



December 2016

CRAZE OF THE MONTH:

PLANET EARTH 2



What is Planet Earth 2?

Planet Earth 2 is the follow up to the BBC's hugely successful Planet Earth series, which was originally broadcast in 2006. The new series combines incredible ultra-high definition (4k) footage of amazing wildlife with music from Hans Zimmer and narration by the legendary Sir David Attenborough. The first episode, Islands, was broadcast on 6 November followed by Mountains, Jungles, Deserts and Grasslands. The final episode, Cities, will be broadcast on 11 December.

Whilst we know children are often fascinated by animals, wildlife documentaries are usually thought to attract an older audience. However, recent viewing figures for Planet Earth 2 show it is **more popular with young people than The X Factor** and chances are many of your students are fans.

How can Planet Earth 2 be used for literacy teaching?

We know that tapping into children's interests is a great way of engaging them in learning. Our research shows that children who enjoy writing very much are seven times more likely to write above the level expected for their age compared with children and young people who do not enjoy writing at all. Similarly, children and young people who write outside school daily are five times more likely to be writing above the expected level for their age compared with young people who never write outside school.

Our Craze of the Month taps into children's and young people's interests to improve outcomes in literacy. The activities featured here relate to the English Programmes of Study from the National Curriculum in England:

Spoken language

Pupils should be taught to:

- articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions
- give well-structured descriptions, explanations and narratives for different purposes, including for expressing feelings
- consider and evaluate different viewpoints, attending to and building on the contributions of others.

Writing – composition

Pupils should be taught to:

- develop positive attitudes towards and stamina for writing by:
 - writing narratives about personal experiences and those of others (real and fictional)
 - writing about real events
 - writing for different purposes.



The **National Literacy Trust Network** supports schools to develop outstanding literacy provision by providing literacy leaders with tools, resources and inspiration. **Join now.**

Using it in the classroom

Planet Earth 2 offers a number of opportunities to promote learning, with particularly strong links to Geography. Here we'll focus on how it could be used to promote literacy. The activities start with simpler ones designed for KS1/2 students and progress to ones more suitable for KS3/4.

Favourite animal

Ask pupils to sketch and describe their favourite animal from the series (or just their favourite animal). If you are able, show them a few **clips** from the show. You could ask older pupils to do some research into their chosen animal – for example, what's its natural habitat and diet? They could even make top trump-style cards with key facts and figures such as weight, height and how many exist in the wild.

Planet Earth tweets

The show uses the Twitter account @BBCEarth which often aims to appeal to a young audience, with many of the tweets about the show referencing popular culture. Ask pupils to watch the final episode on Sunday (or show them an earlier episode) and get them to write some tweets that capture the action in just 140 characters and would appeal to people their age.



Epic parenting

Many of the animals featured in the show have evolved complex and extraordinary ways of ensuring their offspring get the best possible start in life. Play the section from Jungles that shows a **frog protecting its spawn from wasps** or the male sandgrouse in Deserts taking a 120mile round trip to collect water for their chicks. Ask students to write a factual account of what the animal does to protect its young and why it goes to such great lengths.

Planet Earth diaries

At the end of each episode there is a diaries section which shows how the crew managed to get some of the trickiest footage. Show students one of these sections (the bigger the screen the better!); the one at the end of the Mountains episode has some spectacular footage of the crew gliding and in Deserts we see how they tracked and filmed a swarm of a billion locusts! Ask students to imagine they are one of the crew members and get them to write a diary of their expedition detailing their frustrations at trying to get the perfect shot and the exhilaration of achieving this.



The **National Literacy Trust Network** supports schools to develop outstanding literacy provision by providing literacy leaders with tools, resources and inspiration. **Join now.**

An interview with Attenborough

Sir David Attenborough is still going strong at the age of 90 and has a career in broadcasting spanning seven decades. Ask students to do some research into the life and work of Attenborough and then prepare a set of interview questions they would like to ask him. You could have students work in pairs where one of them pretends to be the man himself and the other is the interviewer.

Parental engagement

As Planet Earth 2 is popular with both younger and older audiences it's a perfect show to encourage families to watch together and talk about afterwards. All the activities listed above could be set as homework and students could be asked to involve their parents. For example, they could ask their parents for their favourite animal from the show and record this. Or why not ask students to find out some of the great lengths their parents went to in order to give them a great start in life?!

Further reading

Pupils who are interested in animals and the natural world might like to try some of these nonfiction books, which can be used to promote reading for enjoyment:

- Eye Wonder: Bugs by DK Publishing
- The Weird but True series by National Geographic Kids
- The Care of Your Animals series by the RSPCA
- Actual Size by Steve Jenkins
- Planet Earth 2: A new world revealed by Stephen Moss
- Older pupils might also enjoy the autobiography of Sir David Attenborough Life on Air: Memoirs of a Broadcaster, originally published in 2002

You'll find additional non-fiction titles for primary school-aged children covering science, animals, history and more on our [Words for Life](#) website.

By Gemma Niebieszczanski

Network and Competitions Manager



The **National Literacy Trust Network** supports schools to develop outstanding literacy provision by providing literacy leaders with tools, resources and inspiration. [Join now](#).

If you and your students enjoyed these activities you might like our Network resource on [Shackleton's Journey](#). We use the incredible story of Ernest Shackleton's polar expedition to apply reading and writing skills across the curriculum.

We also have a fantastic [book-based transition resource](#) with lots of activities for Years 6 and 7 using the gorgeous book The Land of Neverbelieve by Norman Messenger.