

We Bought A Zoo



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DIRECTED BY: Cameron Crowe

CERTIFICATE: PG

COUNTRY: USA

RUNNING TIME: 124 mins

YEAR: 2012

SUITABLE FOR: PSHE, English, art, geography, maths

SYNOPSIS

Benjamin Mee and his two children Dylan, aged 14 and Rosie aged 7, are facing a massive challenge. The children's mother has died and their father, Benjamin, wants to make some big changes to their life to help the family move on. He wants them to move into a big house, with a zoo in the back garden. The idea is met with mixed reactions from his children. Rosie loves the idea of living with the animals. While, Dylan hates it, he doesn't want to leave his old life, his home and all his friends.

Keeping his son happy isn't Benjamin's only problem. The zoo is in need of renovation, so the Mee family and the zoo staff set about getting the zoo back to its former glory. They need to pass a zoo inspection, try and please the grumpy zoo inspector, while also keeping the animals under control and getting the zoo back open to the public.

TEACHERS' NOTES

This study guide suggests cross-curricular activities based on the film *We Bought a Zoo* directed by Cameron Crowe. The activities seek to complement and extend the enjoyment of watching the film, while at the same time meeting some of the requirements of the National Curriculum.

BEFORE SEEING THE FILM

Here are some questions to answer before seeing the film:

- Do you know anything about the film already?
- Do you like the film's title? Do you think it gives too much away about the plot before you've watched it?
- Would you like to live in a zoo?



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AFTER SEEING THE FILM

Although the film is a heart-warming, fun movie, it also tackles a more serious issue of the death of a parent. You see Dylan struggling to cope with his grief by drawing dark and grim pictures and being expelled from school. Meanwhile, Rosie just wants to help her father by doing jobs around the house.

- Can you describe your feelings as you were watching the film?
- Do you think the characters are realistic and believable?

In the film, Rosie and Dylan have already dealt with a lot of change since their mother died. But they have even more changes ahead moving to a zoo.

- Do you understand why Benjamin wants to do something different and buy the zoo?
- Do you think it's the right thing to do for the Mee family?

ACTIVITY

Pretend to be either Rosie or Dylan and write to Benjamin, explaining why you want, or don't want, to move to the zoo.

Try and answer some of these questions:

- What would you find hard to leave behind?
- What would you miss most about your life now, e.g. your bedroom, your school, your friends?
- What would be the best thing about living in a zoo?
- What animal would you most want to look after?

TRUE STORY

The film is based on a true story. Benjamin Mee is a writer for the Guardian newspaper and was living in France with his wife and two small children, when his family circumstances called for him to move back to the UK and go in search of a house big enough for his family and his mother. The family ended up buying Dartmouth Zoological Park, which was in need of some tender loving care and a lot of money spending on it. After moving to the zoo, Benjamin's wife Katherine died of a brain tumour leaving him to look after the couple's two small children, Milo and Ella and also take care of the zoo.

Benjamin decided to write a book about his experience and that book was turned into the film.

ACTIVITY

The Mee family and the staff have to prove to the strict zoo inspector Walter Ferris that they know how to care and look after the animals and maintain the zoo, to be able to secure a license to be able to re-open.

Using the library and the Internet put together an illustrated fact sheet explaining how to look after one of the animals from Rosemoor Animal Park. Choose from one of the following animals:

- Solomon the lion
- Buster the bear
- Spark the tiger

The aim of the fact sheet is to help Dylan and Rosie look after their new wild pets. The fact sheet must also convince Walter Ferris that they know how to care for the animals



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THE OPENING

Once the Mee family and the staff get the license to re-open they must set about advertising the grand reopening and attracting attention to the zoo.

ACTIVITY

Discuss with your class the best way to let people know that the zoo is opening again. What kinds of things could you do?

Think about the different kinds of media that you could use, posters, flyers, websites or how about contacting the local newspaper or radio station?

Getting a story in the newspaper or on the radio is a great way of getting people interested in an event.

Choose one of the following to help Benjamin, Dylan and Rosie:

- Design and create a poster to put up in the restaurant that Lily works in.
- Write a short news story for the Rosemoor Times informing the readers about the grand re-opening.
- Working in pairs, one of you is Dylan and the other is a radio presenter from Rosemoor Radio. The presenter needs to interview Dylan about the grand opening. [The presenter needs to think about the questions he/she will ask Dylan to get the right information for the listeners, while Dylan needs to think about the information he needs to talk about during the interview.]

Below is some information that you will need to use, whether you make the poster, write the news story or do the interview.

Rosemoor Wildlife Zoo, California

Opening Saturday 7th July 2010

Come and see:

Solomon the Lion &

Buster the Bear

There will be face painting, kite flying and hot dogs.

The official opening will be at 10am and the zoo will close at approximately 5pm.

MEMBERSHIP

Like any zoo, the one in the film needs money to keep it running. Think of all the food the animals need. The cost of maintaining and fixing the enclosures and paying for all the medicines that sick animals need.

One way of raising much-needed funds is offering membership to a club. Members pay the zoo a fee each year and it entitles them to special discounts and other 'members only' features.

The Dartmouth Zoological Park charge:

£40 per year for adult membership
£10 per year for children membership (aged 5 to 15 years)
£35 per year for concession membership
£45 per year for family membership (2 adults maximum)

Do you think that these prices are affordable? Give your reasons.

ACTIVITY

Now create your own membership kit for members of the Rosemoor Zoo Club to help Benjamin and the team, raise some much needed funds.

What would you offer your members? Here are some ideas:

- A membership card
- Discount on entrance fees
- Membership certificate
- Newsletter telling them about what is happening at the zoo and what the animals have been doing
- Animal adoption. This is where a member can choose an animal to help pay towards. They will receive a picture, adoption certificate; information on the kind of animal it is and what it likes to eat and where it lives; plus regular updates on its wellbeing.

Written by Helen Dugdale