

A Curriculum Guide to

Big Game

By Stuart Gibbs



About the Book

Teddy Fitzroy returns as FunJungle’s resident zoo sleuth when a rhinoceros is at risk in *Big Game*, a companion to *Belly Up* and *Poached*—which *Kirkus Reviews* called a “thrill-ride of a mystery.”

When someone takes aim at Rhonda Rhino, FunJungle’s pregnant (and endangered) Asian greater one-horned rhinoceros, the zoo steps up security measures in order to protect this rare animal and her baby.

But the extra security isn’t enough—someone is still getting too close for comfort. Teddy and company start to suspect that whoever is after Rhonda is really after her horn, which is worth a lot of money on the black market.

For the first time ever, the head of the zoo enlists Teddy for help—for once, he doesn’t have to sneak around in order to investigate—and the results are more wacky, and more dangerous, than ever before.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: READING, WRITING, AND RESEARCHING

Prereading Activity

This activity aligns with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.2) (RL.6.2) (SL.4–6.1, 2, 3)

As a prereading activity, have students complete an anticipation guide structured in the following manner:

<i>Before Reading</i>	<i>After Reading</i>	<i>Statements</i>
		Asking too many questions is always a bad idea.
		All mysteries are worth solving.
		Adults always know the right way to approach a problem.
		When in danger, it is best to play it safe rather than take a risk.

Instruct students to complete the guide by placing a “+” sign in the box next to the statements for which they agree, and a “0” next to those for which they disagree. They must commit to agreement or disagreement—there are no conditional responses. Students should be assured that there are no correct or incorrect positions.

Discussion Questions

The following questions may be utilized throughout the study of *Big Game* as reflective writing prompts or alternatively, they can be used as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection. These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3, 7, 9) (RL.5.1, 2, 3, 4) (RL.6.1, 2, 3, 7, 9) (SL.6.1, 2, 3) (W.4–6.4)

1. In *Big Game*, the novel opens with Teddy stating, “I was helping walk the elephants when the first shot was fired at Rhonda Rhino.” From this first introduction of Teddy, what is unusual about his circumstance? In your opinion, is Teddy lucky that he gets to reside at FunJungle? What are the advantages and disadvantages of getting to live at a zoo park?
2. What are some of the ways that living at FunJungle is similar to living in a tent camp in the Congo of Africa? How are those experiences different? Which do you think Teddy prefers and why?
3. Teddy describes Bonnie Melton, the head elephant keeper, as someone with forty years of experience in her job but with “the enthusiasm of a high school kid.” What can readers infer about Bonnie’s feelings for her work? In considering yourself and your potential career as an adult, what kind of work do you hope to do? What is it about that particular job that makes you feel passionate about it?
4. Consider Teddy’s reaction when his father brags about him for knocking out the local bully at school and having the head cheerleader want to date him: What can you discern from how Teddy feels about this attention?
5. After learning that Summer has transferred from her private prep school on the East Coast to Lyndon B. Johnson Middle School, Bonnie asks Teddy, “Is that why she transferred from that fancy-schmancy school? So she could be belle of the ball here?” Do you think Bonnie is right or do you think Summer has better reasons to want to remain close to FunJungle and Teddy? If so, what are they?
6. After the elephant stampede, Pete Thwacker, head of public relations at FunJungle, chooses to use the event as a means to draw visitors to the park to view the wreckage. Why would people want to visit for such a reason?
7. What is it about Rhonda that makes her “even more precious than any of the other rhinos?” Why does protecting her become such a priority for all involved parties at FunJungle?
8. Teddy says that “Even though it was still well before 7:00 a.m., Hoenekker was dressed impeccably in his security uniform. His shoes were polished. His tie was crisply knotted. His pants and jacket were ironed. Hoenekker also sported a military crew cut and his muscles bulged beneath his starched shirt.” Based on Teddy’s description of him, what can be inferred about Chief Hoenekker? Does his security leadership style seem different than that of Marge’s? Do you believe him to be a better leader?

9. While going to check on Rhonda after hearing the shots ring out in the park, Teddy's dad tells him, "Stay back here, Teddy. This could be dangerous." What does Teddy's father hope to accomplish by keeping Teddy away? Given the situations Teddy regularly finds himself in, what does that tell us about his father's hope to protect him?

10. After Xavier realizes Teddy isn't giving him all the details about the elephant stampede at FunJungle, he gets frustrated and states, "Friends don't keep secrets from each other." Is he right? Do you think Xavier has a right to feel the way he does?

11. Why do Teddy and Xavier feel that TimJim, the Barksdale twins, could be potential suspects in the FunJungle shooting? Do you feel their suspicion is unwarranted? Why or why not?

12. Teddy says, "Summer was one of the smartest kids in school, although a lot of people assumed she was dumb because she was beautiful." Do you think that's a common misconception?

13. After seeing a "Wanted" photo of Teddy at the entry of the zoo, Summer teases him by saying, "Look at you! You're FunJungle enemy number one!" What has Teddy done in the past that has led him to be suspected of wrongdoing?

14. In *Big Game*, Large Marge is again determined to blame Teddy for whatever issue she is investigating. Why does Large Marge always seem so determined to catch Teddy misbehaving and why does she always seem to desire to get the best of Teddy? Do you think she is at all justified in her actions? Why or why not?

15. J. J., owner of FunJungle, tells Teddy, "I won't kid you. I'm extremely concerned about this. I want to find whoever fired that shot before they try again—and I think you might be of considerable assistance in doing that." Do you think J. J. is right to ask Teddy to help him investigate the attempted shooting of Rhonda and poaching of her horn?

16. After Teddy points out that it is unlikely his parents would be willing to have him help with the investigation, J. J. tells him, "There are other people out there who do what your parents do. It'd be hard to find a primatologist as good as your mother, but then I could find someone a little more cooperative." How does his veiled threat to fire Teddy's parents make Teddy feel? Why does Teddy agree but choose not to tell his parents? If you were in the same predicament, what would you do?

17. Consider the secondary cast of characters from *Big Game*. Who are your favorite and least favorites? What is it about those particular characters that you really like or dislike?

18. When Teddy learns that there are multiple exotic hunting ranches scattered throughout Texas, he remarks, "You mean, people are raising all those animals here just for people to hunt?" Why does Teddy have such a hard time understanding such a business? How do you feel knowing such businesses exist?

19. After Athmani tells Summer and Teddy, “Hunters are usually big supporters of wildlife conservation. After all, if all the animals are gone, there’s nothing left for them to hunt.” He also points out that, “You might think it’s cruel, but then, there are people out there who think that zoos are cruel. No matter how much great conservation work is done here, they still look at this place as a giant animal prison.” Do you think his point is a valid one?

20. What is it about Summer that Teddy feels continually drawn to? Why do you believe she seeks out his friendship? Consider the evolution of their friendship—how would you characterize the relationship between the two of them, and how does it change over the course of the novel? Given their interaction at the end of the story, how will things be different for them moving forward? In what ways might this complicate their investigative work?

21. Throughout *Big Game* and the other FunJungle books, readers learn a great deal about rhinos and other animals. Which animal facts most interested or surprised you?

22. How do the Fitzroys feel after learning that their family’s trailer has been moved to make space for a roller coaster and other rides at FunJungle? Do they have a right to be frustrated by McCracken’s motives to base all decisions on money?

23. After a meeting with J. J., Teddy’s mom declares, “Every time that man offers to answer our questions, I end up with a hundred more. He’s hiding something from us.” Do you believe she is right to be suspicious of her boss?

24. After being accused by Marge of robbing a FunJungle ice cream shop, and listening to her call him a “pest and all-around bad egg,” Teddy finally has the courage to call her a bully. Do you think he’s right? Do you believe you would be brave enough to do the same thing?

25. Why is Doc so reluctant to remove the horns of the rhinos at FunJungle? What makes him finally capitulate to perform the procedure?

26. Describe Summer and Teddy’s investigative partnership. How does her questioning shape how Teddy considers the clues and evidence before him? In your opinion, what is it about the way that the two of them work together that is so effective? What are the challenges to this relationship?

27. Teddy’s mom and dad install additional cameras as a means to learn more about what has caused Pancake’s unusual behavior. When Kyle questions the idea that Pancake could have escaped his exhibit, Teddy’s mom states, “I thought it’d be best to examine the evidence before completely dismissing the theory.” In what ways can her notion be applied to all manner of investigations? How does learning of Pancake’s cleverness remind the humans charged with his care not to underestimate him or other animals?

28. As each of the FunJungle novels close, Teddy has solved a number of important mysteries. Predict what Teddy’s next adventure will be!

Extended Writing and Research Prompts

These activities align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3) (RL.5.1, 2, 4) (RL.6.1, 2) (W.4–6.4)

1. Violet’s uncle tells Summer and Teddy that allowing hunting of an animal may be one of the best ways to save it. Using research resources, investigate game hunting and the role it can play in conservation. Is this idea in alignment with or in opposition to the animal conservation movement? Be sure to examine the following:

- What are the largest world conservation organizations?
- What are their missions?
- What work do they do?
- How do hunting organizations promote conservation?
- Are there any similarities between the two?

After finishing your research, prepare a presentation to share with others.

2. After reading *Big Game*, brainstorm “crimes” committed by the characters from the novel. Work together to act as the prosecution or defense for the selected characters, while also acting as the jury for other groups. Use several sources to research for the case, including the novel and Internet resources on judicial proceedings and roles of the members of a trial. All the while, write a persuasive piece to complement your work. Additional resources for literary mock trials can be found at www.readwritethink.org.

3. Because of his mother’s work at FunJungle, Teddy gets to reside at the zoo/park. Do you have a favorite theme park or zoo? Imagine what it would be like living there. What would be the greatest benefits to such an experience? What would be the biggest challenges? Do you feel that Teddy takes advantage of this unusual situation?

4. Though FunJungle has its fair share of mishaps, it has also been able to recruit specialists, like Teddy’s mother, from around the world to work with and care for their animals. Using library resources and the Internet, have students research a park or sanctuary dedicated to working with and caring for specific types of creatures. Be sure to learn the following:

- Who established the park and why was it founded?
- What is the park’s mission?
- How is it supported and by whom?
- What other animals are cared for (if any)?
- What can individuals do to help support this facility?

After gathering this information, have them create a visual presentation that illustrates their findings.

5. Throughout *Big Game*, animals from locations around the world are referenced and highlighted. Using the FunJungle novels as inspiration, use textual descriptions of the creatures to select one particular animal to research. Place students in pairs and have them role-play as news reporters giving a report on their selected animal. To enrich the activity, record the “news report” and allow students to use props and costumes.

6. Throughout the course of the novel, readers are offered great insight into Teddy’s point of view based on the events of *Big Game*. Assume the role of one of the secondary characters from *Big Game* and draft a diary entry detailing what you experienced and witnessed. To prepare, create an outline using the five Ws (who, what, when, where, and why). Remember to write in first person and give special attention to sensory imagery (what you saw, smelled, heard, etc.)

Big Game through Literary Elements Analysis

Use the following activities to allow students to show their understanding of various literary elements in *Big Game*. These activities align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9) (RL.5.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9) (RL.6.1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 9)

Setting

Consider the setting for *Big Game*: Why is the FunJungle location so important? Using the descriptions provided in each of the FunJungle books, illustrate the four places within the park you believe to be most important to the story. In addition to the illustrations, include a short explanation of the significance of each location, and why you believe it is important.

Considering Character

The purpose of this strategy is to help students demonstrate knowledge of a character in *Big Game* by following written prompts to complete a poem about the individual. Students can be given the prompts to follow on a worksheet, or, alternatively, students may create an original slideshow using PowerPoint, Prezi, or their presentation maker of choice.

BIPOEM:

- Line 1: First name
- Line 2: Three traits that describe the character
- Line 3: Relative of _____
- Line 4: Lover of _____ (three things)
- Line 5: Who feels _____ (three things)
- Line 6: Who needs _____ (three things)
- Line 7: Who fears _____ (three things)
- Line 8: Who gives _____ (three things)
- Line 9: Who would like to see _____ (three things)
- Line 10: Resident of _____
- Line 11: Last name

Advice Column

Ask students to describe one of the problems faced by a character in *Big Game* and write advice to him/her. Students may choose to be serious or humorous. Use the letter format common to newspaper advice columns, where the person with the problem writes for advice and the advisor writes back. Often the person seeking advice “disguises” his or her name with a descriptive name associated with the problem.

Gift Giving

Have students select five or more gifts that would be perfect to give to one of the characters in *Big Game*. While these gifts can be tangible or intangible, they should be things that he/she would really want or need. Be sure to provide an explanation for each gift.

Character Report Card

Ask students to examine the ethical nature of a character's actions and choices in *Big Game*. Have them set up a "report card" using a chart and include the following four categories: respect, responsibility, cooperation, caring, integrity, self-control, honesty, and effort. In addition, include a teacher's comments section. In each category, give the character a letter grade that you believe he/she deserves based on actions and choices made in the book. In "comments," use two specific pieces of evidence from the novel to explain/support the grade.

Character "To Do" List

Remind students that like us, literary characters have tasks they need to complete. Selecting a character of their choice from *Big Game*, students should create a list of the most important tasks at hand for that character, including explanations as to why those tasks are necessary.

Visualize the Scene

In small groups, have students select a favorite scene from *Big Game* and create either a digitally or manually illustrated graphic novel for that scene. Using a digital comic strip creator (<http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/> or <http://infinitecomic.com/> for example), have students begin by using the strips to create storyboards for their scene. Have them select original art, images, and graphics. Alternatively, students could assume the roles of two of the characters with each one's personality and voice, and have them interact with one another by creating an extension of a scene from one of the novels. As part of the evaluation component, consider panel size and number of panels, transitions and layouts, artwork, writing, and lettering.

Book Trailer

Previews of coming attractions in the movie industry are known as trailers. Design an original book trailer for *Big Game*. Begin by creating a storyboard, detailing which scenes you intend to incorporate in your trailer. Use a moviemaker program of choice such as www.animoto.com. Post your finished trailers to www.youtube.com.

This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock, a teacher and school librarian in Coppell, Texas. Dr. Brock holds a Ph.D. in Library Science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.

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