

# Save the Mountain Gorillas

Join us in the Arapahoe Ridge Elementary gym from 5-6:30 p.m. May 9th 2019.

Bring your money for donations, bracelets and more so you can help save the Mountain Gorillas. All money will go to the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund.



© Andy Rouse / Barcroft Media



## By: Mrs Glass's Class



*Grandma, tell us a story!" The children cried as they gathered around grandma.*

*"What do you want me to tell you a story about?" Grandma asked.*

*"Tell us about mountain gorillas before they went extinct," Tommy said.*

*"Yeah!" Hanna, Sarah and Jeremy agreed.*

*"Okay," Grandma replied. " Back in the year 2020 I was helping the park rangers monitor the last living mountain gorilla. There was a terrible war going on at the time. Suddenly, we heard a loud BANG. The great beast was hit and fell to the ground. We all tried to help it but it was too late."*

*"Why were they so special, grandma?" Sarah asked.*

*"Well, honey, mountain gorillas were a lot like you and me. In fact, they shared 98.3% of the same DNA as humans."*

*"What happened to a happy ending, grandma?" Tommy asked.*

*"There was no happy ending. People chose money over life."*

Do you want this fictional story to become a reality? If we don't act now, mountain gorillas will become the new age dinosaurs...**EXTINCT!**

There is so much you can learn about the background of mountain gorillas, why they matter, other threats they face and what you (and others) can do to help them. The survival of mountain gorillas is in your hands.

These magnificent animals have been around for 7-11 million years. Do you really want them to go extinct? If we don't do something now, then the mountain gorillas won't survive much longer. They live at elevations of 8,000 ft to 13,000 ft in the mountains of the Congo Basin in Africa. They share many characteristics with humans because our DNA is so similar. For example, they live in families that are usually made up of 5-10 gorillas, but families with as many as 50 gorillas have been found. They care for each other and communicate feelings and warnings with grunting sounds and body language. Also, gorillas build new nests in the rainforest every night. At the age of 14 male gorillas get their silver backs and they use signals to warn other males about poachers or danger. There are a mere 790 mountain gorillas left in the wild and they only live in a tiny, yet important part of the world! Park rangers and volunteers are trying their best to save the Mountain Gorillas. Read on to find out why they are an indispensable species.

Why are mountain gorillas a critical species to protect? Well, gorillas are important globally because they are our closest living relatives, sharing 98.3% DNA with humans. Also, they create biodiversity, which is done by spreading the seeds from the fruit they eat. This is possible because by not chewing the seeds in their fruit, the seeds pass right through the digestive tract. Whenever gorillas "do their business", another seed gets planted and fertilized! Gorillas also help biodiversity by eating leaves and opening up gaps in the trees as they tromp around, letting the sunlight shine through and rain reach the forest floor. In addition, when the rainforests they live in are healthy, moisture in their habitat is evaporated and, through the water cycle, becomes the rain we desperately need around the world. Because gorillas help forests thrive, trees are able to take in carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and give out oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>). Some people even call the forests they live in "Earth's living lungs." Clearly, mountain gorillas really do matter to all creatures, all over the world. So why would we put these animals in danger?

It is hard to imagine that humans would allow these magnificent creatures to become endangered. Shockingly, humans are not only allowing it to happen, they are the number one reason that mountain gorillas are fighting for their survival. Issues like war, habitat destruction and weak law enforcement in the Congo area put mountain gorillas in great danger. For over 20 years, a horrible civil war has ravaged the area where mountain gorillas live. It all started when two tribes, the Tutsi and the Hutu, began fighting for power over Rwanda. It is estimated that up to 1,000,000 people, half of which were children, were killed in this war. Additionally, rangers from Virunga National Park claim at least 15 gorillas were killed due to violence in the park and countless other gorillas were killed in unprotected areas. Another major threat to the well-being of mountain gorillas is habitat loss. The forests where mountain gorillas dwell are also rich with resources such as oil, trees (used to build homes and make charcoal), coltan (a mineral used in making cell phones), and rich, fertile soil that can be used by local people for farming. Humans have not only destroyed precious mountain gorilla habitat, they have also set illegal traps to catch animals for their meat and illegal pet trade. Many gorillas have been caught in these traps and have been killed and sold as bushmeat. Orphaned mountain gorillas are illegally sold as "adorable" pets. It is difficult for the government and park rangers to catch these illegal poachers due to lack of funding and resources and an unstable government. While the mountain gorillas certainly are facing numerous challenges, there is still hope, and it lies with you and me.

You may be asking yourself, "How can I help?" Fortunately there are many ways that you can make the mountain gorillas future look much brighter. The first thing you can do is donate to amazing organizations that are working to eliminate the threats that mountain gorillas face. Two of these organizations are the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund and Research Center and WWF (World Wildlife Fund) where you can adopt a mountain gorilla which will help pay for food and medical treatment for animals in need. The second thing you can do is take action. You can take action by teaching others about preventing poaching and illegal wildlife trade, working to make more protected areas for gorillas, and protecting the land that they call home. As Mahatma Gandhi says, "Be the change you want to see in the world"

It is horrible to imagine our planet without mountain gorillas. Now that you know how you can help gorillas, you have two choices to make. You can either work to save mountain gorillas or their story will end just like grandma's. The part she didn't tell was that if mountain gorillas go extinct, humans will be right behind them. We depend on gorillas for the very air we breathe. You know why they are important, you know the threats they face daily and you know how to help. Now put your knowledge to work and help mountain gorillas survive. Your future might just depend on it.

### Sources

World Wildlife Fund

Zoobooks: Gorillas (January 2017)

Netflix Documentary called Our Planet: Jungles (2019)

Netflix Documentary called Africa: Congo (2019)

Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund