

# EDUCATORS' GUIDE

## MAGIC TREE HOUSE<sup>®</sup>

# MERLIN MISSIONS

### **A Crazy Day with Cobras** and **Snakes and Other Reptiles:**

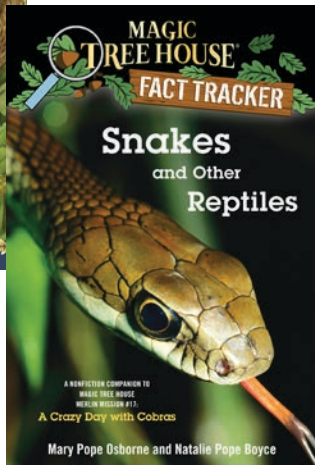
*A Nonfiction Companion to A Crazy Day with Cobras*



PB: 978-0-375-86795-8  
EL: 978-0-375-89875-4  
Grades: 2-5  
F&P: N • Lexile: 570L

#### **ABOUT *A Crazy Day with Cobras***

Merlin's beloved penguin, Penny, has been put under a spell! Jack and Annie must find four things to break the spell. The first is a rare and precious emerald. When the magic tree house whisks them back to India over four hundred years ago to search for the jewel, they discover an amazing and exotic world filled with great danger.



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Grades: 2-5  
F&P: Q • Lexile: 800L

#### **ABOUT *Snakes and Other Reptiles***

*A Nonfiction Companion to A Crazy Day with Cobras*

Can snakes really be charmed? What do komodo dragons like to eat? How do you tell the difference between an alligator and a crocodile? Which reptile has the deadliest venom? Find out the answers to these questions and more in Jack and Annie's nonfiction guide to snakes and other reptiles.

## CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

### **ACTIVITIES FOR *A Crazy Day with Cobras***

#### **Masterful Moguls**

After reading *A Crazy Day with Cobras*, students will be familiar with the history and magnificence of the Taj Mahal. In their adventures in India, Jack and Annie discover this astonishing example of Mogul architecture that was created by Shah Jahan, the Great Mogul who ruled India from 1628 to 1658. Facts found in the book about this magnificent structure include:

The Taj Mahal is a mausoleum—or tomb and monument—built in the mid-17th century in Agra, India.

It was built for the ruler of the Mogul Empire in memory of his favorite wife.

This beautiful building is regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Over 20,000 workers were used in its construction, which took over 20 years! The Taj Mahal was built entirely out of white marble, which was brought in from all over India and Asia.

The Taj Mahal is decorated with a variety of precious and semiprecious stones cut into the marble to make flowers.

Allow your students to work in small groups as “Masterful Moguls” and create their own Taj Mahals by designing models from various sizes of cardboard boxes and paper tubes. Students can use cereal boxes, tubular snack containers, disposable bowls, and various sizes of paper tubes for the construction. White paint, white construction paper squares, or Styrofoam squares can be used to cover the boxes to simulate the marble. Students can use markers, glitter pens, or plastic craft gem stones to create the flower-shaped gemstones in the marble. The surrounding gardens can be crafted using construction paper and paint or other creative materials such as clay or Model Magic. After “construction,” allow groups to further research the Taj Mahal and create posters to display alongside their models that include additional facts. Invite other classes to visit your classroom to view the Mogul masterpieces!

**CURRICULUM:** *History • Art*

### **An A+ Adventure!**

*A Crazy Day with Cobras* opens with Jack having just received a grade of A+ on a writing assignment in which he told of the exciting adventures in the tree house. Annie contributed by drawing pictures to accompany the story using her sparkle pens. This story proved to be the key to saving Penny, the little orphan penguin that helped save Merlin’s life. Allow your students to use their creative writing skills to create their own A+ adventures! Guide them through the writing process by first allowing them to create a story map. Use the Mission Mapping printable activity sheet to help students develop a plan for their story. Next, encourage students to create a rough draft using their maps. After proofreading and revising, students will be ready to write and illustrate their own tree house adventures. They may use sparkle pens (glitter pens), as Annie did, when drawing illustrations to accompany their text. Allow children time to share their stories with classmates. A class book entitled *A+ Tree House Adventures* could be created by binding all of the stories created by your students together. Students will enjoy having their own copies to take home to share with their family and friends.

**CURRICULUM:** *Language Arts*

### **Hide-and-Seek**

When Jack and Annie happen upon a cobra’s nest, they discover that cobras blend into their surroundings making them very difficult to see or detect. This camouflage helps protect animals and their young from predators. There are four main types of camouflage:

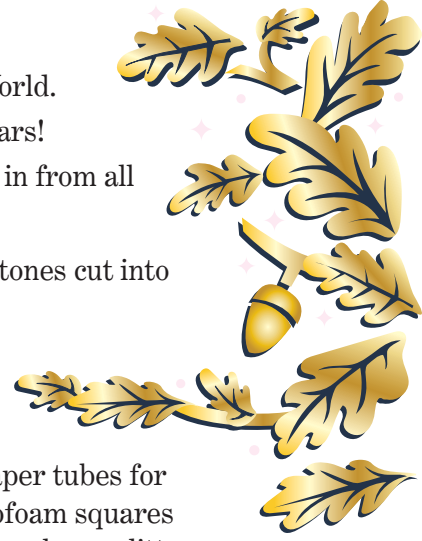
**BLENDING** is when colors on an animal’s body match its surroundings. Examples: crab spider, snowshoe rabbit, polar bear, cobra

**PATTERN** is when an animal’s stripes, spots, or other color markings make the outline of the animal’s body hard to see. Examples: tiger, zebra, leopard frog, blue-ringed octopus.

**DISGUISE** is when an animal hides in plain sight by looking like an object in its surroundings. Examples: leaf-mimic katydid, walking stick.

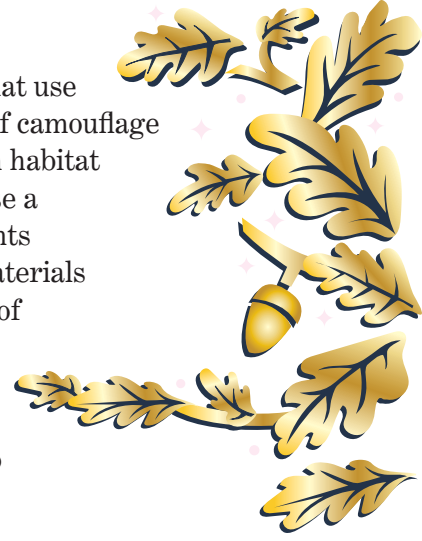
**MIMICRY** is when an animal’s looks and behavior imitate that of a harmful or distasteful animal, which makes enemies shy away. Examples: king snake, longhorn beetle, viceroy butterfly.

Guide your students in a study of the different habitats such as forests, deserts, ocean, arctic



region, or wetlands. Display pictures and provide resources of animals that use camouflage in these different environments. Review the different types of camouflage listed above. Next, supply a large section of bulletin board paper for each habitat studied. Label each with the name of the habitat. Allow students to choose a habitat and work in groups to create different habitat murals. The students should then create camouflaged animals for the selected habitats with materials of their choice. Encourage them to display animals using different types of camouflage. Have a checklist made for each mural of animals “hidden” in the picture. Classmates should check off the animals or “hidden treasures” they are able to identify. (This activity could also be adapted to individual use by giving students a large piece of construction paper to create the habitat and camouflaged animals of their choice.)

**CURRICULUM:** *Science*



## **ACTIVITIES FOR *Snakes and Other Reptiles:*** ***A Nonfiction Companion to A Crazy Day with Cobras***

### **Pre-Reading Activities**

Introduce animal skin coverings to students as a method by which animals are classified. Discuss the terms warm-blooded and cold-blooded as a way to identify animal groups. Expose students to vocabulary such as fur, scales, feathers, antlers, claws, eggs, live birth, webbed feet, nocturnal, and marsupial while discussing the pictures. Show pictures of 10 animals from various animal groups. Ask students to visually identify the animals that have fur, the animals with claws, the animals with scales, the animals that are warm-blooded, cold-blooded, etc.

Play a guessing game with students by having them make up clues about each animal picture. Divide your class into two teams. One team will make up riddles about the animals; the other will guess the animal. Only the team making up the riddles will be able to view the pictures during the game. Show 10 more pictures of animals and repeat the procedure reversing the roles of the two teams. The following examples could be used for this introductory game:

- **Turtle:** I have scales, a shell, four legs, and am cold-blooded.
- **Zebra:** I have black and white striped fur, four legs, and am warm-blooded.
- **Snake:** I have scales and no legs.
- **Frog:** I have smooth, wet skin and live near water.
- **Alligator:** I have scales, live in water, lay eggs, and have claws.
- **Deer:** I have fur, am warm-blooded, and have antlers.
- **Owl:** I have feather, claws, and am nocturnal.
- **Tiger:** I have fur, am warm-blooded, and have stripes.
- **Ostrich:** I have feathers, lay eggs, but can't fly.
- **Kangaroo:** I have fur, am warm-blooded, have strong hind legs, and am a marsupial.

### **Cracking the Cobra Code**

In *A Crazy Day with Cobras*, Jack and Annie get too close for comfort to a pair of king cobras protecting their nest from predators. Provide students with an entertaining way to learn more about these magnificent reptiles. Ask for volunteers to help you create a class cryptography wheel on construction paper or tag board using the second page of the Cracking the Cobra Code printable activity sheet. Students should connect the “Cobra Code” and “Plain Text” wheels by inserting a brad in the center of both wheels, which will provide ease in turning the wheels. Extra strength will be needed to insert the brad.

Give each student a copy of page one of the Cracking the Cobra Code printable activity sheet. In

order to decode the facts, students will need to use the cryptology wheel beginning in the following way: A on the plain text wheel should line up with O on the Cobra Code wheel. Older students may enjoy using their higher-order thinking skills to make up their own messages about other reptile facts from the research guide to be decoded by classmates using their cryptology wheels.

**CURRICULUM:** *Language Arts • Science*

### Calling All Turtles!

*Snakes and Other Reptiles* provides students with interesting facts about sea turtles. They discover that an amazing sight takes place once a year on beaches around the world. Hundreds of female sea turtles emerge from the ocean to crawl on shore, dig holes in the sand, and lay their eggs. When the eggs hatch, the babies head straight for the ocean guided by the moonlight reflected on the water. These turtles will return to the same beach where they were hatched. Allow your students to make a diorama depicting this fascinating scene. Students should bring a shoe box to school to use for their project. Supply them with paint, construction paper, sand for their “beach,” and walnut shell halves to use for 3-D turtle babies. After completing their dioramas, have students write descriptions about the nesting behaviors of sea turtles to accompany their projects.

**CURRICULUM:** *Art • Science • Language Arts*

*Teaching ideas provided by Paula Henson, the 2007 MTH Educator of the Year who is a teacher at the Christian Academy of Knoxville in Knoxville, TN.*

