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Joan Procter, Dragon Doctor

by Patricia Valdez and illustrated by Felicita Sala



Summary: This book tells the story of Joan Procter, who spent her lifetime researching reptiles, especially Komodo dragons. She shared her studies and passions with the world.

Why We Love It: Many have heard of Jane Goodall and her work with primates, but not many have heard of Joan Procter and her similar story with reptiles. From her childhood filled with curiosity to her path of introducing her research to the world, we find this woman fascinating.

Topics: reptiles, Komodo dragons, science, scientists, female scientists, zoos, national history museum, observation, animal study, lifelong passion, habitats, war, wartime conditions, how war changes the world

Big Ideas: lifelong passion, following your interests/passions, being different, being yourself, pursuing your passion, sharing knowledge, world-changing

Back Matter:

- Biography of Joan Procter
- Information on Komodo dragons
- Bibliography
- Some of Joan's original paintings of clown frogs

LESSON STEPS:

1 QUICK WRITE.

(Choose One):

- What is your favorite type of animal? Describe it. What do you like about it?
- If you could study something (for a living), what would it be, and why?

Write about this for 3 minutes and then set it aside.

2 READ.

Read the picture book *Joan Procter, Dragon Doctor* by Patricia Valdez and discuss the story. Discuss parts of the story that stick out to you or that you connect with. What writer's craft moves do you notice the author using? Notice the parts of the story.

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3 SHARE THE STRUCTURE.

Show the students the structure found in the picture book. Reread the story, looking for chunks together and watching for how the author moves from one part to the other.

A Curiosity That Changed the World

What
someone was
interested in

What that
interest
looked like at
first

How that
interest
grew and
brought about
changes

The larger
impact that it
had on others

4 INVITATION TO WRITE.

Here are several ways you can get students to write.

- Have students use the text structure to write a kernel essay summary of the story. (Give them between 5 and 10 minutes to do this.)
- Have the students use the text structure to write their own piece in a kernel essay. (Give them between 5 and 10 minutes to do this.)
- See what students come up with. (Give them around 10 minutes.) Here are some possibilities:
 - A page of thoughts in their quick write
 - Examples of the author's craft moves
 - A text structure

Whatever they choose to write, let them know that they can change anything they need to and make it their own.

5 SHARE.

Invite students to try their writing on someone else's ears. This is a crucial step! The sharing is just as important as the writing.

Want to Go Deeper?

Try these options.

OPTION 1: CRAFT CHALLENGE

- **Alliterative Pitchfork:** This author uses an alliterative pitchfork. Alliteration is the repetition of the beginning sounds of words that are near each other. A pitchfork is a sentence (or series of sentences) that takes one thing and branches it off into three or more. Here's an example from the story:

*"They **g**awked at the **g**eckos. They **p**eered at the **p**ythons. And they **m**arveled at the **m**onitors."*

Look through your piece to see where you can use an alliterative pitchfork. After you write, try it out on someone's ears to see how it sounds in your writing.

- **Antithesis:** This author uses a rhetorical device called antithesis. Antithesis is when two contrasting ideas are intentionally put next to each other, usually through parallel structure. Here's an example from the story:

*"While **other girls read stories about dragons and princesses**, Joan read books **about crocodiles**. Instead of **a favorite doll**, **a favorite lizard** accompanied her wherever she went."*

Look through your piece to see where you can use antithesis. After you write, try it out on someone's ears to see how it sounds in your writing.

- **Myth Explosion:** This author uses a sentence that we call a myth explosion: She lists the myths or untruths that were spread about the dragons and dispels them in the same sentence. She even pitchforks it (not just one—but three!). Here's the example from the story:

*"The reports of Komodo dragons were greatly exaggerated: They could grow to ten feet, **not thirty**. They ran fast, **but not as fast as a motorcar**. They could be fierce, **but they were mostly gentle**."*

Look through your piece to see where you can use a myth explosion. After you write, try it out on someone's ears to see how it sounds in your writing.

OPTION 2: ANALYZE

1. Start with a big idea.

- If you want students to find the big ideas themselves, try asking, "What big ideas do you see in this story that tell you what it's really about?"
- If students need a nudge, try using some of the big ideas from the list in this lesson's introduction and have students provide evidence from the story to support their answers. Ask, "How is this story about [the big idea]? How does the author explore [the big idea]? Where in the story do you see that?"

2. Turn the big idea into a truism (thematic statement).

Once you have identified the big ideas, use one of them to create truisms for this story. Here are a few (found in the story) to get you started:

- *Sometimes what we love can turn into something bigger that we can share with the world.*
- *Being yourself and following your passions can impact the world around you.*

Have students write and share their own truisms.

Ask them to prove their truisms by providing evidence from the text. They might imagine a listener saying, "Oh yeah? How do you know? How is that true in the story?"

Want to Go Deeper?

Try these options.



OPTION 3: READING RESPONSE

Students can compose short or extended responses to demonstrate understanding by answering any of these questions. Look in the appendix to find a list titled “Basic Reading Response Text Structures” and a list of “Useful Essay Question Stems for Nonfiction Texts.”

Questions for Reading Response

- Explain why it was unusual for Joan to have a passion for reptiles.
- How did Joan change the habitat for the lizards in the Natural History Museum?
- How did Joan change people’s perceptions of the Komodo dragons?
- What surprised people when they saw the Komodo dragons?
- How were Joan and Sumbawa, the Komodo dragon, alike?

OPTION 4: EXTENSION IDEAS

- Dig into the back matter:
 - Use the biography of Joan Procter as a short nonfiction text to read, discuss, create and answer questions, and write.
 - Use the bibliography to jump-start research about this part of history and topic.
- Research the history of another reptile.
 - Create an infographic about that reptile.
 - Create a poem based on your research.
- Use the text structure to write about another person.



Student Samples for *Joan Procter, Dragon Doctor*

QUICK WRITE

by Jackson Silva, 4th Grade

If I studied something for a living, it would be to study animals and what they do so I could know what is dangerous and what is not. Then I could help someone who thinks they are in danger, but is actually not.

QUICK WRITE

by Lorelei Mueller, 5th Grade

I would study the human body. Why? Because anatomy is very interesting. Seeing how small cells are. Also, I think the mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell.

KERNEL ESSAY (USING “A CURIOSITY THAT CHANGED THE WORLD”)

by Lorelei Mueller, 5th Grade

Mark Rober was interested in space. At first, he looked at books. Then he helped build the first Mars Rover. Later he started a YouTube channel and made Build Boxes for kids to learn STEM.

KERNEL ESSAY (USING “A CURIOSITY THAT CHANGED THE WORLD”)

by Alex Leal, 5th Grade

My little brother was and is obsessed with lacrosse. At first he thought it was dumb, and he didn't want to do it. When he first tried it out, he loved it. He was

aggressive and strong. Then it caused him to get more disciplined.

TRUISM

by Jack Biegler, 3rd Grade

Even though something could be rough on the outside, it could be soft on the inside.

CRAFT CHALLENGE (MYTH EXPLOSION)

by Alex Leal, 5th Grade

School is not that hard, as people say. As people say, it's a waste of time. But it actually helps you become smarter. If you fail a class, the teachers didn't fail you. You failed to get help as the teacher tries to teach you. The teachers try to make you learn new things, but it's mostly you who doesn't listen.

READING RESPONSE (USING THE TEXT STRUCTURE “RACE”)

by Jack Biegler, 3rd Grade

Q: How did Joan change people's perceptions of the Komodo dragons?

A: Joan changed people's perceptions of dragons by showing people that Komodo dragons are calm and don't go as fast as they thought. In the story, it states how she went into the enclosure and touched Sumbawa when people thought the Komodo dragons were scary. Even though people were scared of him, when Joan went and touched him, people were surprised.