p.2	Roared p.3	Tinkled p.11

- Identify the rhyming pairs of words throughout the text [you may choose to introduce the term 'couplet']. How do these add to the concept of song?
- What mood, emotion or story is suggested by pp. 19/20. Discuss the use of expression, colour, tone and shading here, compare the left-hand page to the right hand and note similarities/differences.
- Use the Learning Wall to explore and record the use of noun groups/phrases and adjectival groups/phrases to describe more fully a character, place, thing, or idea.
- Add topic specific vocabulary to a word bank on the learning bank e.g. primates, primatologist, endangered, hominids, subspecies.

After Reading:

- In small groups have students research the following and create a classroom display e.g. wall murals or dioramas:
 - ✓ **Habitats:** rainforest, wetland and bamboo forests
 - Mountain Gorillas:** Two species with two subspecies: Eastern Gorilla – Mountain Gorilla and Eastern Lowland Gorilla, Western Gorilla- Cross River Gorilla and Western Lowland Gorilla. Describe the different kinds of foods they eat, discuss the kinds of habitats they live in, or describe the ways they care for their young.
 - ✓ **Other species** [illustrated in book]: hippopotamus, leopard, congo peafowl, Finch's Agama lizard, bitis nasiconis (snake), hiperolius adspersus isetc (red-eyed green tree frog).
- Address any unanswered questions on the learning wall and discuss findings as a whole class. Add any new questions/wonderings that arise during the reading.
- Iona College (Brisbane) commissioned this book to share their story of community and belonging. The gorilla is Iona's mascot, and is a symbol of strength, resilience, confidence, humility, wisdom and leadership. The butterflies throughout the illustrations reflect colours of the Iona College houses. Each house is named for a significant person in the [OMI](#) tradition. If appropriate in settings, students could select one of these

and, in pairs, create a one-page biography. Conduct a gallery walk to share these. Alternatively present as a slide show in an open area e.g., library or school entry.

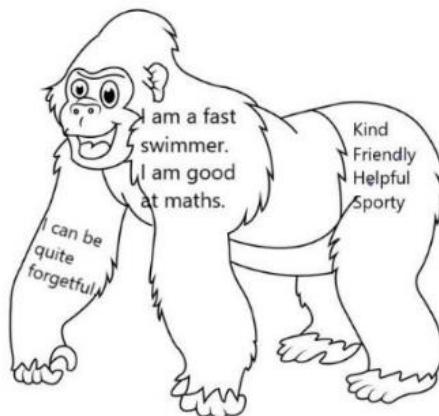
- ✓ Eugène de Mazenod
- ✓ Rector Fr. Tim Long
- ✓ Catherine McCauley
- ✓ Carlo Domenico Albini
- ✓ Mary Mackillop
- ✓ Vital Grandin
- ✓ Józef Cebula
- ✓ Anthoni [Anthony] Kowalczyk
- ✓ Ovide Charlebois
- ✓ Joseph Gérard

- Initiation is the admission and induction of an individual into a group or family. As part of the Religious Education curriculum, ask students to make connections between their personal experiences of initiation (e.g. new class, new school, new team) and the experience of becoming members of the Church through the Sacraments of Initiation. Identify words, actions and symbols present in the story linked to different initiation ceremonies.

Writing:

- Write a diary entry as a day in the life of a gorilla or a PoV commentary [an [excerpt](#) from **The One and Only Ivan** could be useful here as an example].
- Write a descriptive passage to inform a reader of the gorillas' habitat/s, use as much 'show, don't tell' as possible.
- Older students might like to be more creative and make a fake [social media profile](#) for their gorilla species.
- Write and illustrate a pattern poem about a gorilla. Suitable choices could be acrostic, shape, cinquain, haiku or an onomatopoeia poem depending on ability of students.
- Information report. Present research on chosen gorilla species in a report. [Free templates](#) available online. [Gorillas Land](#) has an excellent comparison between the species with quick facts. .
- Have students ask their families what special welcome they were given as newborns. Share these stories, perhaps with photographs if felt appropriate or they could write and illustrate their own story.

- Very young students could complete a cloze activity. Adapt text from one of the simpler non-fiction texts or use some text from the book itself e.g., The _____ is a very large _____ that lives in _____ forests. Gorillas are **the** _____ of the primates. All gorillas living in the _____ are endangered and in _____ of extinction.
- [Mountain Gorillas – Going Going Gone](#) : Reading Vine [free] comprehension activity Years 4/5
- The silverback's 'song' in this story is not just symbolic of the wider community welcoming the newborn infant gorilla, Imani, but also sends wishes/blessings for certain attributes and character traits. What are some of these? [some will be explicit; some will be inferred]. Have students expand on this by creating a character traits analysis for themselves. A template can be an engaging way to do this.



- As a class, determine the attributes the silverback's 'song' hope to bestow upon the newborn. Students could select a designated number of other character traits they think would be important. Depending on ability, adjust task to suit. If appropriate, students may investigate their own unique character traits by completing a survey like the [Free Strengths Survey](#) offered by the VIA Institute on Character.

Examples of Positive Character Traits

Active	Curious	Kind
Admirable	Dedicated	Lively
Adventurous	Easygoing	Loving
Agreeable	Educated	Loyal
Amiable	Enthusiastic	Neat

Amusing	Ethical	Nice
Appreciative	Exciting	Optimistic
Athletic	Extraordinary	Organized
Authentic	Fair	Passionate
Benevolent	Firm	Patient
Brave	Focused	Peaceful
Bright	Forgiving	Playful
Brilliant	Friendly	Polite
Calm	Generous	Principled
Capable	Gentle	Reliable
Caring	Good-natured	Respectful
Charming	Grateful	Responsible
Cheerful	Happy	Self-disciplined
Clean	Hardworking	Selfless
Clear-headed	Helpful	Sincere
Clever	Heroic	Skillful
Compassionate	Honest	Strong
Confident	Hopeful	Sweet
Considerate	Humble	Thoughtful
Cooperative	Innocent	Trustworthy
Courageous	Intelligent	Understanding
Courteous	Inventive	Unselfish
Creative	Joyful	Wise

- Throughout the world the gorilla is linked to concepts of leadership and authority, as well as compassion, generosity and honour. They are associated with powerful spirits and are considered sacred animals in certain tribal beliefs. Gorillas have also been featured in folklore and storytelling, representing noble and wise characters. They can also represent positive energy. Students can define their own positive attributes, create a 'gorilla self-portrait' [see [Anthony Browne](#) books for inspiration] and combine the two.
- Watch [Gorillas - A lesson in animal care & routine](#) [7:00 mins]. Pause at appropriate times. Have students make notes or draw what they see. For younger children, record their observations and create an anchor chart.
- Create a non-fiction comprehension activity (see following example) and adapt to suit students' level/ability.

The **Western lowland gorilla** is a subspecies of the western gorilla that lives in Central Africa. They are a critically endangered species and they are commonly found in zoos.

- **Description:** A male gorilla grows to be 5-6 feet tall and weighs between 300-600 lbs. Females grow to be 4-5 feet tall and weigh 150-300 lbs.
- **Habitat:** The western lowland gorilla is native to the African countries of Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon. Their primary habitat is secondary forests, and lowland swamps.
- **Behavior:** These gorilla's live in small groups of 1 dominant male and 5-7 adult females and their children. Female gorillas become mature at 9-10 years old and have a baby every 5 years. They do not display territorial behavior between groups and their territories may overlap.
- **Diet:** Their diet consists primarily of vegetation such as roots and shoots. They also eat fruit, tree bark, and insects. They eat about 40 lbs. of food per day.
- **Conservation:** The western lowland gorilla is a critically endangered species. Their populations are threatened by Ebola, deforestation, and poaching. There are over 550 gorillas in zoos throughout the world. The Cincinnati Zoo leads the world in gorilla births.

Sample Questions:

1. How big do gorillas grow?

Males: _____

Females: _____

2. What countries of Africa do they live in?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Activities:

- **Vignettes:** Fold a piece of paper into four. Students create four vignettes to show their favourite pages from the book.
- **Brain breaks:** inside or outside: Move like gorillas – take note of the way the young gorillas play and move around using books and film. Mimic their physical activities to demonstrate these e.g., tumbling and swinging.
- **Obstacle course:** Create a gorilla obstacle course challenge [invite PE teacher to help]. Students can complete as individuals or teams.
- Gorilla walking. This exercise is great for ages 3 and up. It helps to promote motor coordination and build up your child's strength in the wrists and core muscles. It is easy to incorporate into home learning, screen activities and also teletherapy sessions. [Amy Baez, Playapy]
- Gorilla pose: Kids Yoga
- Origami Gorilla
- World Gorilla Day activities – Dian Fossey Fund
- Make a felt gorilla craft
- Mountain Gorillas First school activities and crafts
- Carboard Roll Gorilla Craft
- How to Draw a Gorilla
- Draw with Rob (Biddulph) 30 Gorilla
- **Gorilla lunch/picnic.** While gorillas are mostly vegetarian, they also eat bugs. Make healthy fruit and veggie bugs [plentiful ideas online]
- **Koko Signing:** Learn to sign like Koko Kids for Koko
- **Pavement Chalk 'one-pager'** – in pairs or small groups summarise the narrative using chalk art on pathways or playground. Gallerywalk afterwards to share.
- **Tactile Art:** Create multimedia backdrops for the classroom informational displays. For example, print with leaves or other natural materials, collage (fake) fur, bark etc..
- Check out a variety of free activities here



Related resources:

Books:

Picture books/Non-fiction

Gorilla – Anthony Browne

Notes compiled by Sue Warren (Teacher-librarian) & edited by Dannika Patterson (Author)
Version 3.0, July 2024

Little Beauty – Anthony Browne
 Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla – Katherine Applegate
 Growing Up Gorilla – Clare Hodgson Meeker
 Koko's Kitten - Dr Francine (Penny) Paterson
 He Leads: Mountain Gorilla, the Gentle Giant - June Smalls
 The Ultimate Gorilla Book -Jenny Kellett
 The Gorilla Book: Born to be Wild - Dr Carla Litchfield [Adelaide Zoo]
 Gorillas (Our Wild World series)
 You Can be a Primatologist: Studying Primates with Dr Jill Pruetz
 Unforgotten: the Wild Life of Dian Fossey and her Relentless Quest to Save Mountain Gorillas – Anita Silvey
 Dian Fossey: Friend to Africa's Gorillas – Robin S. Doak
 Playing the Shape Game – Anthony Browne

Novels:

The One and Only Ivan – Katherine Applegate

eBooks/readers:

EPIC: [Gorillas](#) collection

Film:

[The One and Only Ivan](#) [Disney Plus]

[Mighty Joe Young](#) [Various streaming services]

[Gorilla Revisited with David Attenborough](#) [Clickview]

[Gorillas are HIGHLY Intelligent!](#) | Wild Bites | BBC Earth Kids [5:37 mins]

[The Day I Met Attenborough](#) [YouTube 1:38 – Aardman/BBC]

[Gorilla Facts](#): Silly School Education [YouTube 2.20 mins]

[Koko the Gorilla](#) [YouTube 7:34 mins]

[Koko the Talking Gorilla](#): 60 Minutes Australia [YouTube 11:00]

Websites:

[10 Great Gorilla Facts](#): National Geographic Kids

[Facts About Gorillas](#) That's Bananas! 24 Fun Facts About Gorillas (free download: Read Brightly)

[Top 10 Facts about Gorillas](#) – World Wildlife Fund

[All About Gorillas](#) Sea World

[Koko](#): The Gorilla Foundation [learn to sign like Koko]/[Kids for Koko](#) – Conservation through Communication

[Dian Fossey](#) Britannica Kids

[Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) Britannica

[DR of the Congo](#) CIA World Fact Book

[The Tragic Facts about Gorilla Poaching in Africa](#) African Gorilla

[Conditions in the DRC](#) – World Vision

Songs:[Gorilla Song](#)[We're Gorilla Family](#)[The Mountain Gorilla Song](#)[Johnny the Gorilla sings "I'm Still Standing"](#)[Go Go Gorilla – The Ideals](#)**About the Book:**

The Silverback's Song

ISBN: 978-0-6485778-2-9

Format: 32pp Hardcover Picture Book

Publisher: Morningstar Books

Author: Dannika Patterson

Illustrator: Nick Kohler

About the Author:

Dannika Patterson is a children's author, presenter & freelance writer with degrees in Journalism & Psychology. For 20 years, Dannika used her wordsmithing skills to help businesses around the world tell their stories more effectively. In 2017, she discovered that writing books for kids is WAY more fun & soul-rewarding. *The Silverback's Song* is her 16th published book title. You can learn more about Dannika Patterson and her books, school workshops and community appearances at her website - dannikapatterson.com

Dannika's connection to Iona College: her husband graduated from Iona College in 1998, and her son currently (2024) attends the school.

About the Illustrator:

Born and raised in Brisbane, currently based on the Gold Coast, Nick Kohler is a self-taught painter specialising in oils. Primarily focusing on portraits, Kohler is interested in capturing the true identity of a subject through a mix of realism and deconstruction techniques. A lifelong fascination with how people interact with their surroundings and each other strongly influences both the process and look of his work. As well as private commission work, he has been a finalist in Aspire Gallery's Focus show, a finalist in the Darling Portrait Prize (2019), and was the winner of the 2017 Neumann Dust Temple Portrait Prize. *The Silverback's Song* is Nick Kohler's debut as a picture book illustrator.

You can learn more about Nick's work here: Nick Kohler — Aspire Gallery
 Nick's connection to Iona College: he graduated from Iona College in 1998.

About the Publisher:

This book was published by Brisbane-based micro press Morningstar Books and is available for purchase by the general public in Australia.

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM (VERSION 9.0) OUTCOMES

ENGLISH	
Foundation	AC9EFLA07 AC9EFLE02 AC9EFLE04 AC9EFLY06 AC9EFLY07 AC9EFLA08 AC9EFLE03 AC9EFLY05
Year 1	AC9E1LA04 AC9E1LA09 AC9E1LE02 AC9E1LY02 AC9E1LY06 AC9E1LY07 AC9E1LA03 AC9E1LA06 AC9E1LA07 AC9E1LA08 AC9E1LE02 AC9E1LE03
Year 2	AC9E2LA08 AC9E2LY02 AC9E2LY06 AC9E2LY07 AC9E2LE02 AC9E2LE03 AC9E2LY03
Year 3	AC9E3LA09 AC9E3LA10 AC9E3LE02 AC9E3LY02 AC9E4LY02 AC9E3LY06 AC9E3LY07 AC9E3LE04 AC9E3LY05 AC9E3LE05
Year 4	AC9E4LY06, AC9E4LY07 AC9E4LA04 AC9E4LA11 AC9E4LE03 AC9E4LY03
HASS	
Foundation	AC9HSFK02 AC9HSFS02 AC9HSFS04 <u>AC9HSFK02 AC9HSFS03</u>
Year 1	AC9HS1S01 AC9HS1S06 <u>AC9HS1K01</u>
Year 2	AC9HS2S01 AC9HS2S02
Year 3	AC9HS3K02 AC9HS3S01
Year 4	AC9HS4K09 AC9HS4S01 <u>AC9HS4K09</u>
SCIENCE	
Foundation	<u>ACSSU002</u> AC9SFU01
Year 1	<u>ACSSU211</u> <u>AC9S1U01</u>
Year 3	<u>AC9S3U01</u>
Year 4	<u>AC9S4U01</u>
The Arts	
Foundation -3	<u>AC9AVA2D01</u> <u>AC9AVA2C01</u>
Years 3-4	<u>AC9AVA4P01</u>
HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION	
Foundation	<u>AC9HPFP03</u> <u>AC9HPFP01</u>
Years 1-2	<u>AC9HP2P03</u>
Years 3-4	<u>AC9HP4M01</u>
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION	
BCE Year 3	<u>CHLS4</u>