



**“Don't Feed the Boy  
is a delightfully satisfying  
blend of action and  
emotion, tension and heart.  
Everyone should have a  
best friend like Whit.”**

—Kathryn Erskine, winner  
of the National Book Award for *Mockingbird*

No kid knows more about zoo life than Whit. That’s because he sleeps, eats and even attends home-school at the Meadowbrook Zoo. It’s one of the perks of having a mother who’s the zoo director and a father who’s the head elephant keeper. Now that he’s eleven, Whit feels trapped by the rules and routine of zoo life. With so many exotic animals, it’s easy to get overlooked. But when Whit notices a mysterious girl who visits every day to draw the birds, suddenly the zoo becomes much more interesting. Who is the Bird Girl? And why does she come by herself to the zoo?

Determined to gain her trust, Whit takes the Bird Girl on his own personal tour of the zoo. He shows her his favorite animals and what happens with them behind the scenes. For Whit, having a friend his own age that he can talk to is an exciting new experience. For Stella the Bird Girl, the zoo and Whit are a necessary escape from her chaotic home life. Together they take risks in order to determine where it is they each belong. But when Stella asks Whit for an important and potentially dangerous favor, Whit discovers how complicated friendship—and freedom— can be.

Brimming with animal facts, adventure and tender truths, this heart-touching tale is about the human struggle to find one’s place in the world.



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**PRE-READING ACTIVITY:****Zoo as city**

1. Brainstorm the moving parts of a zoo. What animals, workers, support systems must be in place for the zoo to operate effectively?
2. What do you think is the purpose of the zoo?
3. Write a paragraph about a time you went to the zoo. Alternately, write a paragraph about what you expect at the zoo.
4. What other attractions can you think of that are similar to zoos?

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*Support animal education and conservation: visit your local zoo!*

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**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Whit says his favorite animal is the giraffe. What is your favorite animal? What do you have in common with this animal and why do you feel a kinship?
2. Whit is home-schooled and has spent nearly all of his life at the Meadowbrook Zoo. How does this affect his life especially in terms of how he relates to other people?
3. When Whit meets the Bird Girl he worries that he will say the wrong thing. What does he do to help prepare himself for his friendship with her?
4. How does the Bird Girl's reaction to his life at the zoo change Whit's view of himself?
5. Whit knows a lot of facts about exotic animals from his time at the zoo. Is there an area in your life where you are an "expert" or do you know someone who is?
6. Whit is troubled by Stella's living situation, particularly Phil and the gun he keeps under his chair. Have you ever encountered something similar at a friend's house that made you frightened or want to help that person?
7. Whit says he has every bit as much right to complain about his life, even though his circumstances don't seem as dire as Stella's (insert quote about cancer/cold). Do you agree with Whit?
8. Phil says zoos are an "abomination," but Whit's experience at the zoo has been one that proves the animals are treated with love and kindness. How do you feel about the practice of keeping exotic animals caged?
9. Freedom and escape are recurring themes in DON'T FEED THE BOY. Have you ever felt trapped? If so, what did you do about it?
10. What do you think Whit's experience will be like at Meadowbrook Middle School? What advice would you give him as a new student?

**ACTIVITIES**

1. Instead of Geography or Spelling, engage readers with a **ZOO BEE** using animal facts from DON'T FEED THE BOY. (sample questions on p. 3 of this guide) Serve animal crackers to participants. Award your champion with passes to the nearest zoo.



## Questions for ZOO BEE:

1. What does S.S.P. stand for?
2. What is the gestation period for lemurs?
3. What do macaques eat?
4. Why are flamingos feathers colored salmon (or pink)?
5. How many gallons can the pelican's beak hold?
6. How many gallons can the pelican's stomach hold?
7. A standing elephant is a sure sign of \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Elephant usually lie down how many hours each night?
9. Why does lying down (not standing) harm the elephant?
10. What does a peacock's call sound like?
11. Name one species zoos have helped save from extinction?
12. What type of animal is a Komodo Dragon?
13. How often are most snakes fed at the zoo?
14. What do snakes spend most of their time doing?
15. Describe the Mariana fruit dove's personality.
16. In what are venomous snakes placed for travel?
17. In what are non –venomous snakes placed for travel?
18. True or False: Boa constrictors crush their prey.
19. If a cheetah is loose in the zoo what is the one thing you shouldn't do?
20. What tool does the vet use to drill an elephant's bad tooth?
21. How far does a baby giraffe fall when it is born?
22. What do captive bald eagles eat?
23. How much food per day does an average elephant consume?
24. What is antivenin used for?
25. How did the Bornean sun bear get its name?
26. True or False: Bornean sun bears are nocturnal
27. What color are giraffe tongues?
28. How do Madagascar hissing cockroaches make noise?
29. True or False: koala bears are marsupials
30. What do koala bears eat?
31. What do gorillas and baseball players have in common?
32. If you want to please a chimpanzee, what treat do you give them?

### **Answer Key:**

**1.**Species Survival Plan **2.** 132-134 days **3.** monkey chow **4.** because of all the shrimp they eat  
**5.**3 gallons **6.**1 gallon **7.**sickness **8.**3-4 hours **9.**all that weight puts unnatural pressure on the lungs and blocks the digestive tract **10.** a woman screaming **11.**black-footed ferrets, Spix macaws, plains bison & many more **12.** reptile **13.**once a week **14.**sleeping **15.**shy and secretive bird that avoids detection by roosting high in the forest canopy **16.**red hot boxes **17.**pillow cases that have been turned inside out & Igloo coolers **18.**False, they squeeze them until their air supply is cut off **19.**run **20.**jackhammer **21.**7 feet **22.**dead fish and rats and chicks sprinkled with vitamin supplements **23.**more than a hundred pounds of hay plus 25 pounds of fruits and veggies **24.**snakebites **25.**yellow crescent on its chest **26.**True **27.**dark grey or black **28.**by exhaling through their breathing holes **29.**True, they have a pouch **30.**eucalyptus trees **31.**they spit **32.**sugarless cinnamon gum



## LANGUAGE ARTS

1. Write a “who am I?” poem from the perspective of one of the animals at the zoo (your choice.) ex. IF NOT FOR THE CAT by Jack Prelutsky
2. Write a letter to a friend telling them all the ways they are important in your life.
3. Write a story about Whit’s first day at Meadowbrook Middle School.
4. Read IF I RAN THE ZOO by Dr. Seuss. Write your own version.
5. Write a position paper in favor or against zoos. Present your argument orally.

## MATHEMATICS

1. Choose five exotic animals and create your own imaginary backyard zoo. Research what these animals eat. Calculate how much and what type of food to order. Create a budget.
2. Create a poll to discover the most popular/least popular zoo animal. Display your results in a graph.

## SCIENCE

1. One of Whit’s summer projects is a field study. Conduct your own field study of an animal in your life.
2. Research an animal on the Red List of Endangered Species. Create a conservation plan based on your findings.

## HISTORY

1. Research the history of zoos. Give a news report as if you are reporting from the very first zoo, a current zoo, or a zoo in the future.
2. Whit’s mother is a veterinarian turned zoo director. Research the role of women in zoos. How has it changed? What gender roles do you see currently emerging?

## ART

1. One way Stella escapes her life is by drawing birds at the zoo. Research and draw your
2. Create a 3-D model of Meadowbrook Zoo.
3. Examine the illustrations in DON’T FEED THE BOY. Why do you think the illustrator chose those particular scenes to illustrate? Choose another scene and illustrate it yourself.
4. Make a poster advertising the zoo. Include hours, prices and attractions.
5. Research John James Audubon, a famous artist and naturalist who, like Stella, loved to draw birds. Choose one of his paintings and attempt to copy it.



## MULTIMEDIA

1. Using podcasts or video tools, create a radio or television spot advertising an exhibit or special event at the zoo.
2. The Meadowbrook Zoo is in the midst of an extreme drought at the time of our story. Create a public service announcement about the drought. Include information on what creates a drought, ways people can reduce the effect of the drought and how droughts impact the environment for people and animals.
3. Choose an animal on the Red List of Endangered Species and create an informative Powerpoint presentation.

## Additional Resources

### Books (fiction):

BELLY UP by Stuart Gibbs

THE ONE AND ONLY IVAN by Katherine Applegate

THE SECRET ZOO by Bryan Chick

THE ZOO CREW (Nancy Drew and the Clue Crew) by Carolyn Keene

TROUBLE AT THE ZOO by Bindi Irwin

ZOOBREAK by Gordon Korman

### Websites:

<http://www.iucnredlist.org/>

<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/>

<http://www.nwf.org/>

<http://animal.discovery.com/animals/>

<http://www.aza.org/>

<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/default.cfm>

***\*check your local zoo's website for additional educational/curricula resources***

### Audio/Video:

MADAGASCAR (2005)

WE BOUGHT A ZOO (2011)

### About the Author



Irene Latham is a poet and novelist who lives and writes in Birmingham, Alabama. Her debut novel *Leaving Gee's Bend* was named a Bank Street College Best Book, a SIBA finalist, a Crystal Kite Finalist and 2011 ALL Children's Book of the Year. As a child she dreamed of being a zoo veterinarian and even trained as a teen zoo volunteer. All it took was observing one surgery to convince her that perhaps she'd better just write about the animals instead.



Irene offers **free** 30-minute Skype visits and has developed a fact-packed live presentation suitable for groups of all kinds. To find out more about scheduling and fee requirements, visit her at **[irenelatham.com](http://irenelatham.com)**.