

# Baboon

by David Jones

**Genre:** Fiction; Adventure/Fantasy

**Themes:** Social Groups  
Animal Behavior  
Fitting in

**Suitable for:** Grades 9 – 11

## Baboon

As Gerry accompanies his parents to Africa, where they research baboons, the plane crashes. All three survive the crash, but while Gerry's body lies hospitalized in a coma, his consciousness comes to inhabit the body of a baboon in the troop his parents have been studying. As Gerry struggles to survive, learning how to live as a member of the troop and protect himself from the dangers of predators, he tries to find a way to let his parents know what has happened.

## THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITY IDEAS ...

... are only a start. There are many possibilities for helping students construct meaning from text.

## BEFORE STARTING THE BOOK:

Activities to build the context and introduce the topic of the book, and to establish prior knowledge and interest

1. To provide students with background information, have them use the Internet to find out more about one of the following:

- baboon social behaviors
- the African veldt (geographical features, vegetation, wildlife)

## WHILE READING THE BOOK

Activities to check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

### CHAPTERS 1–6

1. Introduce students to the term “suspension of disbelief” and have them offer examples of books and movies that ask readers or viewers to accept improbable or impossible events. Then have students consider Gerry’s transformation into a baboon. Ask:
  - How did you react to Gerry’s transformation? Did it have a negative effect on your enjoyment of the novel so far, or did it make you curious to read on? Why?
  - How does the author try to make Gerry’s transformation easier for readers to accept?
2. Have students reflect on parallels between baboon society and human society. They could record their ideas in a two-column chart, listing baboon behaviors in one column and similar human behaviors in the other.

### CHAPTERS 7–12

3. Invite students to work in small groups to discuss what they would have done in Gerry’s position when he encounters his parents. Each group could act out its best idea for the class.
4. In a journal entry, have students reflect on
  - what they think of Gerry’s killing of Lothar
  - why Gerry thinks it’s okay to kill Lothar with the club but not the gun

### CHAPTERS 13–18

5. Invite students to choose a favorite scene from this section of the novel and imagine it as a movie scene. What piece of music would make a suitable sound track for this scene? Students could share a brief excerpt of the musical selection with the class, and then explain why they thought it would be appropriate.

6. In a class discussion, have students share their ideas on the following topics:

- What really happened? Were the events of the novel just a dream while Gerry was in a coma?
- Should Gerry tell others about his experiences?

## AFTER READING THE BOOK

1. Recall with students Gerry's final statement in the novel:

*But I know one thing: you can't live without the troop.  
Somehow, you have to find a way to fit in.*

In an informal debate, have students make arguments for and against this statement as it applies to humans. As a follow-up activity, students could present their point of view in a personal opinion essay.