

Save the Mountain Gorillas

If we work together we can save mountain gorillas!

-Join us on May 9th.

-Held in the
Arapahoe Ridge
Elementary gym.

-5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Please bring money
to donate (small bills
or direct credit card
donations) to make
purchases and raise
money for the **Dian
Fossey Gorilla
Fund!**



Save my
species!



This document
is made by
Jordyn N. and
Xylena C. in
Mr.L's class.

Flip over to read about the mountain gorilla's legacy, why the matter, the horrific threats they face, and how you and others can help.

Mr.L's Shared Class Mountain Gorilla Essay

We can all agree that any human would shudder at the mere thought of killing another precious life. What we can't seem to all agree on is what defines a precious life? Does it have to be human? Could it be an animal? What about an animal that is 98.3% genetically identical to our DNA and known as our 3rd closest cousin? These precious lives (roughly 800 left in the wild) that is being brought to extinction from the jungles of Africa is none other than the mountain gorillas. Mountain gorillas have a fascinating background, matter to our planet for countless reasons, have horrific threats in the face of their existence, yet can be helped. For these reasons, I know mountain gorillas are the most important endangered species to be saved! The survival of our *human-like* relatives rest solely in our own *human* hands.

The legacy of the mountain gorilla started with their discovery in 1902 . Primarily found in Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda, mountain gorillas faced immediate tragedy, left with a prediction of extinction by the year 2000. Today, 2019, mountain gorillas are not yet extinct but are considered, "high risk of becoming extinct." According to The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) this ranking is better known as **ENDANGERED**. Despite being endangered, the mountain gorilla population has slightly increased from years of effort. Currently, mountain gorillas (scientific name: *Gorilla beringei beringei*) are estimated to be between 800 and 1000 in number. This subspecies of the eastern gorilla can weigh up to 500 pounds (full grown silverback male) and stand upright towards 5 ½ feet. These sizes shouldn't frighten you because the mountain gorilla is really a misunderstood gentle giant. What should frighten you, however, is how the *giant* role they play in our world is fading away.

Try to imagine the infinite number of reasons that the mountain gorilla matters for. First, mountain gorillas help maintain the ecosystem in many unique ways. According to the show, *Our Planet* on [Netflix](#). "Gorillas, along with Elephants, act as the gardeners of the RainForest." This means when they eat, they spit out the seeds, spreading them across the Rainforest floor. This allows more specific plants to grow in other areas. Even more, as they move around spreading the seeds, they create gaps into the trees, which act as trails to allow other animals to know where to find important locations to go to (for watering holes w/ minerals like salt and food locations). Lastly, these trails also allow light to pass through and let smaller plants grow (a.k.a the sun-loving plants). Another reason why mountain gorillas matter is because as humans protecting them, it protects the rainforests too, which keeps the world balanced. We can infer that without the Rainforests there would be a bigger global warming impact, such as no rain (which helps cool the Earth down). According to The Nature Conservancy, the world's rainforests cover less than 2% of the Earth's surface area yet has 50% of the Earth's living species (plants and animals). By protecting rainforests in Africa and around the world, we can protect that 50% of living things on Earth. Located in these rainforests we tend to think of these fluffy giants as dangerous and helpless but they're nearly *exactly* like us. They are 98.3% genetically identical to us. Mountain gorillas laugh like us, having feelings like us, play like us, eat like us, and share many other similarities to humans. When we hunt them it's like killing our own cousins. This means, by taking their land or poaching them, we are eliminating the chance to learn from them, and even more, taking the chance away from evolution that could allow other life to evolve. Even with all the reasons on why the mountain gorillas matter, humans still create excuses and threats to these gentle giants.

Now you know how much the mountain gorillas truly matter, but let me tell you how much mountain gorillas are threatened by habitat destruction, disease, war, and commercial exploitation. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo mountain gorillas have been under threat since their discovery in 1902. Habitat destruction is the action of *destroying* a species habitat. This is one of big threats mountain gorillas face. Humans are moving into gorilla habitats and clear the forests for land, crops, and ultimately money. WWF says "Even land within protected areas is not safe from clearing any more." Over the past year, 3,700 acres of land have been overruled for housing and construction reasons. This causes the gorillas to move higher up the mountain, and as you know, the higher you go, the colder it gets which is hard for gorillas to live through. Even their thick fur can't protect them from the cold. Another threat mountain gorillas face is disease. WWF says, "Gorillas that come into contact with humans can be vulnerable to human disease, which gorillas experience in more severe forms." This means that slight exposure to disease can be fatal. This is happening more and more to mountain gorillas. Another threat gorillas face is war. Mountain gorillas live on the main battlefield of the civil war over the mountain gorillas territory. They travel many miles a day so when there's war going on they interfere with gunfire, bomb tanks, smoke, and anything war related. If a gorilla gets hit that's one less gorilla in the population. After the war in 1990, war refugees went into Virunga National Park, home to ½ the gorilla population. Once there, mass poaching and habitat destruction ensued in the fight for the land's resources like oil. The last threat mountain gorillas face is commercial exploitation. You probably are wondering what commercial exploitation is, and no it has nothing to do with a commercial on T.V it has something to do with poaching, illegal trade and trading animals as pets for money, in other words milking it (taking advantage of an animal and making money out of it). The effects that commercial exploitation does on mountain gorilla makes it hard to enforce laws on poaching, illegal trading, and taking innocent animals to be pets. It's hard to enforce laws because this mostly happens in remote areas places hard to find. This can endanger or cause extinction to specific animals. Now you understand what horrific threats they face, it's time to know how to help these mountain gorillas.

Now for the big moment. How you can help save the Mountain Gorilla? One way to help the gentle giant is to help raise awareness on how many gorillas are being killed for bushmeat or because of land conflict. You can do this just by telling somebody, or posting information on social media. There are multiple efforts happening to help save mountain gorillas but one group that stands out is the World Wildlife Fund (aka WWF). You can help by donating to fundraisers such as the ones WWF and other corporations such as T.R.A.F.F.I.C. are setting up. These donations help them purchase drones to go and scout for poachers, help train rangers to help with tourism, to help raise more money, reinforce laws, and create protected areas. These donations can also help with teaching tracking methods, and help with the research of understanding these creatures. Helping these corporations can allow them to help talk to the lumber businesses that are cutting down the trees in the gorilla's habitat and also in talking to the governments about creating reinforced areas. They are also providing the villages with resources to keep them from hunting the gorillas to get bushmeat for protein. WWF also teamed up with a musician Samba Mapangala and his orchestra to create a song that holds a positive message in a uplifting tone to intrigue the listener. The song is called Les Gorilles des Montagnes. The song helped raise awareness of how mountain gorillas play a humongous role in ecotourism, which can improve local livelihoods. It was free and poured out of local radio stations, schools, streets, and homes. Les Gorilles des Montagnes was recorded in Swahili, the number one language spoken in the Virunga landscape. Countless other organizations, including the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, dedicate themselves to the necessary efforts of conservation, dedication, and study of gorillas in the wild. *Zoobooks* expert John Bonnett Wexo says, "Gorillas are peaceful creatures. If people are willing to leave them a place to live, without bothering them, they will continue to survive, as they have for millions of years." The more people think about what they're doing to help mountain gorillas, starting with leaving them alone, the more change we'll make.

A mountain gorilla extinction would be a horrific tragedy and drastic changes must happen soon. To make this possible, the mountain gorilla needs to be the *top priority* animal saved from the endangered species list. You now know some mountain gorilla history, why they matter, the dramatic threats they face, and even ways others are currently helping- along with ways you can help too. The famous nonviolent activist Mahatma Gandhi once said, "A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history." Think now, what can you do in this mission to ensure that mountain gorillas thrive in our future instead of just becoming a forgotten part of history?



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

