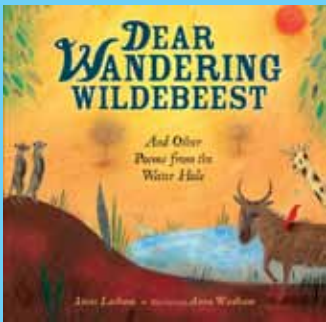


**DISCUSSION GUIDE: *Dear Wandering Wildebeest: And Other Poems from the Water Hole*** by Irene Latham, illus. by Anna Wadham



Millbrook Press/Lerner

**PRE-READING ACTIVITY:**

***How far would YOU go to learn about life at the water hole?***

This book was inspired by photographs taken by wildlife photographer Greg du Toit. You can view them here: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1253935/Photographer-captures-amazing-images-lions-watering-hole-submerging-months.html>



Discover what risks du Toit took in order to capture the best images. How do you think these photos helped the author to write DEAR WANDERING WILDEBEEST?

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

**Life on the Savanna**

1. In “To All the Beasts Who Enter Here” the ground around the water hole is compared to a “human palm.” How is this true? What other comparisons might you make?
2. The dung beetle in “Dung Beetle at Work” serves an important function for the ecosystem. What other creatures can you think of that help to recycle waste?
3. “Tree for All” chronicles the many ways a bush willow tree serves the residents of the African savanna. How do you think the creatures adapt when there is no tree nearby?
4. The poem “Dear Wandering Wildebeest” says, “let’s embrace this season/of strife.” In what ways is the migration season a time of strife?

**About the Animals**

1. In “The Watchman’s Song,” the animal is never named in the poem. How does the illustration inform the reader? Would you know the poem is about a meerkat without the illustration?
2. “Lifestyles of the Sleek and Sinuous” introduces five of the snake species native to the African continent. What might you write about a snake species native to where you live?
3. In “What Rhino Knows” we learn that rhinos are solitary beasts. What other animals are solitary in nature?
4. “Lioness, after the Hunt” is about a specific moment in a lioness’s life. Why do you think the author chose this moment? Which moment would you choose?

**Poetry & Art**

1. “Impala Explosion” is written in rhyming couplets. How do the sounds in the poem mimic an impala explosion?
2. “Oxpecker Cleaning Service” is modeled after an advertisement. Where have you seen advertisements like this? Would you hire an oxpecker, based on this poem?
3. The illustration for “Lioness, after the Hunt” shows the lioness with one eye open. Do you think lionesses really do this? How would it aid in the lion’s survival?

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4. “Says Nightjar to the Stars” is a persona or “mask” poem, which means it is in the voice of the nightjar. According to this poem, how does the Nightjar feel about its life? If you were writing the poem, what feelings would you include?

**ACTIVITIES**

**Language Arts**

1. Write a letter to wildlife photographer Greg du Toit. Tell him what you think about his adventures at the water hole.
2. Write your own persona or mask poem in the voice of an animal of your choosing.
3. Read selections from *National Geographic Book of Animal Poetry*, edited by J. Patrick Lewis.

**Mathematics**

1. Research the different weights of animals that visit the water hole. Display your results in a graph.
2. Examine the illustration for “Triptych for a Thirsty Giraffe.” How many shapes and angles can you find?

**Science**

1. The wildebeest migration is the largest mammal migration in the world. Research other migratory animals and patterns.
2. Research the effects of seasons and weather on the water hole. Create a Public Service Announcement brochure or video with warnings and survival tips.

**History**

1. Research big game hunting and poaching on the African continent. What species have been most affected? How?
2. Make a map of existing big game reserves.

**Art**

1. Create a 3-D model of the water hole, complete with visiting animals.
2. Make a poster advertising “Oxpecker Cleaning Service” or your own advertisement poem.

*About the Author*



**Irene Latham** is a poet and novelist who lives and writes in Birmingham, Alabama. Her debut novel *Leaving Gee’s Bend* was named a Bank Street College Best Book and 2011 ALA Children’s Book of the Year. Her most recent novel *Don’t Feed the Boy* is about the son of zookeepers who struggles to escape the confines of zoo life. The author of three poetry collections for adults, this is her first book of poems for children. A lifelong animal-lover, it comes as no surprise that her work features beasts of all kinds.



Irene offers **free** 30-minute Skype visits and has developed a fact-packed live presentation suitable for groups of all kinds. To find out more about scheduling and fee requirements, visit her at [irenelatham.com](http://irenelatham.com).