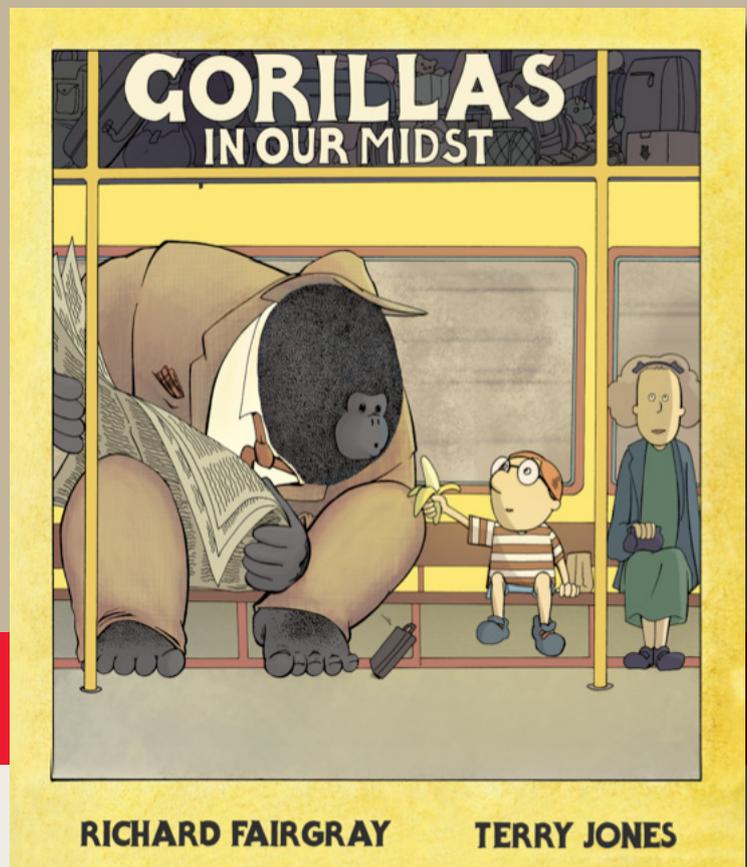


Gorillas in Our Midst

By Richard Fairgray
& Terry Jones

Illustrated by Richard Fairgray

• Reading • Writing • Science



Synopsis

Gorillas in Our Midst is a hilarious picture book about gorillas – gorillas that live alongside humans, completely unnoticed. An ordinary-looking boy peers out of the pages and addresses the reader. He tells him or her that gorillas are everywhere. He explains that the reason no one notices them is because they're in disguise. The boy says that gorillas hide behind masks and are always hungry for bananas. Readers learn that gorillas have been living alongside humans throughout history, and that some, such as Gorilliam Shakespeare, even became famous. They also learn that most gorillas lead ordinary lives, catching buses to the mall or attending school. This is a fun book with plenty of gorillas for young readers to find hidden among the illustrations.

About the Authors

Richard Fairgray was born and raised in New Zealand and has been creating books since he was seven years old. His main focus has been comic books, but he has taken time out during his life to work on films, to perform stand-up comedy, to teach high school, and to stick labels on honey jars. For the last eight years, he has been working exclusively in comics with long-time collaborator Terry Jones. Their main work together is the ongoing series called *Blastosaurus*.

Terry Jones was born in Wales. He taught high-school-aged children in the United Kingdom for many years before immigrating to New Zealand. He retired from teaching in 2009 to focus on his writing. He has written newspaper and magazine articles, some non-fiction works, and two novels.

Writing Style

Gorillas in Our Midst is written in the first person. The speaker is a young boy in a striped T-shirt who speaks directly to the reader in a conversational style (e.g. he says, 'Like I said, always have a banana with you.'). On many pages, this sense of an intimate conversation taking place is also enhanced by the illustrations, in which the speaker is frequently shown standing and looking out of the page, as if facing the reader. The few times other characters speak, their words are shown in speech bubbles.

The illustrations need to be viewed along with the text for the book to make sense and for the jokes to be appreciated. For example, on one page the illustration shows a child being propelled into the air by a young gorilla sitting down heavily on the opposite end of a seesaw. The text assumes the reader has seen the picture. It simply says, 'That's why no one wants to ride the seesaw with Eric.' On the final page, it is the illustration that gives away the twist in the tale – the reason the boy always carries a banana with him is because he, too, is a gorilla in disguise.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the cover. What is going on? Where are the characters? Why do you think the illustrator made the cover yellow? What else in the picture is yellow? (cover)
- What does 'in our midst' mean? How is the word 'midst' similar to the word 'middle'? Can you find a gorilla in the midst of these people? (title page)
- Who is talking on this page? Why do you think he says you should always carry a banana with you? Do you think there a gorilla on the train? Where? (p.5)
- Why are the gorillas so interested in the boy? (p.6)
- How are the gorillas on this page disguised? Do you think you would be able to spot them? Why? (p.7)
- Where is the gorilla hiding? How can you tell? (p.8)
- Why do gorillas like to wear masks? What other jobs might involve wearing a mask? (p.9)
- Who is the gorilla in the old painting? What famous person from history is his name similar to? What letters did the author change to make it a gorilla name? (p.14)
- Who is the gorilla in the statue? What famous person from history is his name similar to? How did the author change the name to make it a gorilla name? (p.15)
- What is sign language? Do you know anything about Koko, the gorilla who uses sign language? (p.16)
- Eric looks friendly. Why do you think no one wants to ride the seesaw with him? (p.18)
- Why does the fact that the boy's town often sells out of bananas mean there are lots of gorillas living there? (p.19)
- Why is the gorilla catching a bus? Where is it going? (p.21)
- Have you ever seen a gorilla swinging through your town? (p.23)
- Have you ever seen an orangutan? Where? (p.25)
- What is this gorilla disguised as? How does the boy realise it's a gorilla, not a person. (pp.26–27)
- Why does the boy always carry a banana? (pp.28–31)

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: MONKEY MADNESS

Elicit information on how the author changed the names William Shakespeare and Abraham Lincoln to **Gorilliam** Shakespeare and **Ape**braham Lincoln. Help your students understand that gorillas are apes, not monkeys (monkeys have long tails), and that orangutans, gibbons and

chimpanzees are also apes. Play a version of *Simon Says*, where you call out the name of a monkey or ape species. If it is a monkey name, the students can move about the classroom making monkey noises, but, if it is an ape name, they must sit down. Students are 'out' if they make noises when they should be sitting, or vice versa.

ACTIVITY 2: GO APE WITH APE BOOKS

If your students enjoyed *Gorillas in Our Midst*, use it to introduce them to other picture books featuring apes and monkeys. Some books they might enjoy include *Gorilla* and *Voices in the Park* by Anthony Browne. Assist your students in comparing and contrasting the books.

ACTIVITY 3: LOOK INTO ALLUSION

Older students might enjoy investigating the many examples of allusion within this book. Discuss how allusion in literature is a reference to another text, place, person or event. Help them identify and investigate everything from the title (which is a play on the film title *Gorillas in the Mist*), to the references to Koko the gorilla (see below) and a real-life science experiment (see below).

ACTIVITY 4: KOKO THE GORILLA

Read page 16 again with your students. Find out what, if anything, they already know about Koko the gorilla — she is a real gorilla who uses sign language to communicate with her trainer Penny (the woman with the ponytail in the illustration). Then share with your students information and videos about Koko from www.koko.org/koko4kids (find and choose material that it is suitable for your students beforehand). This material can be used as an introduction to a study about gorillas or apes, and will help students develop an understanding of how intelligent these creatures are.

ACTIVITY 5: INVISIBLE GORILLAS

Discuss with your students the author's idea that gorillas could be walking among us without us noticing. Ask: Do we notice everything in front of us? Help your students realise that we don't always notice things if we are not concentrating on them. To illustrate this, ask your students to list everything in a part of the school that they cannot see, such as part of the playground or the hall. Can they remember everything that's there? Take them to see what they have missed.

Now tell your students that scientists have studied this effect. Show your students the video of the invisible gorilla: www.theinvisiblegorilla.com/videos.html#tryit. This is a famous experiment in selective attention. Viewers are so focussed on answering the question that they do not always notice the gorilla that walks in and out of the experiment. How many of your students notice the gorilla? Discuss with your students how this experiment might have inspired the author.



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC