
Series Review

August 2012

Program: **Animal Atlas**
Episodes reviewed: **“To Tell The Truth (Ep. 910)”**
“Living Dinosaurs (Ep. 912)”
Program length: **30 minutes**

Summary:

Animal Atlas continues its long series life by using technology to consistently improve the essential visual component of the episodes. The high definition video of the arresting animals and animal elements is well used to engage viewers and lead them through a sequence of valued and meaningful insights. One of the series strengths continues to be that it does not just present a list of animal facts but links a wide variety of information into sequences that make knowledge of the animal kingdom both simpler and easier to remember. The interstitial quizzes have become not just summaries of previous information but a lead-in to the next organized sequence of information. The tone of credited narrator Eric Schwartz is perfect for the target group of 13-16 year-olds. It is non-professorial and faux flip—again, ideal for the target mindset of self-confident adolescence. Yet the vocabulary is rich. It presumes the understanding of the words like “behemoth” and “adaptation” but gives enough context to add that word to young viewers’ vocabulary without getting pedantic. Great information in a rich visual context

Episode: “To Tell The Truth” (910)

Animal Atlas is able to move nimbly between television idioms. Here, the tone masquerade as a game show (“**To Tell The Truth**”) allows the examination of a variety of contradictory, confounding, and misunderstood characteristic of animals. These include why whales aren’t fish, frogs aren’t reptiles, spiders aren’t insects and why octopi are closer to snails than fish. Like the series in general, the episode goes beyond listing of facts when, in a sly answer to the interstitial quiz, it states that snakes may have warm blood. When it explains that snakes are not warm-blooded but simply can have warmed blood from exposure to the sun (like all cold-blooded animals), it sneaks deep into the difference between temperature and a temperature-maintenance biological mechanism which is the real differentiator for animals. Facts like the 18 hours a day koala sleeps are blended into a look at nearly everything called a “bear”, whether they are truly related or not—and then explains why not. The reviewed episodes offer excellent information on analogous traits in animals without touching on convergence. Finally, the explanation of why the camels’ hump is not for water storage is another great use of misconception to explain the marvels of animal adaptation.

Episode: “Living Dinosaurs” (912)

A strong characteristic of **Animal Atlas** is consistently relating exotic animals to more familiar animals and locations to make them more understandable. In “**Living Dinosaurs**”, the wingspan

of an Andean condor is measured ground-to-rim against a basketball goal—an ideal image for 13-16 year-olds to sense how large a ten-foot wingspan really is. Colorful images of dinosaurs are juxtaposed against those of barnyard chickens, making those exotic drawings of never-seen animals seem much less fanciful. The excellent exploration of birds of prey and their probable relationship to dinosaurs is compelling. Facts about these always-fascinating raptors include the eagle's 7,000 feathers, the reason for baldness in vultures, and the note that raptor talons can be stronger than the hand and arm of a man. These facts are all wrapped around the defining characteristics of birds of prey. The episode, like the series, has the very good sense of when to define a word and when to rely on context. "Paleontologist" and "apex predator" are defined by the narrator while "omnivorous," "herbivorous", and "omnivorous" and "predation" are left to be defined by the visual context which the program provides well. Balancing information and the viewer's own inferences is one of the enduring qualities of the program,

Education Summary:

Animal Atlas covers a range of educational enrichment when matched against the Common Core standards. The emergence of Common Core as the education blueprint for 45 states and 3 territories has made it easier to align content again standards taught in school. Common Core is an outgrowth of common state standards and is generally compatible with all states in the larger details. The match of **Animal Atlas** with Common Core builds on the standard met since last season.

Target audience (13-16 year-olds) for tone, program content, and learning concepts:

- Middle and high school (ages 13-16)

General Category of Learning:

- Life Sciences
- Biological sciences
- Thinking skills

Content Standards Applicable in the Animal Atlas series:

Common Core and Single State

There are no science content standards yet in the Common Core Content Standards (to be adopted by all but four states). However, Animal Atlas addresses the standards below, which were pulled from the Common Core State Standards Initiative for English Language arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and technical Subjects (<http://www.corestandards.org/>), published in June 2010 by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Following the Common Core correlations are correlations to a typical state science standard (in this case, Illinois).

Reading Standards for Literacy in Science and Technical Subjects 6–12 (condensed)

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas> Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Key Ideas and Details> Determine the central ideas or conclusions; provide an accurate summary distinct from prior knowledge or opinions. Grades 6-8

Key Ideas and Details> Cite evidence to support analysis of science explanations> Determine the central ideas or conclusions; summarize complex concepts, processes, or information presented by paraphrasing them in simpler but still accurate terms. Grades 9-10, 11-12

Craft and Structure> Determine the meaning of symbols, key terms, and other domain-specific words and phrases as they are used in a specific scientific or technical context. Grades 9-10

Craft and Structure > Analyze how the text structures information or ideas into categories or hierarchies, demonstrating understanding of the information or ideas. Grades 11-12

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas> Translate quantitative or technical information expressed in words into visual form. Grades 9-10

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas> Distinguish among facts, reasoned judgment based on research findings, and speculation. Grades 6-8

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas> Compare and contrast the information gained from experiments, simulations, video, or multimedia sources with that gained from reading a text on the same topic. Grades 6-8

Science Standards (Secondary, Grades 6-12):

Science > Assessment Framework > 12.11.01 - Identify the major categories (taxa) of biological classification: kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species.

Science > Assessment Framework > 12.11.02 - Understand the kingdoms used by taxonomists: a 5-kingdom system; monera, protista, fungi, plantae, and animalia and a 6-kingdom system; eubacteria, archaeobacteria, protista, fungi, plantae, and animalia. Students should be able to identify organisms within the systems.

Science > Assessment Framework > 12.11.03 - Identify the following basic animal types by their common characteristics: sponges, cnidarians, flatworms and roundworms, mollusks, arthropods, echinoderms, invertebrate chordates, and vertebrates.

Science > Assessment Framework > 12.11.27 - Understand that variation within a species increases the likelihood that at least some members of a species will survive and reproduce under changed environmental conditions.

Science > Assessment Framework > 12.11.28 - Understand that reproductive or geographic isolation can lead to speciation.

Science > Assessment Framework > 12.11.29 - Understand that the millions of different species of plants, animals, and microorganisms that live on Earth today are related to each other by descent from common ancestors and that biological classifications are based on how organisms are related.

Science>Assessment Framework > 7 12 A - Know and apply concepts that explain how living things function, adapt and change.

Science>Assessment Framework > 12B - Know and apply concepts that describe how living things interact with each other and with their environment.

Note: The reviewer believes it is not much of a stretch to include the Common Core Language

Standards for 6-12. The implications for understanding in context is powerful (and timely) with digital media.

Language Standards Grade 8 Students: >Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words or phrases based on grade 8 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase. b. Use common, grade-appropriate Greek or Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., precede, recede, secede). c. Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech. d. Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

Reading Standards for informational text> Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue. Grades 6-12

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use > Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 9–10 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase. b. Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., analyze, analysis, analytical; advocate, advocacy). c. Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, or its etymology. d. Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase

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 400,000 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 served 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.

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