



THE WORLD'S GREATEST LION: A TRUE STORY OF SURVIVAL

by Ralph Helfer

Illustrations by Ted Lewin

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Nominee 2015
Grades 3-5**

*Submitted by Julye Lerma, Librarian,
Levi Milton Elementary, Walker, LA*

Title: *The World's Greatest Lion – A True Story of Survival*

Author: Ralph Helfer

Illustrator: Ted Lewin

Publisher: Philomel Books

Pages: 40

SUMMARY

Beautifully written and illustrated, *The World's Greatest Lion* is the story of Zamba, the lion who led other animals to safety during a flooding of the ranch where the animals lived.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Ralph Helfer is a well-known Hollywood animal trainer who was one of the first to use affection and kindness to train wild animals. He is the author of *The Beauty of the Beasts*, and he lives in Los Angeles and Kenya, where he leads safari tours.

Biographical information taken from HarperCollins Publishers at
<http://www.harpercollins.com/cr-102847/ralph-helfer>,

Accessed August 27, 2014.

ILLUSTRATOR BIOGRAPHY

Ted Lewin grew up in Buffalo, New York, with two brothers, one sister, two parents, a lion, an iguana, and a chimpanzee. Ted always knew he wanted to be an illustrator. As a child he copied the works of illustrators and painters he admired. When it came time to go to art school, he needed to earn money to finance his education so he took a summer job as a professional wrestler. Ted's career as an artist began with illustrations for adventure magazines, but over the last thirty-five years he has devoted full time to writing and illustrating children's books. Ted and his wife Betsy live in Brooklyn, New York, where they share their home with their cat, Sophie.

Biographical information from the illustrator's website at <http://www.tedlewin.com/>,
Accessed August 27, 2014.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Illustrator website <http://www.tedlewin.com/>

OTHER TITLES BY AUTHOR

Modoc: The True Story of the Greatest Elephant That Ever Lived (2007)

The World's Greatest Elephant, Illustrated by Ted Lewin (2006)

Zamba: The True Story of the Greatest Lion That Ever Lived (2006)

OTHER TITLES BY ILLUSTRATOR

Can You See Me? (2014)

Look! (2013)

Lost City: The Discovery of Machu Picchu (2003)

Stable (2010)

RELATED TITLES (Students may also enjoy these titles)

Christian the Lion by Anthony Bourke and John Rendall

A Friend For Einstein by Charlie Cantrell

Friends: True Stories of Extraordinary Animal Friendships by Catherine Thimmesh

A Lion Called Christian: The True Story of the Remarkable Bond Between Two Friends and a Lion by Anthony Bourke and George Adamson

Shadow by Michael Morpurgo

Tarra and Bella: The Elephant and Dog Who Became Best Friends by Carol Buckley

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Art:

- Locate the area of Africa where the beginning of the story takes place. What animals live in this area? Investigate how these animals interact with each other. Create a diorama of this habitat including the landforms and animals that inhabit the area.
- Lions, especially male lions, are called “the king of the jungle.” How are lion packs really organized? Look it up, and draw what a lion’s court might look like.

Writing:

- Choose another animal book in which the animals have an unusual relationship. Write a reaction paper about their relationship. Search the web for more information about these animals. (ex. Tara and Bella by Carol Buckley)
- Write a report on lions or create a pamphlet about lions. Here are some potential sources:
 - www.lions.org
 - www.animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/african-lion
 - www.nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/greatcats/lionfacts.cfm
- Do a web search on “affection training”. Are there other types of training used on animals?
- Write a paper defending or objecting to the use of animals in films or television.

Science:

Zamba and the other animals at Ralph’s ranch hide from the storm, and the resulting flash flood, under Old Lady. Make a flood model with the class by shaping a landscape out of sand and pouring water on it with a watering can.

Social Science:

Zamba, renamed “Leo the Lion”, was one of 5 lions used as the MGM mascot – the lion who roared before each movie began. Before which movies did Zamba/Leo roar? Have you seen any of these movies? With your parent’s/teacher’s help, try to watch one. How does the movie compare to another one that you might have seen lately?

Vocabulary:

Grasslands	Horrific
Intruder	Abrupt
Staggered	Soothing
Aggressive	Companion
Situation	Deluge

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about the use of animals in movies and television?
2. What do you think made Zamba lead the other animals to the top of the hill to safety?
3. How do you feel about taking animals from their natural habitat?
4. Do you think “affection training” is a good idea? Why or why not?
5. Would you be interested in working with animals when you grow up? What field would you choose? Why?
6. Would you be interested in visiting a country in Africa? Where would you go? Why?

RELATED WEBSITES

IMDB: Zamba

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm3815917/>

See a list of Zamba’s acting roles.

Animal Trainer Ralph Helfer and Producer Ivan Tors

<http://daktarivshow.wordpress.com/2013/05/22/the-story-of-africa-u-s-a-and-its-proprieters-animal-trainer-ralph-helfer-and-daktari-producer-ivan-tors/>

An article about animals in movies with quotations and photos of the author.