

African Cats



Directed by: Keith Scholey and Alastair Fothergill

Certificate: U (contains documentary footage of animals hunting and fighting)

Running time: 89 mins

Release Date: 27th April 2012

Suitable for: The activities in these study notes address aspects of the curriculum for literacy, science and geography for pupils between ages 5–11.

Synopsis

An epic true story set against the backdrop of one of the wildest places on Earth, *African Cats* captures the real-life love, humour and determination of the majestic kings of the Savannah. The story features Mara, an endearing lion cub who strives to grow up with her mother's strength, spirit and wisdom; Sita, a fearless cheetah and single mother of five mischievous newborns; and Fang, a proud leader of the pride who must defend his family from a rival lion and his sons.

Genre

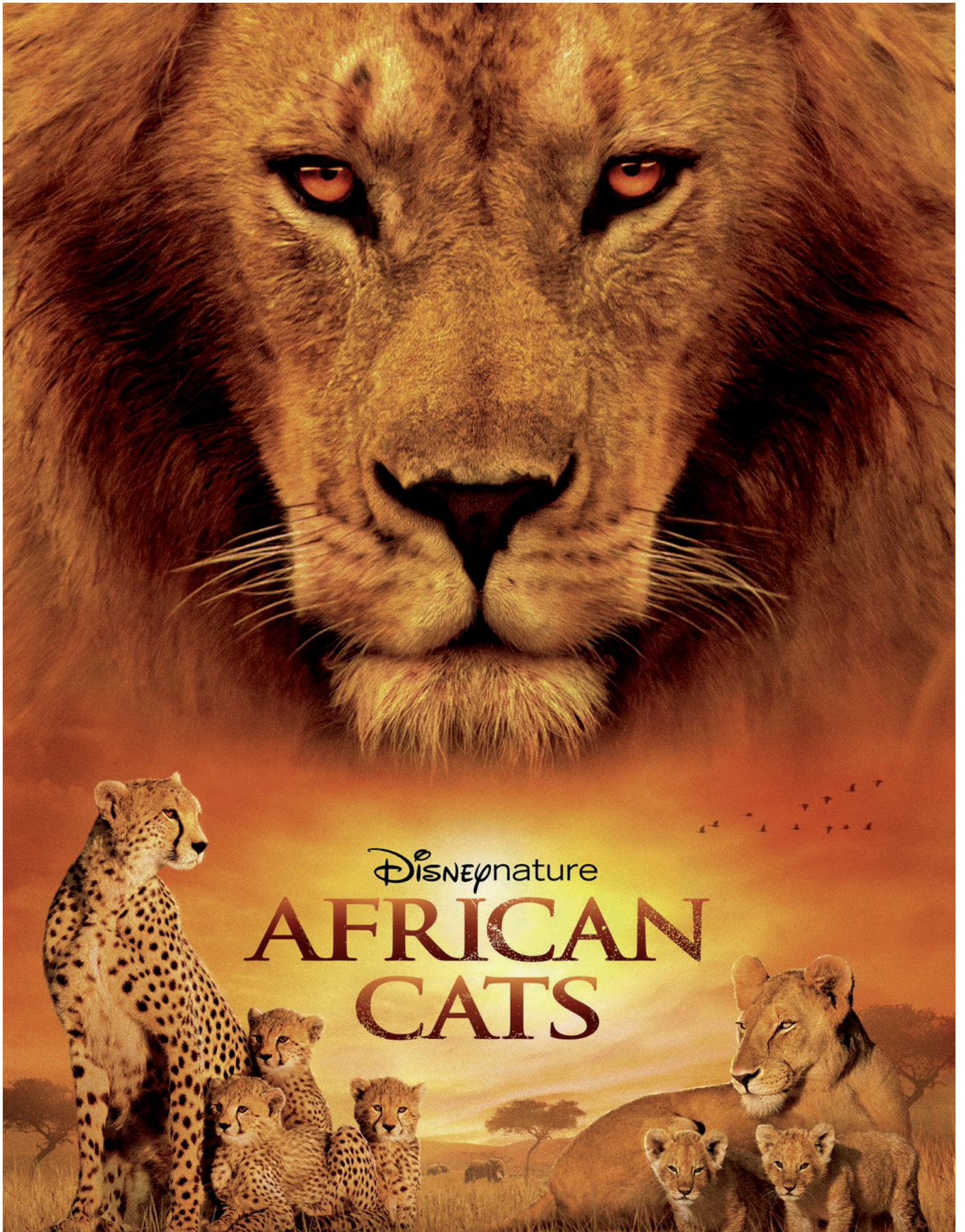
African Cats is a nature documentary, referred to by its producers as a 'true life adventure'. It was filmed in the Maasai Mara National Reserve, a major game region in southwestern Kenya. The film uses real-life footage to tell the true story of two families of wild animals, both fighting to survive in the Savannah. *African Cats* features a voiceover narration by the actor Samuel L. Jackson and a portion of the money made from ticket sales went to the African Wildlife Foundation.

BEFORE SEEING THE FILM

Review pupils' understanding of the documentary genre. How are they different to other films they watch? Make two lists, one of nature documentaries children have seen (e.g. *March of the Penguins*) and one of other films about animals (e.g. *Happy Feet*). Compare the films within each list.

Look at the film poster within this guide. What stands out and immediately grabs your attention? Discuss the decisions made by the designer. What are the dominant colours? Discuss possible reasons behind the colour scheme. What reactions do you think the designer wants from someone looking at the poster?

Use a map, globe or atlas to locate Kenya where *African Cats* was filmed. What other animals besides lions and cheetahs do pupils expect and hope to see in the film? Ask pupils to record what they already know and what they would like to find out when they watch the film.



AFTER SEEING THE FILM

Animals need four things to survive – food, water, space and shelter. They need food for energy, water to stay hydrated, shelter for protection and space to find all these things and a mate. Discuss these four areas in context of the film and the wildlife featured. Pupils can use the table within this guide to record their ideas.

Every organism in the Savannah plays an important part in sustaining the ecosystem and allowing the other animals and plants to survive. Therefore, as some of the animals featured in *African Cats* are endangered, the whole of the Savannah is at risk and several conservation charities are striving to protect it. Ask pupils to write a persuasive letter to hunters or potential donors to these charities, making a case for saving the Savannah. Visit www.filmeducation.org/africancats/savethesavannah.html to find out more.

Imagine you are documentary filmmakers heading to Africa to film animals in the Savannah. Consider the following questions with a partner and take notes. Watch the behind the scenes clips at www.filmeducation.org/africancats for ideas.

- What will you need to take with you to make yourself comfortable during your stay?
- What filmmaking equipment might you need to take?
- How might you use long shots, mid shots and close-ups?
- What tricks might you need to use to get close to the animals and get the shots you want?

Wildlife	Food: what did they eat?	Water: where did they find it?	Shelter: how did they protect themselves?	Space: how would you describe the environment?
Lions				
Cheetahs				

SHOT, PAIR, SHARE – ACTIVITY ONE

Now you have filmed your documentary you need to edit your footage and write the voiceover narration to go with it. Practise by choosing a film still from the grid below.

NB Teachers: pupils will need a copy of their chosen image, plus some sticky-notes.

Shot

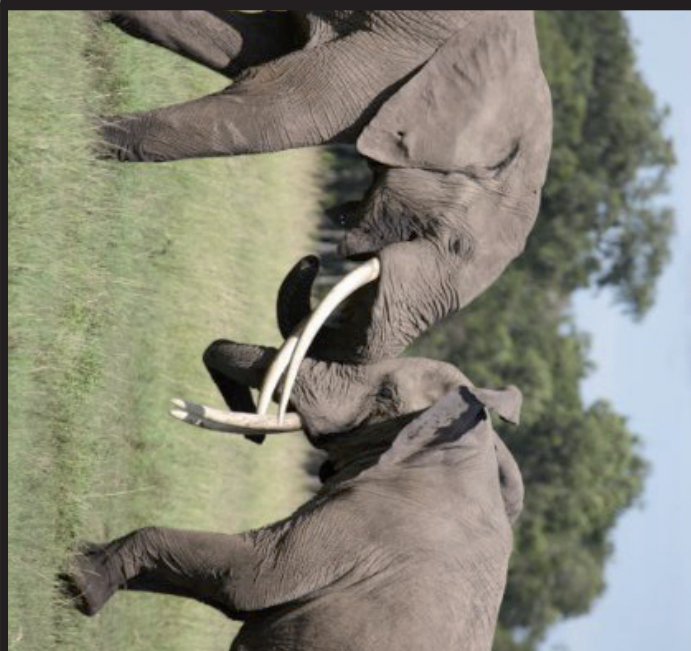
With a partner, explore your chosen film still. Discuss the image, and then talk about it with your partner.

Success criteria:

MUST: describe the image in terms of what you can see

SHOULD: describe the image in terms of the animals' behaviour

COULD: describe the image in terms of the environment and what it would feel like to be there



SHOT, PAIR, SHARE – ACTIVITY TWO

Pair

Using sticky notes, annotate the image with answers to these questions:

- Where are the animals and what is it like there?
- What are the animals doing?
- Why are they doing it?
- Where is the camera placed and what does the chosen shot draw attention to?
- What physical features are helping the animals adapt to their environment?
- What might have happened before this moment and what might happen next?

SHOT, PAIR, SHARE – ACTIVITY THREE

Now try and write a detailed voiceover narration to accompany your chosen film still.

Share

Write a voiceover narration to accompany your chosen image. Describe the environment and explain the behaviour of the animals like the voiceover you heard in *African Cats*. Choose language, sentence starters, connectives and punctuation carefully. You could use your chosen image as part of a storyboard, which you can complete yourself.

Success criteria:

MUST: describe what is happening in the image using appropriate technical vocabulary

SHOULD: describe what is happening using ambitious vocabulary

COULD: storyboard the next image or two in the sequence and write a voiceover for those as well

NB Teachers: As part of writing a non-chronological report about the Savannah or one species featured in the film, pupils can make their own 'documentaries', performing in masks or animating using toy animals and software such as Photostory, Windows MovieMaker or I Can Animate).

Pupils can write and record voiceover narration to accompany their documentaries.

Storyboard template

SHOT

DIALOGUE / DESCRIPTION

