CLARA

The (Mostly) True Story of the Rhinoceros Who Dazzled Kings, Inspired Artists, and Won the Hearts of Everyone . . . While She Ate Her Way Up and Down a Continent!

Emily Arnold McCully

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EDUCATORS' GUIDE

ABOUT THIS BOOK

For millennia human beings have forged relationships with animals, but perhaps no relationship has been as unique as that of an eighteenth-century merchant marine and his pet rhinoceros, Clara. In *Clara: The (Mostly) True Story of the Rhinoceros Who Dazzled Kings, Inspired Artists, and Won the Hearts of Everyone . . . While She Ate Her Way Up and Down a Continent!* readers will encounter the remarkable tale of Captain van der Meer and his beloved rhino, who together toured the great cities of Europe, traveling by land and by water, bringing awe and joy to all who were fortunate enough to lay eyes on the fantastic creature. Ultimately, *Clara* is a tale of friendship and devotion, and the magical bond that formed between one of history's most improbable duos.

Grades: Preschool–3
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Arnold McCully has written and illustrated many highly acclaimed picture books, including the Caldecott Medal–winning *Mirette on the High Wire*. She is also the author of the young adult biography *Ida M. Tarbell: The Woman Who Challenged Big Business—and Won!*, which was a *Washington Post* Best Children's Book of the Year and a finalist for the YALSA-ALA Best Nonfiction Book of the Year. Emily lives in New York City. Learn more at emilyarnoldmccully.com.

Common Core Standards Addressed in this Guide:

Craft and Structure: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 2 topic or subject area.

Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.3. Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

Comprehension and Collaboration: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2.2. Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

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PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Throughout the narrative readers follow Clara and Captain van der Meer from India to Holland and to the major cities of eighteenth-century Europe. Show students a world map that includes all seven continents. Introduce or review the names of the continents and label them on the map. Also label where students live. Share with students that *Clara* primarily takes place in two continents: Asia and Europe. Pass out copies of a world map and direct students to label Asia, Africa, and Europe. As students read *Clara*, they will continue to label the map with countries and cities on Clara's tour.

VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

Some of the vocabulary in *Clara* may be new to students. Consider previewing the following words before reading the book: *continent*, *mythical*, *vessel*, *pitched*, *hurled*, *noble*, *essence*, *orangerie*, *beckoned*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The story is set "nearly three hundred years ago, when half the world was still a mystery to the other half." Ask students what the author means by this description. Why was Captain van der Meer shocked upon seeing Clara for the first time?
2. In eighteenth-century Europe many people believed that rhinos were "mythical beasts." Ask students to think of truly mythical beasts, such as dragons and griffins. Why would people think that rhinos might not exist, other than in stories?
3. Discuss the captain's early treatment of Clara. How does he demonstrate his commitment to caring for the young animal? Why was owning a baby rhino a "large responsibility"?
4. After the ship lands in Holland, the captain "hurried Clara off to his home in Leiden." Study the picture in which the captain is luring Clara along the road by offering her two oranges. Describe the thoughts and feelings of the onlookers. What might the young boy who points at the pair be saying?
5. In addition to being responsible for Clara's care, the captain needed to devise a plan for transporting her around Europe. What traits and skills does the captain have that allow him to accomplish his goals?
6. Discuss the meaning of this description of Clara: "Clara might have been homely on the outside, but she had a beautiful soul."
7. Reread the advertisement that the captain had printed on posters and flyers: "There has arrived in Europe an animal called rhinoceros." How might these descriptions of Clara encourage people to come out to see her? What parts of the advertisement do you think are most enticing?

8. How are the captain and Clara an "unlikely duo"?
9. Upon seeing Clara, the King of Prussia described her as *incredible*, *monstrous*, and *noble*. Discuss the meaning of these three adjectives and how each applies to Clara. The author writes that "Frederick has recognized Clara's essence." Discuss the meaning of this word and challenge students to come up with synonyms.
10. Captain van der Meer was a clever business man. Describe how the captain used his intelligence throughout his seventeen years touring with Clara.
11. Imagine standing on the banks of the Rhine River and catching a glimpse of a "mythical" beast moving downriver on a raft. Some people said that the sight of Clara "changed them forever." Why do you think people had such strong reactions to, and memories of, seeing the rhinoceros?
12. What is a celebrity? How was Clara a celebrity?
13. Why is the captain "speechless" when King Louis XV declares that he wants Clara for his menagerie? Why do you think he presented the king with such a large price—one hundred thousand pieces of gold—to purchase Clara? Do you think it would have been better for Clara if the captain had given her to the king?
14. On the last page, the author writes that "[Clara] had taken care of [the captain], too." How did Clara take care of the captain?
15. How was Clara "the greatest trouper and truest friend"?
16. The author's note states: "Today, we know that confining and exhibiting a wild animal is inhumane. But Clara lived in a time before people understood her needs." Discuss the important issue of animal rights with your students. How have people's thoughts on humane animal treatment changed since the time of Clara's story?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

San Diego Zoo. Rhinoceros information page: kids.sandiegozoo.org/animals/mammals/rhinoceros

Getty Museum of Art. Oudry's Painted Menagerie (interactive site): getty.edu/art/exhibitions/oudry/

This guide was created by Colleen Carroll, children's book author, writing teacher, curriculum writer/developer, literacy specialist, and education consultant.

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NAME _____

A VELVET TONGUE

Instructions: In the story readers learn that "Clara gave everyone she liked a lick. Her tongue was as soft as velvet." In the lines below, use figurative language to write other creative descriptions of Clara.

Her head was as _____ as _____.

Her eyes were as _____ as _____.

Her skin was as _____ as _____.

Her legs were as _____ as _____.

Her ears were as _____ as _____.

Her horn was as _____ as _____.

Educators: Reproduce this sheet for your students.

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NAME _____

RHINOMANIA!

Instructions: Clara the rhinoceros fascinated all who laid eyes on her. Poets, painters, scientists, musicians, fashion designers, and even shipbuilders were moved by "the strangest animal on earth." In the space below, write a poem, draw a picture, or design a product inspired by Clara.

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