



Series Review

8/2009

Program: Animal Atlas 6
Episodes reviewed: “Bones?! Who Needs ‘Em?!”
“ ‘S’ is for Species”
Program length: 30 minutes

Animal Atlas remains on course as a program that is entertaining and engaging to a wide audience while managing to deliver information that would be very welcome in a middle or high school classroom. The series matches the evolved visual intelligence of the young 21st century audience by building content with short clips, five-seconds or less in length, and weaving them together in a narrative that keeps a viewer engaged with a compelling narrative overview. The animal kingdom has an innate richness of color, form, and motion and **Animal Atlas** episodes are built from this richness. The thread that links the clips together is the connection between the differing members of the animal kingdom--- including our own species. In a compelling blend, animal examples are pulled from both common experience, such as the horse and cat, and exotic animals like the clouded leopard and the red panda. As the nature of animals is explored, the content and clarity create a program of exception education value.

The “**Bones?! Who Needs ‘Em?!**” episode moves colorfully from undulating invertebrate jellyfish to galloping horses, delivering physiological and behavioral information that, while entertaining, contains real biological explanations. It covers the diverse kinds of skeletal material, for example, exploring the difference between sharks, land mammals, and reptiles. The program is punctuated with **Animal Facts** segments that don’t just demand recall—they require thinking. Which makes them more fun. The narrative refreshingly avoids talking down to its audience. Like “**House**”, the program understands that real information does not get in the way of entertainment. From the names of turtle shell plates (“scutes”) to the water-filled nature of leech skeletons (“hydrostatic”), real information is mixed with humor and some very pretty photography.

In “**‘S’ is for Species**”, quick cuts, music, and the clever narration make great sense out of the entertaining blend of images and motion through the taxonomy laid out by scientists—the perfect way to make the amazing visuals of nature even more fascinating. The infectious and irreverent attitude of the narration neatly targets adolescents without putting off the broader audience. But even with hundreds of video image, there is great attention to information detail. Whether the screen shows the black tongue of a giraffe, the big eyes of the equine family, or tours the faces of the predatory cats, there is not an

animal that isn't fully identified. The program encourages thought while it entertains. The Animal Facts segment typifies the value placed on knowledge and curiosity.

The habitats of the animals explored in the program includes savannahs, rivers, underwater, deserts, jungles, the arctic and rain forests. The rich diversity of life blended with music and a narration that is both fun and intelligent makes this a program well worth watching.

It remains a great exemplar for the use of broadcast media for entertainment and enrichment.

Summary:

Target audience for tone, program content, and learning concepts:

- Middle and high school (ages 13-16)

General Category of Learning:

- Life Sciences

Content Standards:

Content standards were pulled from a random state (Illinois) and matched with the program. The two programs reviewed satisfactorily addressed the standards below. Both the state Assessment Frameworks and the Learning Standard were cross-matched.

Science > Performance Descriptors > 12A.3 - Apply scientific inquiries or technological designs to compare evolutionary trends between kingdoms and phyla, exploring natural and applied hybridization, explaining the increasing sophistication of body systems correlating embryological, structural, and functional development, or exploring the impact of environmental factors on these trends.

Grade(s) 6-8, 9-12

Science > Assessment Framework > 12.7.01 - Understand how scientists classify organisms. Identify common insects, ... birds, reptiles, and mammals using a dichotomous key.

Grade(s) 6-8

Science > Learning Standards > 12.A.3c - Compare and contrast how different forms and structures reflect different functions (e.g., similarities and differences among animals that fly, walk or swim; structures of plant cells and animal cells).

Grade(s) 6-8

Science > Learning Standards > 12.A.1b - Categorize living organisms using a variety of observable features (e.g., size, color, shape, backbone).

Grade(s) K-2, 3-5

Science > Learning Standards > 12.B.1a - Describe and compare characteristics of living things in relationship to their environments.

Grade(s) K-2, 3-5

Science > Assessment Framework > 12.4.02 - Identify the basic divisions of animals and their common characteristics (e.g., define mammal, fish, bird, reptile, amphibian, insect, arachnid; give examples of each).

Grade(s) 3-5

Science > Learning Standards > 12.B.3b - Compare and assess features of organisms for their adaptive, competitive and survival potential (e.g., appendages, reproductive rates, camouflage, defensive structures).

Grade(s) 6-8

Hall Davidson served as Director of Education Services at PBS station KOCE-TV for 15 years, where he also was executive director of the media consortium Telecommunications of Orange County (TOC) serving over 200,000 students. Prior to that, he worked in educational media at PBS station KLCS-TV in Los Angeles. He was president of Video-Using Educators and is currently chairman of the school site council at a public elementary school in Los Angeles. He is director of the nation's oldest student media festival, the California Student Media & Multimedia Festival, and on the board of directors of California's largest technology user group, Computer-Using Educators (CUE). He is an Emmy-nominated producer of educational programs. He was classroom teacher in the public school system and began teaching on television at night on an Emmy-winning program before leaving the classroom for a position providing staff development for teachers on media use in the classroom.

**HALL DAVIDSON
2428 CANYON DRIVE
LOS ANGELES, CA 90068**

