

Australia: Sam the Koala/Fire Survivor
NewsDepth, February 19, 2009
Classroom Activities



Overview:

The state of Victoria in southern Australia has recently been hit with hundreds of bush fires during a record-breaking heat wave - temperatures well above 38°C (100°F).

Unfortunately, these fires have proved to be the deadliest in Australian history, with over 200 deaths being reported. The fires mostly appear to have been started by lightning - however a few appear to have been arson, and are under investigation - entire towns being declared crime scenes. Humans aren't the only ones that have suffered devastation in Australia's deadly bushfires, however. Officials estimate that millions of animals perished in the blazes. One lucky survivor was Sam, the koala. Fireman David Tree found Sam in the midst of a bushfire. She was in need, and he came to help. Sam will spend the next seven months at the Mountain Ash Wildlife Center getting the very best care.

Students will discover in today's activities why Australia has so many bush fires and will write about the animals who were so unfortunately the most numerous victims.

(Source for picture: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-02/14/content_10818542_2.htm)

Grade Level: 4-5

Subject: Science

Standards:

Students will be able to compare organism's ecosystems/habitat that affect its survival. They will be able to analyze how organisms cause changes in their ecosystems and how these changes can be beneficial or detrimental.

Classroom Activities:

1. Activity #1 Discussion about Bush Fires

- Locate Victoria, Australia on the map
http://maps.google.com/maps?hl=en&rlz=1T4DKUS_enUS311US313&q=Victoria+Australia+map&um=1&ie=UTF-8&split=0&gl=us&ei=KpacScX3D5icNbzZoJ4F&sa=X&oi=geocode_result&resnum=10&ct=title
- Explain to students what a bush fire is.
<http://www.ask.com/bar?q=what+are+Australian+bush+fires&page=1&qsrc=0&zom=&ab=2&u=http%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FBushfire>

- Explanation of the 2009 Victorian Bush fire
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009_Victorian_bushfires
- Visit the Boston.com website “The Big Picture” so students can view the devastation that is caused by the bush fires.
http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2009/02/bushfires_in_victoria_australi.html
- Can you think of words you would use to describe what you see in these pictures?
- It is reported that over 200 human deaths were reported, and that millions of animals perished in the blazes. Why do you think so many animals perished in these fires? Don’t most animals move rather quickly, quicker than humans? Why don’t you think they could escape?
- Watch an interview with fireman David tree who helped rescue Sam, the koala from one of the bush fires. <http://video.aol.com/video-detail/australian-bushfires-koala-rescue-with-interview-february-2009/288230386227421091/?icid=VIDURVNWS02>
- Love story about Sam and Bob, two koala bear survivors:
<http://uk.reuters.com/article/oddlyEnoughNews/idUKTRE51A1R620090211>

2. Activity #2 Write your Own Animal Survival Story.

- Distribute or show on an interactive whiteboard or overhead the animal pictures from the American Red Cross video about the Australian bush fires.
- Ask students to each choose a picture and write a short one page story featuring the animal or animals in the picture.
 - Have them give the animal a name,
 - Instruct them write to a short story with the animal in the first person.
 - Describe what it was like to survive the fires
 - Include what the animal thinks lies ahead for him/her.

Pictures are from Pictures from American Red Cross video:

<http://video.aol.com/video-detail/victorian-bushfires-australia-07-feb-2009/288230388937092568/?icid=VIDURVNWS10>

3. Activity #3 Know the Koala

- One of the reporters on this week’s NewsDepth feature, Martine Alpins, identified the animal survivor of the Victoria Bush fire as Sam the lucky Koala Bear. Let’s learn a little more about Koalas and see if perhaps the Koala isn’t a bear after all.
- Visit the National Geographic Site for more information about koalas:
<http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/Animals/CreatureFeature/Koala>
- More koala sites for kids:
 1. <http://animals.pppst.com/koala.html> Free presentations about koalas in PowerPoint
 2. <http://www.kidsplanet.org/factsheets/koala.html>
 3. <http://www.thekoala.com/koala/>

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