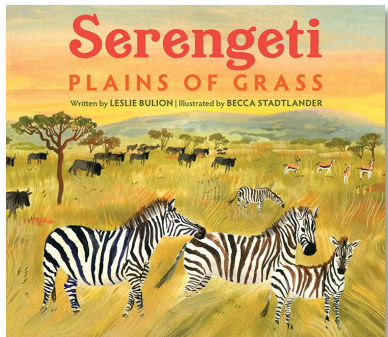




PEACHTREE

Educator's Guide



Serengeti: Plains of Grass

Written by Leslie Bulion | Illustrated by Becca Stadlander

HC: 9781682631911 | e-book: 9781682634370

Ages 8–12

ABOUT THE BOOK

Leslie Bulion, a virtuoso science poet, has created a portrait of the rainy season on East Africa's southern Serengeti Plain, offering young readers a compelling look at an ecosystem in motion.

Using a series of interconnected verses inspired by an East African Swahili poem form—the utendi—Bulion's cadences and rhythmic lines mimic the web of life in the Serengeti, following the great migration of wildebeest, zebras, and other into and then out of the vast short-grass plain.

THEMES:

ecosystems | food webs | animal migration | science poetry

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Grades 1 and up: Ecosystem Connections

- Before reading *Serengeti*, ask students what they know about ecosystems. What makes up an ecosystem—what are its living components or parts (plants, animals, bacteria, fungi), and non-living components (climate, seasons, soil/water characteristics, location, structure)?
- Ask students to name different ecosystems they may have seen, heard of, or read about, such as rainforest, desert, coral reef, etc. Choosing two different ecosystems mentioned by students, discuss which components make these ecosystems different from one another.

Science Poetry Connections

- Ask students, working in pairs or as a class, to choose and compare any two consecutive poem spreads in *Serengeti* to find written information and ideas that help readers make connections between one spread and the next. These ideas can be structural and/or conceptual.
 - **Structural:** (e.g.,: poem stanza is at top left, four-line stanza, last word is always grass, first three lines of partial rhyme using same ending consonant sound, 4 strong beats per line, often 8 syllables per line, informational notes, etc.)
 - **Conceptual:** (e.g.,: movement of energy through the food web, animals in relationship to their habitat and to each other, one animal changes the environment in a way that impacts the next, etc.)
- Before reading the introduction to *Serengeti*, “Serengeti: An Ecosystem in Motion” you may choose to discuss the following vocabulary: *plain, monsoon, migration, parasite, carnivore, predator*. After reading the introduction, discuss components of the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem that make it interesting, similar, or different from other ecosystems students may be familiar with.
- Before reading the body of *Serengeti* aloud, you may choose to discuss the following vocabulary words defined in the book: *sward, gnu, kopje, chaff, raptor, scrum, scat*.

- For the first read-aloud: share the poem in stanzas and illustrations once through *without reading the spare science notes*.
- Read the book through again, this time including the science notes. Ask students to listen for the partial end-rhyme sounds in each stanza.
- Ask students to share their findings with the class and discuss.
- Ask students in pairs or as a class to choose any three consecutive spreads in *Serengeti* and discuss similarities and differences among the illustration layouts (e.g.: panoramic view, close-up view, time of day, animals alone, animals interacting, plants, etc.).

Grades 3 and up: Conservation Connections

- With your class, read the backmatter section entitled “Serengeti Stewardship.” The following related topics are available for further exploration and classroom discussion.
 - a. How do humans fit into an ecosystem?
 - b. Discuss connections, similarities, and differences among the following concepts: environmental stewardship, conservation, preservation (see discussion definitions).
 - c. Who are the stakeholders (the people who care about and are involved) in environmental stewardship of Earth’s unique ecosystems such as the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem in Tanzania and Kenya? [spelling?]
 - d. What are the differences between local populations and indigenous populations?
 - e. How does climate change relate to stewardship and conservation?

Visual Literacy Connections

- Ask students in pairs or as a class to choose any three consecutive spreads in *Serengeti* and discuss similarities and differences among the illustration layout (e.g.: panoramic view, close-up view, time of day, animals alone, animals interacting, plants, etc.).
- Ask students to discuss how the illustrator’s choices for page design affect where the readers’ eyes travel, where they linger, and their reactions to the subject(s).
- Ask students to examine the illustrations for connections between the spreads, such as food web connections, foreshadowing of animals in the next/previous spread, habitat, features connected to other spreads, etc.
- Ask students to share their findings with the class and discuss.

Discussion Definitions for Conservation Connections [add the word/s being defined and its source--see an older HH guide like for Russell Freedman’s books for style, none in bold, remove underline; change url to a bitly]

- <https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/noaa-education-council/monitoring-resources/common-measure-definitions/stewardship-definitions#:~:text=Environmental%20stewardship%3A%20The%20responsible%20use,Chapin%20et%20al%2C%202011%20>
- <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/preservation/>
- https://www.nationalgeographic.org/article/conserving-earth/?utm_source=BiblioRCM_Row
- <https://www.conservation.org/blog/experts-to-achieve-global-conservation-goals-secure-indigenous-rights>

Poetry Writing Activity: Add an Animal Stanza to *Serengeti*

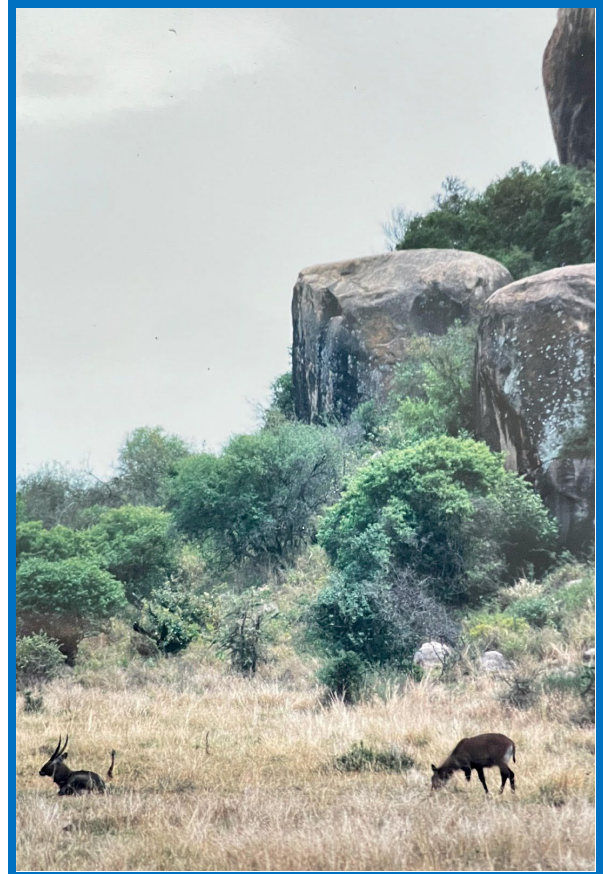
- Share with students that most, but not all animals depicted in the illustrations are mentioned in the poem’s stanzas. There are also many other animals and plants found in Tanzania’s Serengeti Plain that are not featured in the poem stanzas in this book.
- Ask students to search the illustrations for one or two well-known Serengeti animals that are not mentioned in any stanzas of the poem (e.g.: lion, elephant). Discuss whether these animals might migrate with the herd, or whether they might be resident animals of the southern short grass plain.

Poetry Writing Activity: Add an Animal Stanza to Serengeti Continued

- With the class, read aloud the poetry note immediately following the poem's final stanza, entitled "Siringet—from the Maasai language: endless." Discuss the elements of the poet's adaption of the Swahili utendi stanza, using a sample stanza from any spread (e.g.,: four lines, first three lines end in partial rhyme of the same consonant sound (e.g.,: ash, mesh, rush), fourth line is a refrain ending with "grass" approximately eight syllables per line, four strong beats per line (PARCHED soil BED of vol/CA/no ASH). Clap the rhythm of the strong beats.
- In a class activity (or individually with older students, if desired) ask students to choose a Serengeti animal **not** featured in this book (students can choose one of the two animals from the first part of this activity or any other Serengeti migrant or resident animal they are interested in learning/thinking about).
- Ask students, using research and/or prior knowledge, to gather and create a list of information about their animal (e.g.,: lions have mains, lions are predators, lions stalk their prey, lions live in prides, etc.). Always fun to create a list of juicy verbs and description details!
 - Ask students to create their own utendi stanza. Students can crate four simple lines using the information they have collected. The fourth line will end with the word "grass," relating the animal to its grassland home. Students can clap to hear the four strong beats.
 - Older students may also opt to work on including partial rhyme with the same ending consonant sound for the first three lines. A rhyming dictionary can help find these partial rhymes.
 - For younger/all students: if students enjoy perfect rhyme, other near-rhyme sounds, or no rhyme, those kinds of poetic music are wonderful, too!

- Ask students to choose where they would insert their stanza in the book—i.e., where their animal fits into the Serengeti food web—and to explain their choice.
- Ask students to illustrate their new spread choosing their own layout style.

EXAMPLE:



Waterbuck

Photo: Leslie Bulion

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Leslie Bulion has written many books for young readers. She and her husband Rubin live in Connecticut, where she likes to pull on her boots, strap on her headlamp, and find her next critter adventure.

LeslieBulion.com

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR



Becca Stadtlander was born and raised in Kentucky. She attended the Maryland Institute College of Art, where she earned a BFA in Illustration. She has illustrated a number of children's picture books, including *Sleep Tight Farm*, *The Greatest Table*, *On Wings of Words*, *Genevieve's War* and *Fearless World Traveler*.

BeccaStadtlander.com

Peachtree Educator's Guide prepared by Leslie Bulion

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Companion Serengeti and Ecosystem Reading:

Bulion, Leslie. 2018. *Leaf Litter Critters*. Peachtree Publishing, Inc. Atlanta. This science poetry collection explores the brown food web, a soil and litter ecosystem of decomposers/recyclers.

Kennedy, Adam Scott. 2014. *Animals of the Serengeti and Ngorongoro Conservation Area*. Princeton University Press. New Jersey. A concise, photo-illustrated guidebook containing identifying and fascinating behavioral information about mammals and reptiles in the Serengeti ecosystem.

Latham, Irene, and Wadham, Anna, ill. 2014. *Dear Wandering Wildebeest and Other Poems from the Water Hole*. Millbrook Press, Minneapolis. This poetry collection looks at a savannah ecosystem using water as the thread to tie the animals together. Pair with SERENGETI: PLAINS OF GRASS to compare format, ecosystem exploration, poets' subject choices.

Montgomery, Sy. 2019. *The Magnificent Migration*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. New York. An information-rich journal that presents observations and photos as a field notebook, bringing readers right into the author's quest to witness the great wildebeest migration in the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem.

Sidman, Joyce. 2021. *Hello, Earth!* Eerdmans Books for Young Readers. Grand Rapids, MI. A beautifully illustrated epistolary poetry picture book portraying human on ecosystem Earth, with back matter related to stewardship.