



Overview

This article describes how one female crocodile cares for her young, from eggs to independence. The dramatic photographs and glossary provide strong support for readers in what could be a challenging read. There is use of present verb forms (often heard in the narration of television nature programmes) to describe what crocodiles always do. Each stage in the life journey

of the young crocodiles is recounted with a focus on the dangers they are faced with and the ways the mother tries to protect them. The article gives rich opportunities for studying survival in an extreme environment and for making comparisons with other animals, including humans.

Texts related by theme

“The Cat’s Whiskers” SJ 1.3.10 | “A Foal Is Born” SJ 1.3.09 | “A Very Special Frog” SJ 1.4.05

Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

other visual language features that support the ideas and information, for example, text boxes or maps

a straightforward text structure, such as a structure that follows a recognisable and clear text form

figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, or personification

A baby crocodile learning to swim

When all the babies have been safely carried to the water, their mother stays with them, watching over them and helping them to learn about their world. They quickly learn how to swim, but they stay close to their mother at first.

The babies learn to catch insects, frogs, and small fish to eat. They will stay together in this crocodile “crèche” until they are able to look after themselves.

Green tree frog

Dragonfly

Surviving

Life is full of dangers for the young crocodiles. At first, they are only 25 centimetres long – a tasty treat for bigger predators. They learn to hide among the river plants when the shadow of a large bird swoops across the water. They also learn to watch out for bigger animals in the river – including other crocodiles. The female crocodile defends her babies and chases off attackers. But in spite of this, most of the crocodile babies will not grow into adults.

some compound and complex sentences, which may consist of two or three clauses

some abstract ideas that are clearly supported by concrete examples in the text or easily linked to the students’ prior knowledge

some words and phrases that are ambiguous or unfamiliar to the students, the meaning of which is supported by the context or clarified by photographs, illustrations, diagrams, and/or written explanations

some places where information and ideas are implicit and where students need to make inferences based on information that is easy to find because it is nearby in the text and there is little or no competing information

Possible curriculum contexts

SCIENCE (Living World)

LEVEL 2 – Life processes: Recognise that all living things have certain requirements so they can stay alive.

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 2 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of structures.

Possible reading purposes

- To find out how a mother crocodile cares for her babies
- To identify some of the dangers faced by baby crocodiles
- To identify how the author has engaged the audience with her writing.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

Possible writing purposes

- To use the text as a model to describe the survival tactics of the babies of another animal species, such as kiwi, dolphins, or albatrosses
- To research and report on the plants and animals that live in a local ecosystem, such as an estuary, sand dunes, native bush, or a stream
- To use a graphic form (such as a flow chart) to summarise a life cycle or an ecosystem.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar and/or specialist words, including “crèche”, “leaf litter”, “mound”, “predators”, “wet season”, “rot”, “camouflaging”, “hatching/hatch”, “chirping”, “egg tooth”, “swoops”, “defends”, “attackers”, “establish”
- Place names listed in the note on page 31 and shown on the map inside the back cover
- Phrases such as “keeps watch”, “water’s edge”, “tasty treat”, “in spite of”, “home territory”.

Possible supporting strategies

Preview the glossary on page 31, checking that the students know how to use a glossary. Support them to show they understand these words by giving examples of contexts where they may have seen, used, or heard them.

Provide opportunities for students to encounter and practise key low-frequency words such as “crèche”, “predator”, “camouflaging”, and “home territory” in different contexts before and after reading.

The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction, pages 39–46, has some information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- The concept of animals protecting their young and helping them become independent
- The similarities and differences between the young of different species
- Familiarity with nature documentaries
- The risks to survival in the wild.

Possible supporting strategies

Activate, and if necessary build, students’ knowledge of animal survival and the life cycles of different species. Use DVDs, books, articles, and websites to give them exposure to a range of different kinds of animals and the kinds of dangers their babies face. Encourage the students to describe and explain what they know.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Factual information, supported by photographs, captions, a glossary, a note, and a map
- Structure uses headings and a sequence of events in recounting the story of one crocodile and her babies
- Supporting details for main ideas
- Present verb forms – “lays her eggs”, “it forms a mound”, “the eggs are now hidden”
- Connectives that indicate a sequence of events – “As”, “After”, “Now”, “When”, “At first”
- The sequence of events and the use of verb forms for example, to show one action is completed before another – “has made”, “have broken out”
- Use of “If ... [then]” structure to show different outcomes
- Language to describe location – “On the banks of a river somewhere in northern Australia”, “in a nest”, “inside the mound”.

Possible supporting strategies

Show students an excerpt from an animal documentary and discuss the way the narrator tells the story. Point out the way their use of the present tense gives a sense of telling a story “as it happens”, similar to a sports commentary, but the documentary is describing what the animals always do. If appropriate, make connections to tenses in other languages.

For some students, the use of the present tense may be confusing. Spend time working orally to describe events that always happen the same way (such as their morning routine). Discuss that the present here means “always”, not “right now”.

Make a table or timeline to help students keep track of the stages in the lives of the baby crocodiles. Include rows for the time, mother crocodile, and baby crocodiles. Fill in the timeline as you read each page, including notes about what the mother and the babies are doing. Some students could be noting down the changes and risks that accompany each stage at the same time; others could do this on a second reading.

Provide support, if required, to understand the three examples of “if ... [then]” structures on page 25 and the differences between them.

Instructional focus – Reading

Science (Level 2 – Recognise that all living things have certain requirements so they can stay alive.)

Text excerpts from “Crocodile Crèche”

Students (what they might do)

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

The eggs are now hidden, safe from predators. They are also protected from the hot sun and from the wet season’s heavy rain.

*The students combine information from the text and their own knowledge to **infer** that the mother covered the nest of eggs with a mound of grass and leaf litter to protect the eggs. They identify three risks to the eggs (predators, hot sun, heavy rain). They **make connections** with other animals that lay eggs (using nests, protecting the eggs).*

PROMPT students to use the information in the text along with what they already know about risks to make inferences about the mother crocodile’s actions.

- What could happen to the eggs?
- How will the mother’s actions protect the eggs?
- Why do you think crocodiles have so many eggs? What do you predict might happen to them? What can you infer about the risks to baby crocodiles?

Now the mother crocodile does a surprising thing. Very gently, she takes some of her new babies in her mouth! She doesn’t hurt them; she just holds them so that she can carry them down to the river. She places them near the water’s edge and returns for the others.

*The students **ask and answer** questions to work out what the mother is doing and why it is surprising. They take into account their assumption that a crocodile’s mouth is a dangerous place, consider the photograph of her teeth, and then **evaluate** how safe it may be for the babies.*

ASK QUESTIONS to support students as they think about the survival of the babies.

- Why does the author say this is surprising? What could happen to the babies?
- Do you know of any other animals that carry their babies in their mouths?
- How would you judge the riskiness of taking them to the water? Would it be riskier to leave them in the nest? Why do you think that?

The female crocodile defends her babies and chases off attackers. But in spite of this, most of the crocodile babies will not grow into adults.

*The students use the information in the text and work out what “in spite of” means, to **infer** that many of the babies die. They consider all the risks mentioned, from the nest onwards, and how hard it would be for the mother to protect them all.*

MODEL

- Let me show you how I work out what “in spite of” means. I know that the “but” is signalling that something opposite to the previous statement is going to happen. So it means that even though the female crocodile defends her babies, most of them will still die before becoming adults. So “in spite of” means you get the opposite result from what you’d normally expect.

EXPLAIN that the word “this” in “in spite of this” refers back to what the female crocodile does to protect her young and how they learn to hide. Establish that the actions don’t have the intended or expected result.

PROMPT students to evaluate the mother’s efforts and discuss their thinking with a partner.

- Would it be better to have fewer babies? Why or why not?
- What do crocodiles need to stay alive?
- How does this compare with the ways other animals ensure their survival?


GIVE FEEDBACK

- You’ve used the headings and topic sentences to find information in the text. That’s a great strategy for reading non-fiction.
- You compared what the mother crocodile does with what your mother does to look after you. That helped you to understand how gentle the mother crocodile is to her babies.

METACOGNITION

ASK QUESTIONS and prompt to make the students’ strategies explicit for them as they read and respond to the text.

- What kinds of questions did you ask yourself as you read? How did they help you understand the text?
- How did the way the text was written help you to follow the ideas presented?
- How did you use the photographs to help you understand the text? Would it have been as interesting or clear to you without photographs? Why do you think that?
- How did you work out the meanings of long sentences? Did you try breaking them into smaller parts? Did this help you?

 Reading standard: by the end of year 4

 The Literacy Learning Progressions

 Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English (Level 2 – Organise texts, using a range of structures.)

Text excerpts from “Crocodile Crèche”

Laying eggs

On the banks of a river somewhere in northern Australia, a female crocodile lays her eggs in a nest she has made from grass and reeds.

Crocodiles are very good at camouflaging themselves in the water. The mother crocodile may be floating nearby, with just the tip of her nose and her eyes above the water.

Hatching out

After ninety days, the babies are ready to hatch.

They quickly learn how to swim, but they stay close to their mother at first. The babies learn to catch insects, frogs, and small fish to eat.

Each young crocodile sets off to establish its own home territory somewhere along the river where it was born.

The crocodile crèche is closed – until the next wet season.

Examples of text characteristics

TOPIC

When choosing what to write about, it helps for the writer to use criteria.

STRUCTURE

The writer needs to use an engaging title, clear headings, and a scene-setting first sentence. The title and first sentence are often easier to write at the end, but headings will give the writing shape and help to organise the text.

DETAILS OF LOCATION

Using location details helps the reader to get a clear mental picture of not just what is happening but also where it is happening.

LINKING WORDS

These give the reader a clear idea of the sequence of events. They can give specific information (“After ninety days”) or be more general (“Now...”)

USING GRAPHIC FEATURES

Photographs, drawings, and other graphic features add interest and help the reader to engage with and learn from the text.

THE ENDING

A good ending clarifies or emphasises your purpose for writing. It can also point to another cycle of events, summarise important points, or give the reader something more to think about.

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

ASK QUESTIONS to help students form their writing intentions.

- If you’re writing about how an animal survives, how will you decide which animal to write about? What criteria will you use to choose it?
- Who will you write for? What information and style will engage your audience?
- Based on using “Crocodile Crèche” as a model, what headings could you use for your animal? Will they allow you to cover the topic well?
- What would be a good title?

MODEL how to add location detail to a sentence.

- Let’s think about why the author used “nearby” in her sentence. I think the author thought about what would tell the reader more about how the mother crocodile protects her babies. I now know how thoroughly the crocodile does this because the text includes the word “nearby” to emphasise that the crocodile stays very close to her babies at all times.

PROMPT the students to think about sequence and connections.

- How will you show your readers the order or sequence of events?
- Which words or phrases will be most effective? For example, can you avoid saying “next” or “then” more than once?

ASK QUESTIONS

- Would illustrations help your reader to understand the text?
- Where will you find them? What parts of the text would benefit most from illustrations?
- Do your illustrations need labels or captions?

PROMPT the students to think about how they will end their writing.

- How do you want your reader to feel when they reach the end?
- How will the reader know it’s the end?
- Use your responses to these two questions to guide the way you write the final sentences.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You’ve used a good title and clear headings, and the information fits well into each heading. I now know a lot more about ...
- As the reader, I find that the last sentence takes me back to the idea that started the article, reinforcing your main message. That works well.

METACOGNITION

ASK QUESTIONS to help the students think more deeply about the way they write.

- How did the criteria help you with your writing?
- What have you learned about using the present tense in non-fiction writing? How will this help you in the future?
- How hard or easy was it to find the information you needed? What does that tell you about the topic you chose?