

Koko's Kitten

Meet the Author/Story Summary



Meet the Author: Dr. Francine Patterson Francine "Penny" Patterson was born in Chicago, Illinois, on February 13, 1947. After receiving her A. B. degree in Psychology from the University of Illinois, she went on to Stanford University in California to earn her doctorate in Developmental Psychology. In 1971, while working on her graduate-school project, she met the three-month-old Koko at the San Francisco Zoo. Koko, separated

from other gorillas, was lonely and sickly. Patterson immediately volunteered to be Koko's "mother," and switched her project to studying the language capabilities of animals. Since 1972, this project and Koko's welfare have been her life's work.

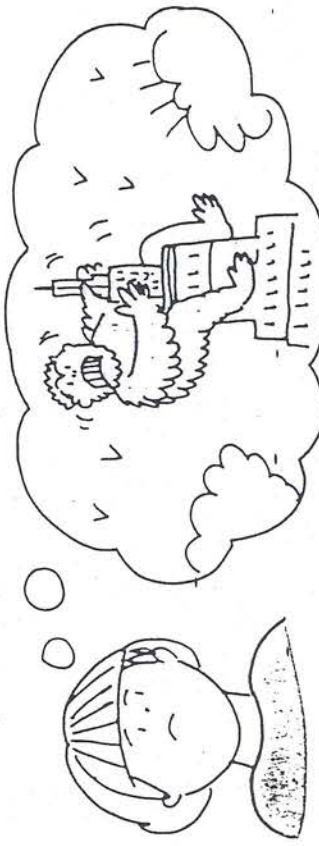
Patterson continues her teaching and research in developmental psychology and primate and human language acquisition to this day. Writing mostly for scholarly journals, she has also written about Koko and primate communication for *Ms. Magazine*, *Reader's Digest*, and *National Geographic*.

Meet the Photographer: Ronald Cohn Born in Chicago, Illinois, on November 12, 1943, Ronald Cohn received his Bachelor of Science and doctorate degrees at the University of Illinois. While his areas of professional expertise are cell biology, biochemistry, and genetics, he also pursues an avocation in photography and film and is an officer of the Gorilla Foundation. For his pictures and films of Koko, he won a *Time* Photo of the Year award (1985), and awards in 1989 from the American Film and Video Festival, the Parents' Choice Foundation, and the Chicago International Festival of Children's Films.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Story Summary Koko, a captive gorilla at the Gorilla Foundation facility in Woodside, California, has been taught over a period of 20 years to communicate with Dr. Patterson using American Sign Language. Drawing on a vocabulary of 500 signs, Koko tells Penny Patterson that she wants a real cat. From a litter, Koko selects a tail-less kitten, and through signs makes up her own name for her pet: All Ball. Koko tenderly loves and mothers the kitten and signs her affection for it in many ways. When All Ball is killed by a car, Koko falls into a deep depression. News of Koko's distress inspires letters of sympathy and offers of help from thousands of children and adults. Eventually, a replacement for All Ball is found, and Koko happily adopts the new kitten.

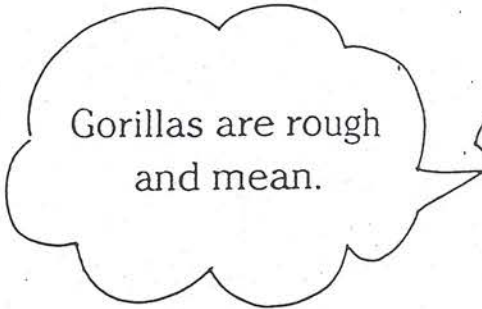
Photo Surprises Introduce the book by inviting students to share what they know about gorillas and gorilla behavior. Ask students to tell where they got their perceptions of gorillas, such as from TV or movies. Then show the book cover and some of the photo illustrations, and ask students how these photographs confirm or contradict their ideas of what gorillas are like. Explain that the book tells a real-life story about a gorilla and her pet.



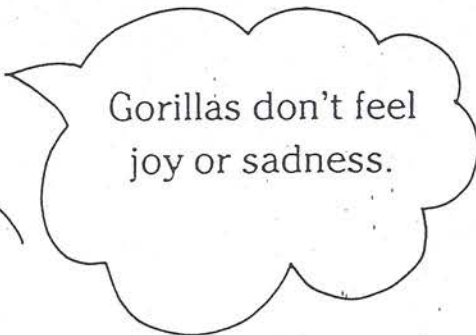
Pet-and-People Talk Discuss ways in which students know what household pets are trying to communicate. For example: How do you know when your pet is hungry? How do you know when your pet is feeling playful, sleepy, frightened, angry, or sick? Explain that the author of this book taught a gorilla to communicate by using sign language. Encourage students to study the photographs as you read the book to determine what signs are used. Then reproduce and pass out the sign-language words and alphabet on pages 55 and 56 for students to use with upcoming activities.

That's Not True!

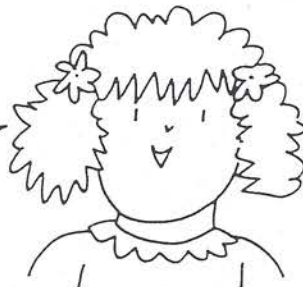
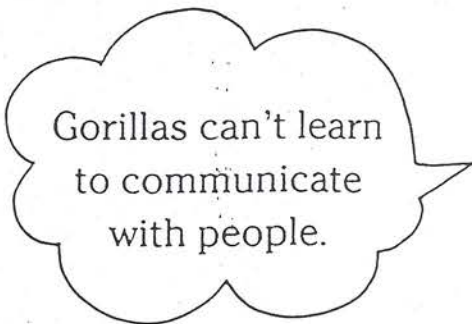
Each person below is saying something that is not true. On the lines write a fact about Koko that tells what **is** true.



True



True

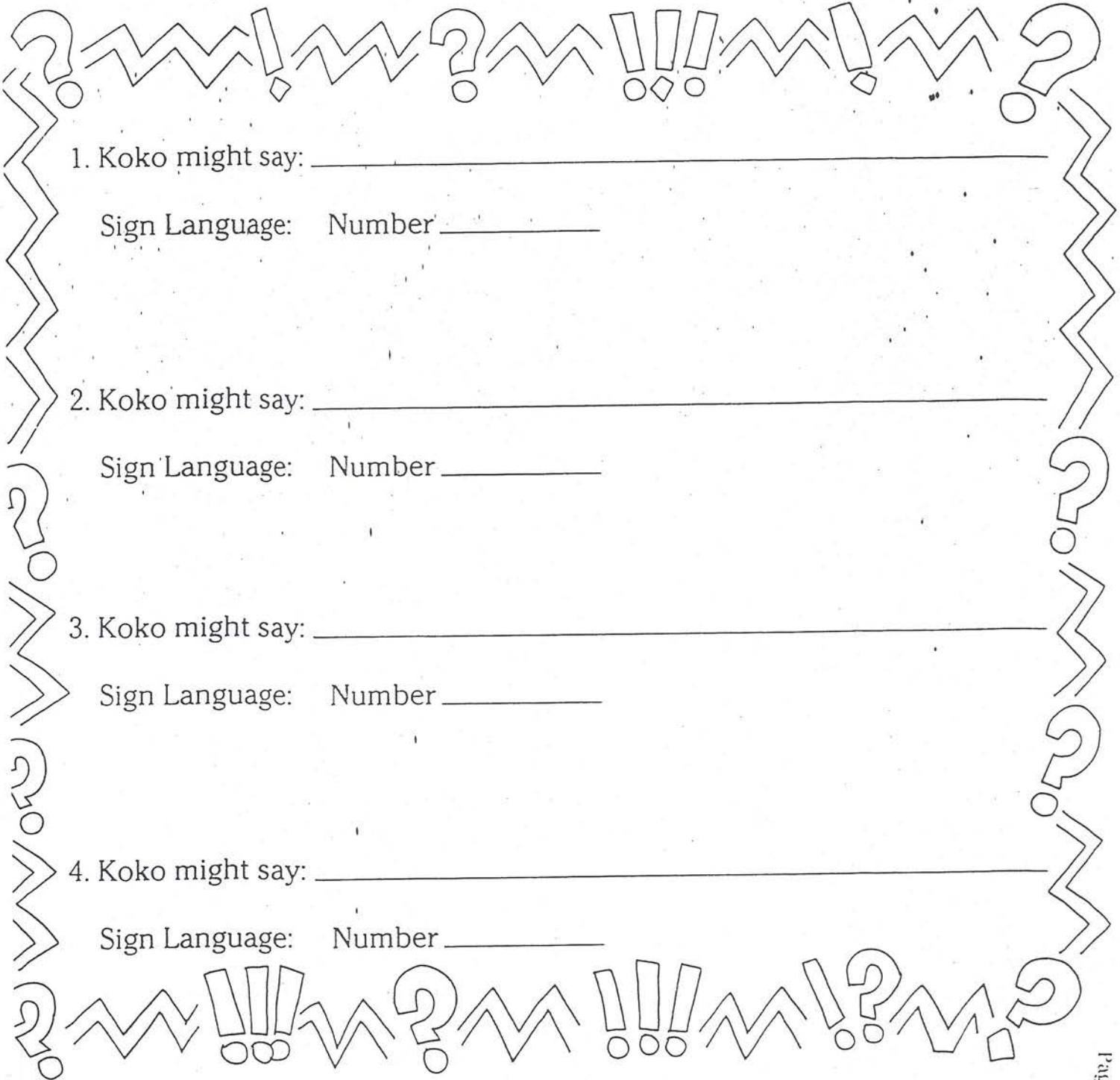


True

- On the back of this page write another fact about gorillas you have learned from *Koko's Kitten*. Draw a picture to illustrate the fact.

Signs for Koko

Think of four ideas Koko can get across by using sign language. On the top line write a sentence to tell something Koko might say. On the bottom line write the number of the sign-language gesture from the worksheet on page 55.



1. Koko might say: _____
Sign Language: Number _____

2. Koko might say: _____
Sign Language: Number _____

3. Koko might say: _____
Sign Language: Number _____

4. Koko might say: _____
Sign Language: Number _____

On the back of this page draw a picture to go with one of your sentences.

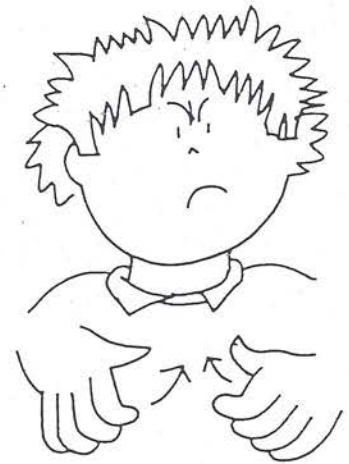
Koko's Feelings

Write about a time in the story when Koko has each feeling.



Sad

Angry

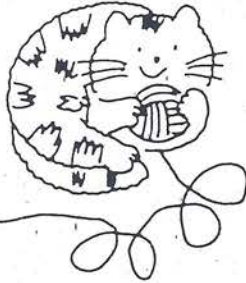


Happy

On the back of this page draw a picture of how the story of Koko and All Ball makes **you** feel. Write a sentence to go with your picture.

A Picture-Letter to Koko

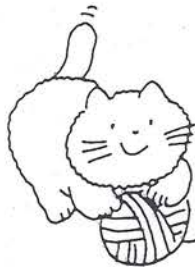
After All Ball dies, Koko gets another kitten. Write a letter to Koko to tell how you feel about this. Here and there in your letter, draw pictures to help make your message clear to Koko.



(Date) _____

Dear Koko,

Your friend,



- Suppose you can send a present to Koko with your letter. On the back of this page draw a picture of the gift you would send. Write a sentence to tell why Koko would like this gift.

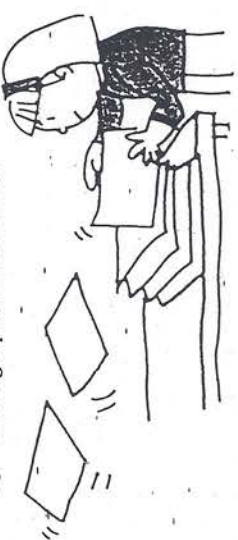
PICTURES AND SENTENCES

A Picture Book for Koko Invite students to work in groups of four or five to make picture books for Koko that tell about key incidents in the story.

- You need:**
- drawing paper
 - pencils
 - markers
 - crayons
 - yarn
 - colored construction paper
 - hole punches
 - gummed reinforcements
 - scissors

Steps:

1. Introduce the activity by brainstorming a list of important events in the story. Write the list on the chalkboard or on poster paper. Remind students that Koko can read pictures but not written words; so, the ideas in their books will have to be conveyed through pictures alone.



2. Distribute art materials. Suggest that group members work together to decide which incidents they will show in their book and assign one or more pages to each member. Additional roles could include: one member to make and illustrate a construction-paper cover for the book; one member to bind the pages and covers by punching two or three holes in the left side of each and tying all the pages and covers together with yarn; one or two members to share the book with the class.

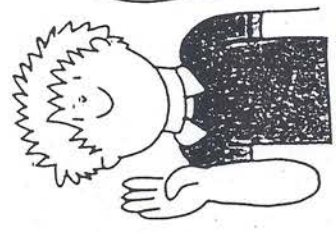
3. Put the finished picture books on a reading table. Invite partners to share the books by telling the story aloud to one another as they look at the pictures.



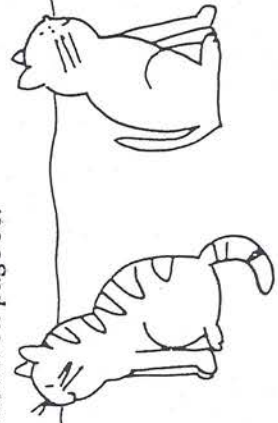
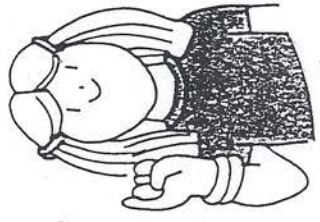
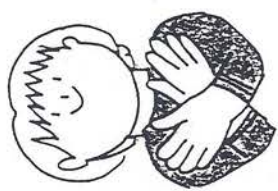
Sign Language Invite interested students to view a videotape of sign language. (For a listing, write to: Gallaudet University Media Center, 800 Florida Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002.) Explain that there are two basic signing approaches, usually used together:



- **Idea Signs** (the kind that Koko uses) Whole ideas can be communicated through a single sign. These signs are usually based on a "moving picture" that stands for the idea. (See page 55 for examples.)



- **Fingerspelling** Words can also be spelled out through the sign-language alphabet, shown on page 56.



Encourage students to work in small groups or with partners to hold conversations in sign language. Suggest that they learn how to sign their names using the sign-language alphabet. Ask groups to the front of the room to share their sign-language conversations, and challenge the class to figure out what the group is talking about.

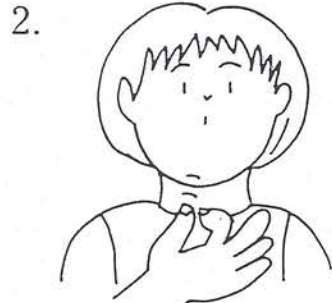
If possible, invite a hearing-impaired guest to visit your classroom to present an introduction to signing.

Words in Sign Language

Try to make sentences with these words in sign language.



CAT



CURIOUS



SAD



LOVE



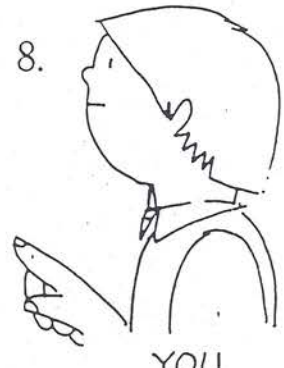
I



ME



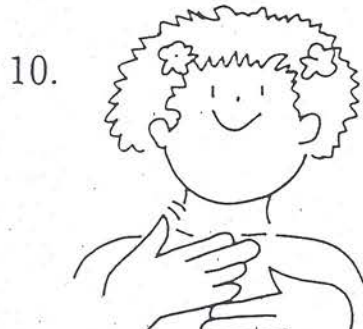
WE, US



YOU



SORRY



HAPPY



LIKE



PLAY



GRAPES



EAT



GONE



CROSS, GROUCHY

DIFFERENT WAYS OF SEEING AND SAYING

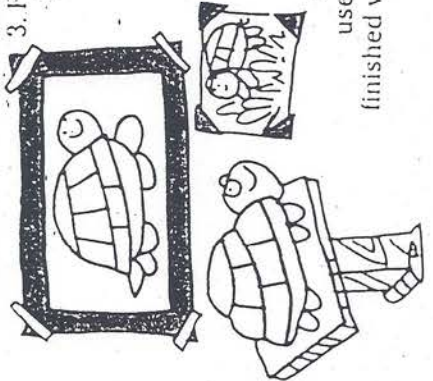
Animal Portraits Invite students to explore different methods of visually portraying the same subject.

You need:

- poster paints, brushes
- paper clay
- crayons
- instant cameras (optional)
- markers
- pencils
- newspapers
- a live animal subject, such as a goldfish or hamster
- (An outside animal, such as a bird or squirrel, will also do.)

Steps:

1. Introduce the activity by reminding students that Koko can recognize kittens in pictures. Discuss ways in which kittens and cats are shown in the book. Using questions like the following, ask students to compare the different portrayals: - Which one is most realistic? Which one has three dimensions? Which one concentrates on colors rather than on shape? Which one is designed to get information from the viewer as well as to give information?
2. Now introduce the animal model. Invite each student to choose two of the following ways to portray the animal: a photo (if you wish to make this an option); a clay statue; a painting; an abstract design; a detailed drawing.



3. Place art materials in a central work area. Encourage students to view the animal from different angles as they paint, sculpt, or photograph it. Store the first pieces of work in a safe spot as students move on to the second.
4. Conclude the activity by inviting students to set up a KOKO'S ANIMAL ART GALLERY, with work classified by the different mediums. Ask students to compare the methods they used. Which one was easier? Why? Which finished work are they more satisfied with? Why?

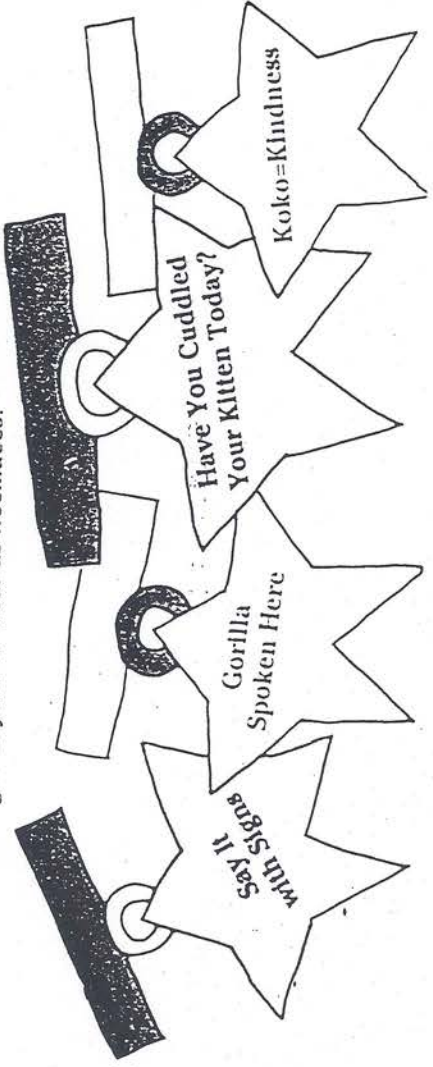
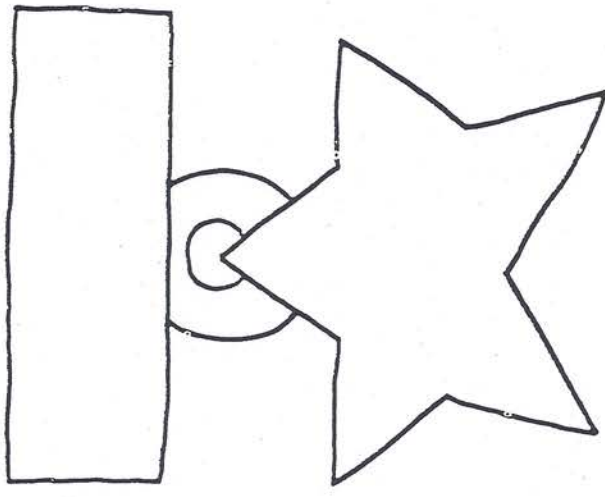
Party Pins Invite students to make badges with sentences or slogans that celebrate Koko.

You need:

- copies of the badge pattern
- scissors
- paste
- construction paper
- crayons, markers
- yarn or tape

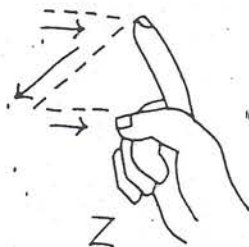
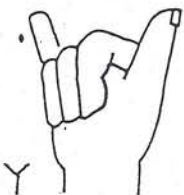
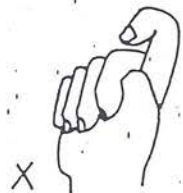
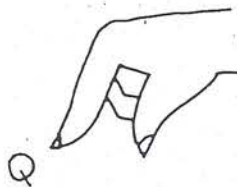
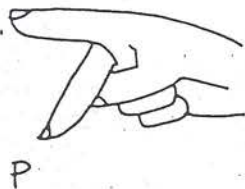
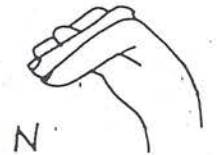
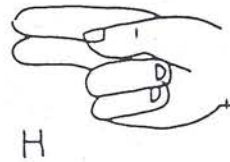
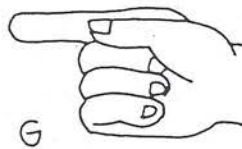
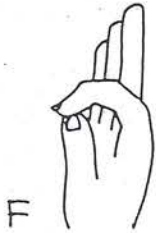
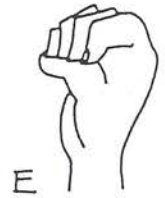
Steps:

1. Introduce the activity by discussing what students know about gorillas in general and about Koko in particular. Ask students to brainstorm short slogans that express their ideas, and write their ideas on the chalkboard.
2. Distribute art materials, including a badge pattern for each student. Have students cut out the pattern, paste it on construction paper, then cut around the badge.
3. Next, have students write a slogan on their badges and color them in. Apply tape to attach the badges to shirts, or punch a hole to tie a length of yarn to wear as necklaces.



Letters in Sign Language

Try to make words with these letters in sign language.





EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

Studying Films: Koko in Motion For further enrichment, *Koko's Kitten* is also available as a film (Los Angeles: Churchill Films, 1989). Before viewing, ask students to pay particular attention to the way words and ideas are signed. Afterwards, discuss other information gained from seeing Koko and Penny in action.

Science: Gorillas at Home Invite students to use encyclopedias and children's nonfiction books to find out about the gorillas' natural home (the rain forests of equatorial Africa), their habits in the wild, and the reasons why gorillas are now rare and are listed as a threatened species.

Encourage students to work with a partner to compile written reports, including pictures, diagrams, and maps. Provide time for students to share their reports with the class.

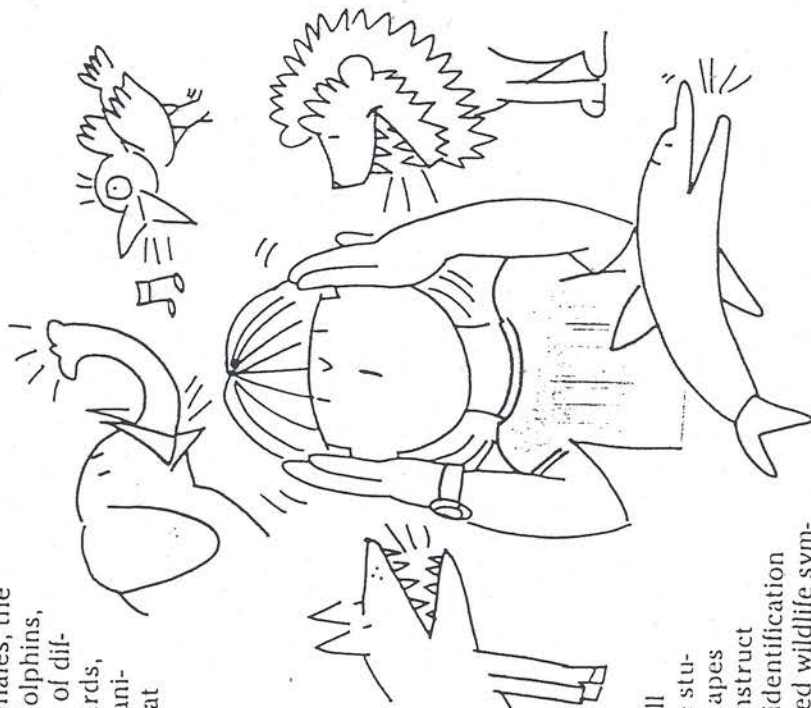


Career Study: Working with Animals

Reread the preface to *Koko's Kitten*, asking students to listen for the reasons Dr. Patterson undertook her work with gorillas. Invite students who are interested in animals and other aspects of the natural world to discuss careers they might follow. If possible, invite a guest involved in one of these careers (for example, a veterinarian, a forest ranger, or a zookeeper) to speak to the class about the training and duties required for their jobs.



Songs, Whistles, and Howls: To help students build awareness that most animals communicate through sounds, play sections of audio tapes of distinct animal sounds, such as the howls of wolves, the whistles of whales, the clicks made by dolphins, the distinct calls of different kinds of birds, and the various animal messages that can be heard by the sea, in woodlands, or in fields. (One good source is *The Special Music Company*, 87 Essex Street, Hackensack, New Jersey 07601.) Use the printed inserts that come with the tapes to explain what students will be hearing. Invite students to use the tapes and inserts to construct their own sound identification quizzes or narrated wildlife symphonies. Or, play the tapes, and ask students to paint images of the animals that come to mind as they hear the sounds.



As a follow-up, invite interested students to listen for different animal sounds—from the small humming and whirring of insects to the sounds made by household pets—in their neighborhood, on the way to school, or on the playground. Suggest that students make picture strips with dialogue balloons to show the animals they hear. They can write captions to give a "translation" of the animal sound.