

FunJungle: *Lion Down*

By Stuart Gibbs

About the Book

For once, operations at the enormous zoo/theme park FunJungle appear to be running smoothly (except for the occasional herring-related mishap in the penguin exhibit), and Teddy Fitzroy is finally able to give detective work a rest. When a local lion is accused of killing a famous dog, the dog's owner, an inflammatory radio host, goes on a crusade to have the cat declared a nuisance so it can be hunted. However, there's evidence that the lion might have been framed for murder and now a renegade animal activist wants Teddy and his girlfriend, Summer, to help prove it and catch the real killer. And if that wasn't enough, someone has poisoned FunJungle's beloved giraffes, and the park's owner wants Teddy on the case. Teddy soon finds himself wrapped up in the middle of his most bizarre, hilarious, and dangerous case yet.

Discussion Questions

The discussion questions below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (R.L.4.1-3, 7, 9) (R.L.5.1-4, 7, 9) (R.L.6.1-3.) (W.4-6.4)

1. At the opening of *Lion Down*, Teddy tells readers, "I got mixed up with the cougar chaos the same morning I was shot with a herring." What about that statement is unusual? Why is it such a good opening line? Explain your answers. Given what you know about Teddy's past experiences, what do you predict is in store for him?
2. When speaking about the penguin exhibit at FunJungle, Summer tells her father, "In the exhibit, they look like a bunch of pet dogs, sitting around, begging for treats." Why is this problematic?
3. Though it's obvious that J.J. McCracken is an intelligent and savvy businessman, he claims that Summer is smarter than he is and reminds people that she came up with the idea for FunJungle when she was seven. Considering her advice to him in *Lion Down*, what other ways do we see him take her feedback and advice to heart?
4. When Teddy threatens to post a picture of Summer looking like a fashion disaster after she teases him about his appearance while using the fish cannon, Summer playfully says, "Don't make me use this, Teddy. I once killed a man with a halibut. Put the phone down." Consider this interaction. What can we infer about Summer's personality from this statement? Do you think she would ever really hurt Teddy?

5. Readers learn a great deal about hippos, rhinos, pandas, mountain lions, and other animals in *Lion Down*. Which animal facts most interested or surprised you? Which animal would you like to know more about?

6. What do you think are Teddy's and Summer's favorite parts of getting to go "behind the scenes"? Are there any ways in which these privileges aren't always positive? Can new roles come with new sets of responsibilities?

7. Why does Teddy feel drawn to Summer? Consider the evolution of their friendship. How would you characterize their relationship? How can you tell that they care about each other? Does their relationship change over the course of the novel? Given their interaction at the end of the story, how might things be different for them moving forward? In what ways might this development complicate their investigative work?

8. In what ways does the arrival of Lily Deakin, Doc's daughter, complicate Teddy's and Summer's lives?

9. Because of his mother's work at FunJungle, Teddy gets to reside at the zoo. Do you have a favorite theme park or zoo? Imagine what it would be like to live there. What would be the greatest benefits to the experience? What would be the biggest challenges? Do you think Teddy takes advantage of this unusual situation?

10. After Summer asks Lily what they can do to help her, she says, "I was really only looking for Teddy. I understand he's solved a few crimes around here." Do you think Teddy handles this misunderstanding appropriately? How could he have handled it differently? Explain your reasoning.

11. Teddy states, "We're not really detectives. We're just kids who've gotten wrapped up in things." Given his comment, do you think Teddy regrets their involvement in earlier FunJungle mysteries? If so, why might he consider once again solving a mystery? Why don't you think he wants to consider himself a detective?

12. Using what you've learned about him in *Lion Down*, describe Lincoln Stone. Do you believe him to be a good person? How does his personality affect his actions? Explain your reasoning. Do you know anyone with a similar personality? How do you feel about them?

13. Consider the unusual cast of secondary characters. Who did you like the most? Who did you like the least? Of all of the characters, who do you most relate to? Explain your answers.

14. Teddy says, "Lincoln Stone didn't fight FunJungle for environmental reasons. He hates environmentalists. He only tried to stop this park from being built because he lives close by and didn't want tourists around." In what ways does living near a large attraction like FunJungle complicate things for local residents? What might be some advantages and disadvantages? How does where you live affect your lifestyle or emotional well-being?

15. Why do you think Lincoln tells the public that his dog is a prized golden retriever? Can you think of any benefits to doing this, or do you think it's more about Lincoln's own public image? Explain your answer.

16. After Summer teases Teddy for being recognized by Grayson Mason, he playfully retorts, "You're just jealous because someone recognized me for once and not you." Consider Summer's reluctance to be out in public, and her desire to wear sunglasses and a baseball cap. Why do you think she doesn't like to draw attention to herself? What would the biggest challenges be for someone like Summer? Do you think you would change your lifestyle or the way you make decisions if you were in Summer's shoes? Do you think people have a right to privacy, no matter who they are?

17. Grayson tells Teddy and Summer, "King was a nice dog. We liked him a lot. Even if Mr. Stone didn't." Teddy and Summer begin to suspect Lincoln Stone isn't nearly as attached to his dog as he claims. What might Lincoln's motivation be to pretend to be so upset about King's death? Is there anything to gain from the capture of the mountain lion?

18. What did you learn from environmentalists in this book? Do you think laws should be broken if an animal's life is at risk? Explain your position.

19. Why does determining the reason for the giraffes' recurring illnesses pose such a problem for Teddy and Summer, as well as for the rest of the staff at FunJungle? Do you think they did a good job trying to figure out what was wrong?

20. Though their previous investigations have been incredibly successful, why are Teddy's and Summer's parents somewhat resistant to having them continue digging into this mystery? Do you agree with their reasoning? Explain your answer.

21. Why does learning that FunJungle hired Jerry to try to deal with the mountain lion upset Teddy and Summer? Why does having a mountain lion on the FunJungle property pose such a problem? Do you think J.J. is right to try to remove it by whatever means necessary?

22. At the end of *Lion Down*, Teddy and Summer once again solve an important mystery. Predict what new mystery will come their way in the next installment of the FunJungle books.

Extension Activities

Penguin Exhibits

In *Lion Down*, readers learn that FunJungle's penguin exhibit is one of the largest in the world, with 416 birds on display. Using library resources to discover more information, determine the largest penguin exhibits both in the United States and internationally. Be sure to learn the following:

- Where are these penguin exhibits located?
- Are there any special programs offered for attendees?
- What are the biggest challenges in exhibiting penguins?

- Does the exhibit share information about conservation efforts?

After synthesizing your information, share what you've learned with your classmates.

Wild Refuge Research

At the novel's conclusion, readers discover that Teddy persuaded J.J. to create the Summer McCracken Wildlife Refuge. Working in small groups, learn more about wildlife refuges. Be sure to consider the following:

- How are refuges different from other animal sanctuaries?
- Are there established animal refuges here in the United States?
- Where are those located?
- Who funds these refuges?
- How are they protected?
- What other interesting facts did you discover?

Using this knowledge, create a visual that can be showcased and shared with others.

Conservation and You

As noted in *Lion Down*, habitat loss is the greatest threat to animals all over the earth. While this is an incredibly serious problem, organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Nature Conservancy are working on ways to protect wildlife and help to combat the loss. Working in a small group, review the websites for WWF ([wwf.panda.org](http://www.panda.org)) and Nature Conservancy (nature.org) to discover what ideas are already being realized. After reviewing these sites, work with a small group to draft an outline or idea map that captures the strategic plans your group suggests to best help animals. Share your group's ideas with the class.

Point of View Play

Throughout the course of the novel, readers gain insight into Teddy's point of view based on the events of *Lion Down*. Assume the role of one of the secondary characters, and draft a diary entry detailing what you experienced and witnessed. To prepare, create an outline using the five Ws (who, what, when, where, and why). Remember to write in first person, and give special attention to sensory imagery (what you saw, smelled, and heard).

You're on Trial

After reading *Lion Down*, brainstorm "crimes" committed by the characters. Work with your classmates to act as the prosecution or defense for the selected characters, while also acting as the jury for other groups as they present their cases. Use several sources to research the cases, including the novel and Internet resources on judicial proceedings and roles of the members of a trial. Then write a persuasive piece to complement your work. Additional resources for literary mock trials can be found at www.readwritethink.org.

DIY: Graphic Novel

In small groups, select a favorite scene from *Lion Down* and create either a digitally or manually illustrated graphic novel for that scene. Using a digital comic strip creator such as <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/> or <http://infinitecomic.com>, begin by using the strips

to create storyboards for your scene. Select original art, images, and graphics. Consider panel size and number of panels, transitions and layouts, artwork, writing, and lettering. Alternatively, you and a partner can assume the roles of two of the characters, taking into account personality and voice. Interact with your partner in character by extending a scene from one of the FunJungle novels.

Now in Theaters: *Lion Down*

Design an original book trailer for *Lion Down*. Begin by creating a storyboard, detailing which scenes you intend to incorporate into your trailer and how much to reveal about the story. Use a moviemaker program of choice such as iMovie or Animoto. Consider posting your finished trailers to YouTube.

Let's Play Favorites

Working with others, create a character trait silhouette about your favorite or least favorite character in *Lion Down*. Begin by tracing an appropriately sized member of the group onto butcher paper. The silhouette must be life-size. The traced silhouette should reflect physical traits of the character, so modify as you draw. Next, cut out the silhouette and include ten values from your list. These need to be the most important character traits. For each trait, include a quote that supports the description. Inside the silhouette, include symbols which represent your character's interests, personality, beliefs, skills, or profession.

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