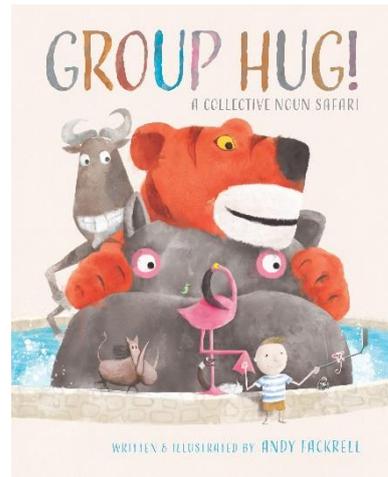


## Teacher's Notes

### *Group Hug!*

By Andy Fackrell

© Ford St Publishing



### Synopsis

Come on safari around the world with Wilbur, an animal-loving city kid, with his BAF's (best animal friends) as he discovers the wonder of animal collective nouns.

While on his regular stroll around the zoo, Wilbur is transported into the wild – including The Serengeti, the Arctic, The Andes, The Australian Outback – to experience life within his favourite animal groups. His buddies not only regale him with jaunty, fact-filled rhymes, but allude to their recent problems caused by the changing climate.

A joyful ode to biodiversity, this epic tale is lavishly illustrated and playfully written, each page an explosion of colour and rhyme. Perfect for budding Attenboroughs and Goodalls, this educational book lyricises not only the majesty of animals in the wild, but the quirks of the English language.

This book supports The Lion's Share, a fund backed the United Nation's Development Programme – its mentor David Attenborough – and its work protecting our most vulnerable wildlife groups.

### Inspiration

The book was inspired by two trips to Africa by the author and illustrator, Andy Fackrell. On his first, to the Serengeti, he travelled with a Masai guide while tracking cheetah for an organisation in Kenya. At dusk, transfixed by the sights of sounds of the savannah, the two were late returning to camp. Driving in pitch blackness, their jeep careened into an aardvark hole. As hyenas surrounded the stricken vehicle, he and his mate willed it back to life. Later that night, a parade of elephants passed by his tent, their trunks gently brushing the canvas, sensing the slightly overwhelmed occupant.

The second trip was to South Africa to film a short documentary on the poaching crisis, for an NGO based in Los Angeles, Over & Above Africa. The film, also based on collective nouns, naturally led Andy to the idea for a picture book, that not only entertained and informed, but highlighted the problems for animals in the wild.

## Author and Illustrator

Andy Fackrell is one of the most awarded and recognised multi-dimensional creatives in the world. A career in advertising earned him the highest honours, including the Cannes Grand Prix for a film for Nike. An obsessive sports lover, he spent much of his career creating work for Nike and adidas, living in Portland and Amsterdam. He is now a film maker exploring documentaries on social and environmental issues. While painting for himself, and occasionally illustrating for other author's work, Andy lives by the beach in Sydney.

\*\*\*

## Discussion Points and Themes

Maybe a child's only experience encountering a wild animal will be at a zoo. And while the morals of their containment can be a tricky subject, the awe of seeing them first-hand provides an intimacy that TV, as primarily an entertainment source, cannot.

A zoo hopefully facilitates a life-long empathy and fascination with animal lives in the wild. Australian zoos, particularly Taronga, support breeding programmes for endangered species, including Tasmanian Devils, Frogs and Bilbys. And while not all zoos in the world offer critical lifelines, there are many species reliant on their existence.

These programmes are argued to be detrimental to long term sustainability of species, as they defer attention away from threatened habitats. The Lion Share, in this regard, is focused on habitat restoration and preservation for endangered species.

*Group Hugs!* stories reflect the ecosystems this fund is working in, particularly in Indonesian forests, home to orangutan and tiger populations.

<https://taronga.org.au/news/2018-07-11/breed-or-not-breed>

<https://www.thelionssharefund.com/content/thelionssharefund/en/home/>

*Group Hug!* is a teaching aid to biodiversity. Illustrated in great depth – the foreground, middle and background layers are more akin to an animated film – each spread features a supporting cast of unnamed species, all biologically correct to the ecosystem.

For instance, in the Andes, alongside the Flamboyance of Flamingos we see a Knot of endangered, Lake Titicaca Water Frogs.

In the Orangutan spread, the zookeeper, who has now joined Wilbur on his safari, is seen swinging from a tree, yelling the Orangutan sound for danger, *Pipsquark*.

Scientists believe this could be the first word humans learned. These fun facts, for each of the book's featured animals, provide content for illustrated bookmarks that supplement *Group Hug!*

An ingenious feature of *Group Hug!* are the end papers; a definitive, and fun, reference source. A world map of all known collective nouns is drawn on the inside front, with the matching animal names on the inside back. Collective nouns originated in the middle-ages

within English hunting parties, with the intent to exaggerate the animal behaviour through exotic use of the English language. These light-hearted terms were intended to be humorous and sarcastic, but by the 15<sup>th</sup> Century became part of standard English language.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective\\_noun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_noun)

The effects of climate change are sensitively woven into each page, in both the illustrations and prose. *The river is lower these last few years, in better times, it's up to my ears.*

On first pass, these details may seem rather subtle, but are there for teachers and parents to expand on. (As the zookeeper yells *Pipsquark* we see a forest fire in the distance).

The tiger page has Wilbur riding on the feline's back, while playing his ukulele. This is based on a painting by Henri Rousseau, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century French painter who created lavish jungle scenes featuring exotic animals.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri\\_Rousseau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Rousseau)

## Classroom Discussions and Activities

1. How do you think they came up with these fascinating names for the nouns? Do they match the behaviour of the animals? Or their appearance?
2. How many do you know already? A Pride? A School? A Herd? Refer to the book's collective noun map and decide the best matched one for each animal group. Is it a Bamboo of Panda? Or a Kaleidoscope of Butterflies?
3. In Australia, we seem to use the collective noun 'Mob' a lot! Can you name what else we call Mob besides kangaroos?  
What other Aussie animals have collective nouns. A platypus? A koala?
4. Zoo Field trip. Try and remember each collective noun, while replicating Wilbur's stroll around the zoo. In small groups, see who can name the most.
5. What are the pluses of zoos? The minuses?
6. What are the threats – not only due to climate change – illustrated or written about on each *Group Hug!* page?
7. Create your own collective noun. There are some animal groups that don't have one, like the Blue-footed Booby bird, that lives in the Galapagos Islands. Let's try and create the best collective noun for it. Learn about its behaviour, then think of the best name that suits! Create a poll at school to select the most popular.
8. Draw an Australian scene from the wild that shows rich diversity, with animals that happily living together. For instance, in Africa, a Bloat of Hippos share their space with a Flock of Oxpeckers, who eat all the annoying bugs flying around their ears. They also happily live alongside a Flotilla of Crocodiles, and never fight each other, because hippos only eat grass, while crocs eat fish and other unfortunate creatures. What other animals could you add to the Pygmy Possum night-time scene?
9. Find an Australian Conservation Group that helps a species in need, like the Mountain Pygmy Possum, and ask for information. Maybe give them a special day in the calendar year and create a story for your school.
10. Using two-line structures create your own animal rhymes for collective nouns. For example, *Their height just inches, a Charm of Finches.*