



On a trip to Rwanda, Explore had the opportunity to visit four families of wild mountain gorillas, a species with only 720 remaining members. Their guide is Craig Sholley, who has been intimately involved in the preservation of African wildlife for more than 30 years. The team's thrilling interaction with these peaceful creatures - who share 98.6% of their genetic makeup with humans - is a startling reminder of their own humanity.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Grades 6 – 8
Life Science

Science – Standard 4. Understand the principles of heredity and related concepts

- Know that reproduction is a characteristic of all living things and is essential to the continuation of a species
- Know that hereditary information is contained in genes (located in the chromosomes of each cell), each of which carries a single unit of information; an inherited trait of an individual can be determined by either one or many genes, and a single gene can influence more than one trait
- Know that the characteristics of an organism can be described in terms of a combination of traits; some traits are inherited through the coding of genetic material and others result from environmental factors

Science - Standard 6. Understand relationships among organisms and their physical environment

- Know that all individuals of a species that exist together at a given place and time make up a population, and all populations living together and the physical factors with which they interact compose an ecosystem
- Know factors that affect the number and types of organisms an ecosystem can support (e.g., available resources; abiotic factors such as quantity of light and water, range of temperatures, and soil composition; disease; competition from other organisms within the ecosystem; predation)
- Know ways in which organisms interact and depend on one another through food chains and food webs in an ecosystem (e.g., producer/consumer, predator/prey, parasite/host, relationships that are mutually beneficial or competitive)

Resource - [McREL Content Knowledge – Standards & Benchmarks](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 🗣️ *What is meant by the title, “Gorillas – 98.6% Human”?*
- 🗣️ *How do the “human” researchers interact with the gorillas? What do they specifically do to get the gorillas to allow them into their habitat? How is this similar to what humans do with each other when they want to “fit in”?*
- 🗣️ *Describe the social dynamics of gorilla groups. Who is the leader of a group? How do they keep the respect of other gorillas? How is this similar to humans who are “in charge”?*

- 🗣️ Describe how gorillas show they care about each other. How do they treat their young, and even their dead?
- 🗣️ In your opinion, are they “Gentle Giants” or “Savage Beasts”? Why?
- 🗣️ Why is it important for people like Craig Sholley to do what they do? How does his work with the African Wildlife Foundation help the gorillas? Why do the gorillas need help?
- 🗣️ Mountain gorillas were almost extinct in Africa. Why is that? What happens in an ecosystem when animals become extinct?
- 🗣️ Do you think people should have to pay a lot of money to come into the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda to see the gorillas? If they didn’t charge money, would more people come? Do you think bringing more people to the forest to visit with the gorillas is good for the gorillas?
- 🗣️ Not many Rwandans can afford to come into the park to visit the gorillas. Do you think it is important for the people who live next to the gorillas be able to interact with them? Why?
- 🗣️ What suggestion do you have for bringing more Rwandans into the park?
- 🗣️ How does making films about people like Craig Sholley and the AWF help animal populations all over the world?

ACTIVITY

Come to Volcanoes National Park to see the Gorillas!

Create a plan that will bring people to the park to see the gorillas. Your plan needs to address a specific population for a specific purpose. For example, local Rwandans should come because the gorillas live right next to them. Or, wealthy people need to come so they can help fund the work of the African Wildlife Foundation. Use information from the www.awf.org website to help with background for your plan.

Your plan must include the following information:

- 👉 Who are you targeting in your plan? Define a specific group.
- 👉 Why should these people come to the park?
- 👉 Where is the Volcanoes National Park?
- 👉 What will they do when they get there?
- 👉 How will they make a difference after they have visited?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Excerpts from interview at explore.org

Craig Sholley, Senior Director of the African Wildlife Foundation, is a wildlife biologist and conservationist who is renowned for his work with the Mountain Gorilla Project in Rwanda.

What is the AWF mission statement?

The [African Wildlife Foundation](http://www.awf.org), together with the people of Africa, works to ensure the wildlife and wild lands of Africa will endure forever.

What is your dream for AWF?

To create a future for Africa that includes the conservation of large wild landscapes and diverse species while



simultaneously improving the livelihoods of people who are willing to deal with wildlife literally ‘in their backyard.’

What are three things about AWF you wish people knew?

- AWF was created almost 50 years ago with a singular focus on conservation issues in Africa – we remain true to our founding mission to this day.
- AWF staff largely consists of Africans – nearly 80% of the people employed by AWF are African conservation professionals who live and work in Africa.
- AWF has a holistic approach to conservation that includes: land protection, wildlife species conservation, conservation enterprise created to improve community livelihood, and capacity building specifically education that embraces the notion of conservation being led by African conservation leaders.

How can people get involved?

Anyone can become an AWF member and can join by visiting our website at awf.org. We encourage philanthropic involvement and try hard to report on how individual or organizational investments in our work makes a difference.

Why is it important to be a selfless person?

Selfless people make positive changes to our world every day.

Did you have an inspirational figure in your life growing up?

Not one, but several.... people like Nelson Mandela, George Schaller, Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey provided inspiration and helped shape my career direction.

Are there other selfless leaders out there you admire? If so, who and why?

There are many and most of them have names that a majority of people would not recognize. They work tirelessly on a day to day basis to make our world a better place.

If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?

I would make the world ‘color blind’ and simultaneously universally tolerant of all religious persuasions.

