



Cheetah

Wendy A. Lewis

illustrated by Graham Ross

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About the Book

Cheetah is the story of a young girl, Mia, who loves animals so much she is usually pretending to be one. Mia longs for a pet and one day she brings home a leopard frog she has called “Cheetah.” Mia’s parents say the frog can stay for one week but then has to go back to the pond. Mia hopes Cheetah will want to stay with her instead. She makes a habitat for Cheetah to live in, cuddles and plays with her, catches bugs for her to eat and loves her with all her heart. Unfortunately Cheetah doesn’t thrive, and when Mia’s mother learns that leopard frogs are “at risk,” she is emphatic about Mia returning the frog to the wild. When Mia she sees Cheetah reunite with another frog and discovers a bunch of frog eggs, she feels better—and gets a wonderful idea for a story.

Both funny and sad, *Cheetah* is a heartfelt exploration into a child’s longing for a pet and the desire to turn a wild animal into a beloved friend. In a gentle way, Mia’s story encourages young readers to think about the issues of wild animals in captivity and species conservation.

About the Author

Wendy A. Lewis is an author from Uxbridge, Ontario, who writes books and stories for young people. Wendy studied English literature at the University of Toronto and worked in various sales, marketing and public relations positions before becoming a full-time mom and author. Her two daughters and their many pets inspire countless story ideas, like *Cheetah*. Wendy’s other books include *Freefall*, *Diver: the Leatherback Sea Turtle* and *Lacrosse Warrior: The Life of Mohawk Lacrosse Champion Gaylord Powless*.

About the Writing

Cheetah is a work of fiction, but it is based on a true story that happened when the author's oldest daughter was in grade one. Wendy's husband took their two daughters to the drop zone where he skydives, and Amelia came home clutching a macaroni salad container with a frog inside. "Cheetah," as Amelia called her, lived with the family for a week and was the star of News Day in Mrs. Spillman's class at school. Wendy saw her daughter's sadness every time an adult said: "You're doing a good job taking care of Cheetah, but you're going to let her go, right?"

As Wendy thought about the situation from Amelia's perspective and from Cheetah's, the story began to grow in her mind. She remembered a saying she learned as a little girl: "If you love something, set it free. If it comes back, it's yours. If it doesn't, it never was." Cheetah belonged to the wild and didn't come back when she was set free, but at least the memories of that special week belonged to Mia. By turning those memories into a story, Cheetah can be remembered and enjoyed again and again.

Teaching Ideas—Curriculum Connections

Cheetah can be used in language units on writing and storytelling because the main character, Mia, writes stories and does an oral presentation. (Just as the author used a real-life situation as the basis for *Cheetah*, so Mia uses Cheetah's adventures as the basis for her story-within-a-story, "Cheetah and Ribbert.") Students can also learn how Mia and her mother research frogs using books and the Internet at home, at school and at the library.

Cheetah is a great tie-in to science studies about frogs, life cycles, endangered species, wild animals in captivity and human impact on the environment. Other curriculum tie-ins include math (Mia creates a graph to show the class's favorite animals, and fun frog math facts can be gathered, such as: leopard frogs can leap up to fifteen times their body length; that's like a four-foot-tall student leaping sixty feet!) and art (by studying Graham Ross's illustrations and cover art, and encouraging students to create their own illustrations using line drawings and textured paintings).

Prereading Ideas

Is it right to keep a wild animal as a pet? If an animal is “at risk” or endangered, is it better to protect it and care for it in captivity, as Mia wants to, or is it better to let the animal take its chances surviving in the wild?

Classroom Discussion Questions

Do you think it is right to keep wild animals in captivity? Do you think it is right to keep wild animals in zoos?

Discuss ways that humans impact frogs and their environment.

Do frogs have rights? Do ants? Do sharks? Even if an animal isn't cute like a panda bear, does it still have the right to live and, if necessary, be protected?

How can animals “at risk” (like Northern Leopard Frogs) be protected so they don't become endangered—or worse—extinct?

Have you ever loved an animal you couldn't keep?

Have you ever really wanted something and, like Mia, felt the adults in your life didn't understand why it was so important to you?

Suggested Activities

As a class, research different kinds of frogs. Ask students to pick one kind of frog and then design and draw a picture of a suitable habitat for it.

Write and illustrate a story about an animal that stays with you for a week.

Act out the last scene—the story that Mia imagines about Cheetah and Ribbert becoming the first frogs in the world to skydive. Have a reporter ask them questions about the experience.

Do a project on “My Favorite Pet.” It can be a real pet or an imaginary one. Include information on “How to Take Care of my Pet.”

Draw a map showing the different settings where Cheetah goes.

Other Titles and Websites of Interest

Gummytoes by Sean Cassidy (Fitzhenry & Whiteside)—A tree frog showing off his antics to some children becomes their prisoner and has to use his wits to escape.

Leon's Song by Stephanie Simpson McLellan, illustrated by Diana Bondar (Fitzhenry & Whiteside)—A homely, old frog finds his special talent when his pond is threatened.

Jeremiah by Stephanie Simpson McLellan (www.stephaniemclellan.com)—A captured tadpole grows arms and legs and finally leaps free to join its bullfrog family.

Diver, the Leatherback Sea Turtle by Wendy A. Lewis (Scholastic Education)—By the author of *Cheetah*, this action-packed story about another endangered animal is told from the point of view of a giant sea turtle. Non-fiction material included.

This website includes information about Northern Leopard Frogs.
www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/frogwatch/whoswho/factshts.northlep.htm

This website describes the Northern Leopard Frog and the dangers it faces.
www.naturecanada.ca/parks_nwa_current_suffield_speciesatrisk_amphibians.asp

The Species at Risk Public Registry is a list of all “at risk,” “of special concern,” threatened and endangered animals in Canada. www.sararegistry.gc.ca

Awards and Reviews

CCBC *Best Books for Kids & Teens* starred selection

Resource Links “Best of the Year” list

“Award-winning Ontario author Wendy A. Lewis penned this humorous and engaging addition to the Orca Echoes series, with Graham Ross’s cheeky line-drawings...A quirky and entertaining choice for children with an interest in animals, and excellent for all collections.”
—*Resource Links*

“Wendy Lewis introduces children to the familiar moral dilemma of taking a wild animal out of nature to keep it as a pet...Graham Ross’ illustrations...clearly illustrate the main event of the chapter and add to the reader’s understanding of the text. Recommended.”
—*CM Magazine*

“In *Cheetah* by Wendy A. Lewis, Mia loves animals so much she’d like to be one. Face painted with spots and stripes, she prowls around the house. When she finds a leopard frog in a pond, Dad says she can keep the frog for one week. In that short time, Mia learns a lot about keeping wild animals in captivity.”
—*City Parent Magazine*

“It was so fun when you came to our class! I liked the speckled frog song and getting dressed up. *Cheetah* is my favorite book in the world. Please write more books and come back soon!”
—Emily A., a grade-two student from Uxbridge, Ontario