

TEACHERS' GUIDE

A NATURAL HISTORY OF FAIRIES



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\$30.00 US/\$39.00 CAN
ISBN: 9781786037633
Ages 6 to 10 (Grades 1 to 5)
64 pages
Hardcover, 11.97 x 10.43 inches



ABOUT THE BOOK:

This enchantingly illustrated natural history of fairies, compiled in the 1920s by the botanist Professor Elsie Arbour for her niece, is now unveiled for readers of today. Inside, you will discover the wide and wonderful array of different species of fairies around the globe and explore where and how they live. Concluding with a reminder that we must protect the endangered habitats of fairies, and all other creatures too, this is a book to be treasured for a lifetime.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE:

While discovering the imaginary world of the fairies, readers will absorb genuine natural-history knowledge about plants and animals. Young readers will be exposed to the terminology used by real-life naturalists as they explore the different species of fictional fairies around the globe, find out about their life cycles, anatomies, behaviors, and habitats. While feeding their imaginations, readers will learn about the importance of protecting the habitats of all wildlife... not just fairies!

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Have readers examine pages 8-9, "What Are Fairies?" Discuss how animals can be grouped by scientists into different categories, for example mammals, insects, reptiles, amphibians, birds and fish. Talk about the characteristics of these different types of creatures. Discuss how, Professor Arbour, the fictional author of *A Natural History of Fairies*, has categorized fairies as mammals. Do the students agree with this classification? Can they think of any other mythical creatures that might be difficult to categorize using real scientific groupings? Examples could include mermaids and flying horses!
2. Read "Fairy Habitats" on pages 20-21, and have students define the word "habitat." Discuss the different types of habitats on Earth, including rainforests, temperate forests, deserts, polar areas, mountains, grasslands, wetlands and oceans. You could look at a world map of different habitat zones. Discuss Professor Arbour's claim that different species of fairy have supposedly developed, or evolved, to suit their habitats. Talk more generally about how other animals have adaptations that make them well suited to a particular climate. You might want to look at desert creatures or polar creatures for some useful examples.
3. Look at the section "Fairies and Plants" (50-51) and talk about the (supposed) role of fairies as pollinators. Discuss the importance of pollination in helping plants produce new plants. Can students think of any real creatures that play a role as pollinators? Why is it important to protect and encourage pollinators?
4. Look at the picture of the rainforest nymph flutterpillar on page 39. Professor Arbour talks about how this fairy has a tail very similar to a snake's head, to frighten away predators. This fairy flutterpillar was inspired by real-life caterpillars who mimic the appearance of snakes. For example, the great orange tip caterpillar and the hawkmoth caterpillar are both excellent snake mimics. Discuss the role of mimicry as a form of defense in the natural world. What other creatures use this technique? For example, some species of edible butterfly mimic the appearance of toxic butterflies to put off predators.



5. Discuss what makes a book fiction or non-fiction. Do all books fall neatly into these categories? What type of book do the children think *A Natural History of Fairies* is? Discuss how it is presented as a non-fiction book, using scientific language, diagrams, charts and 'fact' boxes. Talk about how this kind of 'hybrid' book blurs the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. Can the students think of any other examples of books that blur this line?

Student Activities

1. Invent A New Species of Fairy

On pages 22 – 47, Professor Arbour explores many different species of fairy. For each, she describes its habitat, home, features and behavior. Now it's your turn! Have students come up with their own ideas for a newly discovered species of fairy. They may want to consider these questions:

- What kind of habitat does it live in?
- Where does it make its home?
- What does it look like? What are its wings and clothing like?
- Does it help care for a particular type of plant? How?
- Does it have a special relationship with any other type of creature?
- Does it have any predators? How does it defend itself?

2. Make a Leaf Identification Chart

Look at the Leaf Identification Chart on page 51. These leaves are from common trees in Professor Arbour's local area. Have students make their own leaf identification posters for trees in their own local area. If possible, take students out into nature so they can gather a handful of local plants to carry with them. What kind of fairies, based on the information in *A Natural History of Fairies*, do they think live in this area?

3a. Bark Rubbings

Different types of tree have different patterns on their bark. On a dry day, encourage students to collect bark rubbings from several different trees. Hold a sheet of paper up against a tree trunk, and gently rub the side of a wax crayon across the paper until a pattern emerges. Students can label their rubbings with the name of the tree, then compare the rubbings from different trees. Which trees make the most popular patterns?

3b. Leaf Rubbings

Similar to the above activity, you could collect interesting leaves to make leaf rubbings. Lie a leaf on a flat surface with the veiny side facing up, then cover it with a sheet of paper and make a rubbing using the side of a crayon. Once the leaf rubbings are complete, students could cut them out and use them as wings and clothing for a piece of fairy artwork.

4. Listen to the Birds

In *A Natural History of Fairies* (page 54), Professor Arbour mentions the special relationship fairies supposedly have with birds. Talk to the students about using their observation skills to listen to the sounds of the natural world. Our daily lives are often so busy that we don't pay attention to the sounds of birds, or they are drowned out by the noise of traffic, music and our own voices. Sit in an outdoor spot, close your eyes, and listen. Can you hear any birds?

If you'd like to find out how to identify different birdsongs in the USA, the Cornell University Bird Lab has some fantastic resources and games: <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/bird-song-hero/>

In the UK, visit the woodland trust website for an introduction to the songs of common British birds: www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/04/identify-bird-song/

5. Fairy Codes

On pages 58–59 Professor Arbour describes how she discovered the secrets of the fairy alphabet. First, students could use the alphabet key to decode the message shown on the leaf on page 58. Then, they could write some of their own messages in fairy code. Finally, students could invent their own secret codes, substituting different letters of the alphabet with other letters, numbers or symbols.

Happy fairy-spotting! If your students do come up with their own fairy designs, we would LOVE to see them. Tag author Emily Hawkins @emilyhawkinsbooks, illustrator Jessica Roux @jessicasroux, and Quarto @quartokids on Instagram.



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