



IB/TOPS/MACS

CLASS 10 HANDOUT





Throughout history, human beings have always had a close relationship with animals and other creatures with which we share the planet. One aspect of this relationship which provokes discussion is the issue of keeping animals in captivity.

There are certainly advantages to be gained by animals which are kept in captivity. Many zoos and safari parks employ veterinary surgeons to ensure that necessary medical attention is always available for the animals. In addition, nutrition experts are employed, so the animals have a ready supply of food appropriate to their needs. All of this means that life expectancy, for some creatures at least, is longer in captivity than in the wild; for example, wild squirrels live for an average of three years, whereas their captive counterparts live to be twelve years old. Nowadays, wildlife habitats are being encroached upon or destroyed at incredible rates; zoos and safari parks offer safe environments for animals which might otherwise have nowhere to live. Some rare species exist only in zoos because they have become extinct in the wild. Animals in captivity enable us to see common links between ourselves and some other species. Recently in one safari park, for example, the chimpanzee keepers discovered, through hidden cameras, striking similarities between chimps' responses to the death of a loved one and those of humans. When chimp Pansy was dying, her daughter Rosie and her companions stayed by her, apparently comforting her. Such astonishing research could only have been done with captive animals, and could influence future approaches to working with apes.



People benefit from animals being kept in captivity; they learn about the world of nature. It is delightful to see the wonder on a young child's face as he gazes at an elephant or tiger for the first time. Only the rich can afford to travel to see animals in their natural habitat, whereas in zoos, for example, the majority of people can afford to see them in close proximity. Thus, zoos encourage people to care for our planet and to see that they have a shared responsibility for its wellbeing. A day out to a zoo or safari park is a form of relaxation and entertainment, particularly when these places incorporate restaurants and children's play parks. Such a trip is an excellent family day out, and helps to bring family members closer by providing an opportunity for them to enjoy each other's company.



But zoos and safari parks have their critics too, and most people sit on the fence in this debate. Although more enlightened zoos attempt to emulate natural environments rather than using cages, the animals are still kept in relatively small spaces. They are deprived of their natural habitat, whether it is jungle, open land or seas. In addition, their natural instincts are curbed; it is all very well that a lion is given a few kilos of meat, but that is at odds with our image of it stalking its prey on the African plains. Often animals in captivity experience what is to them an unnatural climate; it is downright stupid to have polar bears and tigers living at identical temperatures. Although some animals are born in captivity, zoos and safari parks sometimes obtain animals from the wild population, which reduces the number of breeding animals in the wild and endangers their species. Animals in captivity often fail to breed. An example of this is the panda; attempts to get them to breed in captivity have proved to be notoriously difficult. Baby pandas are undeniably cute, and when occasionally one is born in captivity, it is a cause for global celebration.

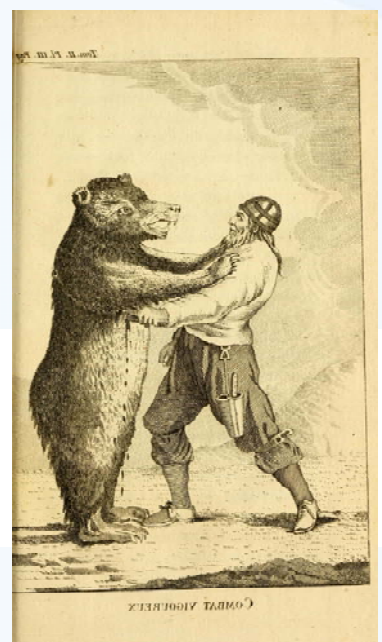


Not all animals live longer in zoos than they would in the wild: it is unusual for an elephant in captivity to live beyond the age of twenty, whereas its counterpart in the wild has a life expectancy of around forty years. There is evidence to suggest that elephants and other large creatures become stressed when kept in captivity. Although zoos and safari parks enable ordinary people to investigate wild animals for themselves, there are other ways in which this can happen, such as through books, films or the internet. Critics of zoos and safari parks argue that keeping animals in captivity is no more than cruelty and exploitation.





Lore had it that my father once wrestled a bear, a claim he never denied. If the story had been about anyone else, it would have been dismissed as exaggeration, which in my country was almost a national affliction. But no-one ever doubted the veracity of any story about my father. He was a towering force of nature; when all six foot of him thundered into the room, people behaved like sunflowers turning towards the sun. With me, Amir, as the glaring exception, my father moulded the world around him to his liking. He was also a man whose word was always respected.



My mother had died giving birth to me and the truth was that I always felt my father hated me a little. And why not? Had I not killed his beloved wife? The least I could do was to turn out a little more like him. Was having a son who preferred poetry to sport what my father had envisaged? I was a pathetic, blundering liability to my football team, always unwittingly obstructing the other team members. When it became abundantly clear that I hadn't inherited a shred of my father's athletic talents, he settled for trying to turn me into a passionate spectator. I faked interest for as long as I could, but my father sensed my lack of genuine interest and resigned himself to the bleak fact that his son was never going either to play or to watch football.



Every winter, each district held a kite-fighting tournament, the winner of which was the child whose kite was the last one flying. This tournament was undeniably the highlight of the cold season. During the contest, participants tried to cut the strings of all their opponents' kites. On the day of any tournament, the streets filled with kite fighters, jerking and pulling on their strings, squinting up at the sky, trying to gain position to cut an opponent's string. I used to build my own kite from bamboo, glue and paper. Then came the crucial part: I had to make my own string – a long, sharp, and colourful line. It was at one of these tournaments that I sensed my opportunity to make my father love me.



Already streets and rooftops were jammed with spectators, including my father. I held my kite high over my head, like an Olympic athlete showing off his gold medal, and tossed it into the air. Within a minute it was rocketing into the sky, making a sound like a bird flapping its wings. At least two dozen kites already hung in the sky, like roaming paper sharks. Within an hour the number doubled; soon the cutting started and the first of the defeated kites whirled out of control and fell from the sky like a shooting star. Soon, kites were coming down all over the place. I sliced a bright yellow kite, the string also cutting a gash on my index finger. Within another hour, the number of kites flying dwindled from maybe fifty to a dozen. By late afternoon, shadows started to lengthen. We were down to six kites and mine was still flying. With each defeated kite, hope grew in my heart.



My eyes kept returning to a blue kite which had been wreaking havoc for the last hour. Then what had seemed like a fantasy that morning had suddenly become feasible; there was just me and the owner of the blue kite left. The tension in the air was as taut as the glass string I was tugging with my bloody hands. People were stamping their feet, clapping, whistling, chanting. All I saw was the blue kite. All I smelled was victory. A gust of wind enabled me to loop my kite on top of the blue one, the owner of which desperately tried to manoeuvre it away. I loosened my grip on the string, and saw the blue kite falling from the sky. Perhaps now I had achieved the redemption I had craved all my life.



It happened just the way I'd hoped. My father had already returned to his study and I stepped tentatively in. His head turned and a smile played on his lips. I put my kite down happily and walked into his thick hairy arms. I buried my face in the warmth of his chest and wept. My father held me close to him, rocking me back and forth.

