

Teaching Guide to *Shortcuts* by Jeff Harris

Introduction

Shortcuts by Jeff Harris is a beautifully illustrated, fact-packed page that makes learning fun. Each week, *Shortcuts'* multicultural cast (Juanita, K., Roland, Junior and James) offers facts, riddles, jokes and puzzles to help kids learn about science, geography, animals, food, history and holidays.

Each teaching guide provides ideas for expanding the lesson and creating discussion and learning activities for your students. The grade level for the guides is usually 3rd to 4th, but they can be adapted for use at other levels. The guides are broken down into four areas:

1. Questions for Discussion and Further Study

Designed to help students think and research, not just give one-word answers

2. Activity Ideas

Designed to allow students to be creative and teach themselves

3. Use the News

Designed to have students use the news in studying each topic

4. Quick Quiz

Designed to be adaptable to several grade levels, evaluate students' comprehension and build vocabulary and math skills

You might use the teaching guides in the following ways:

Questions for Discussion and Further Study: Engage the entire class by asking each question aloud and listing the students' answers on the board. Or have them use reference resources to give their own answers to the questions. Allow them to discuss other students' answers after they've researched the topics. Key words or phrases that can help students search for more information are italicized.

Activity Ideas: Give the students a time limit to research their projects, using library or study time. By having the students cite their resources you can check their work; or, alternatively, tell them which resource(s) you prefer them to use.

Use the News: These can be worked on individually but we suggest they work in groups to learn teamwork skills.

- **Quick Quiz:** We suggest you review the quizzes ahead of time and change the phrasing or difficulty level based on the students' abilities.

Shortcuts: TAKING A GANDER AT THE SALAMANDER

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Objective: After completing the exercises, students should have a better understanding of salamanders.

Subject Areas: The following information about salamanders will be discussed:

- Regenerating limbs
- Mythology of salamanders
- Various species of salamanders

Evaluation: Students may be evaluated using the following point scale:

Four points: Information is accurate, organized, shows creative thought/use of materials

Three points: Information is accurate and organized

Two points: Information is mostly accurate; organization needs some work

One point: Significant inaccuracies; lacks organization

Topics for Discussion and Further Study

1. How long does it take for a lost arm, leg, or tail to grow back on a salamander?
2. Are the giant Chinese salamanders dangerous to humans?

Activity Ideas

- Why did ancient people believe salamanders could live in fire? Do we still believe this? Research and write a brief explanation of what you learn about this strange belief.
- What kinds of salamanders are there? Where do they live? What do they eat? What makes them unique from other salamanders? Research and write a report about a specific species of salamander. This could be a written, oral, or poster report.

Use the News

- When salamanders go through “metamorphosis,” they change into a different form of animal. The word "metamorphosis" can be used in many other situations. What words can you find in the newspaper that are new to you, or interesting to you? Make a list of these terms and look up the definition for them. Then you can collect and make a class list of all these interesting words. A large poster of this vocabulary could be posted in your classroom each week.

Answers to the Quiz

1.) b, 2.) d, 3.) a, 4.) b, 5.) a, 6.) c , 7.) metamorphosis, 8.) larva 9.) 67, 10.) 8

Quick Quiz — Salamanders

1. Most salamanders use their claws for digging.
a. True b. False
2. Species of salamanders that spend most of their lives in water are often called _____.
a. lizards b. larva c. predators d. newts
3. Salamanders are amphibians.
a. True b. False
4. Some salamanders are able to secrete _____ from their skin.
a. fire b. poison c. water d. acid
5. Salamanders hatch from eggs.
a. True b. False
6. Some species of salamanders that spend most of their time in the water do not have _____.
a. tails b. fore legs c. hind legs d. eyes

Vocabulary Comprehension

7. The process called _____ is when a salamander transforms into an air-breathing land animal.
8. After hatching from an egg, a young salamander is called a _____.

Math Comprehension (subtraction, division, addition, fractions)

9. If a salamander lays 96 eggs, but only 29 hatch, how many did not hatch?
10. If only 20% of 40 eggs survived, how many would that be?