



A Teacher's Guide: [**A Mountain Alphabet**](#)

by Margriet Ruurs

illustrated by Andrew Kiss

Themes include: environment / ecology, art, geography

About this book:

A black bear browsing on berries, a moose in the morning mist, a wolf walking through a winter wonderland - welcome to an alliterative journey through the magnificent mountains of western North America. Each painting captures a special mountain mood and invites readers to discover intriguing animals, plants, and even a letter of the alphabet. Thus a beautifully illustrated nature book becomes a puzzle book as well - one which young naturalists will spend hours exploring, discovering all the plants and animals found among the words listed at the back of the book. Truly a book for all ages, *A Mountain Alphabet* combines detailed information about our mountain landscapes with beautiful works of art. Objects that begin with a particular letter are waiting to be discovered in each of the twenty-six full-color paintings. A line of alliterative text describes the treasures of nature shown in each one. At the back of the book is a list of all the things that begin with each letter as well as detailed information about each setting painted. To encourage close observation of the illustrations, the artist has hidden a particular letter of the alphabet in each painting. The lyrical text and useful notes make this book as informative as it is beautiful.

Teaching Ideas:

Prereading Preparation:

Teacher-librarians may want to prepare cards for the library collection and

use throughout the school. Use two paperback editions of *A Mountain Alphabet*. Take the books apart so that each letter of the alphabet can be mounted and laminated.

Introduce the book:

- Show a copy of the book and tell students that it is much more than an alphabet book; it is also a puzzle book packed with information. Explain that one letter of the alphabet is hidden in each painting.
- Distribute the cards, one per student and, for younger children, allow approximately five minutes for them to find their assigned letter. (As far as possible, letters may be assigned matching students' initials.)
- Allow another five minutes for students to list as many plants and animals as they can find on their card. Reference books may be used.
- Shuffle the cards and redistribute them to repeat the exercise.
- Have students in turn read their card aloud.

Postreading:

- Mount the individual pages in order on a bulletin board or blackboard.
- Make a classroom chart with two columns: ANIMALS and PLANTS. Use one color on the chart to list all the names that the class can identify on each page over a period of a few days or a week. When everyone is "stuck," check the list at the back and add to the chart in a different color any names that were missed.
- Have several reference books available for identification and further information about unfamiliar species of animals and plants. Have students take another look at all the pictures to identify the species they aren't familiar with.
- Have students reread their page to the class, sharing information about one new animal and one new plant that they learned about.

Literary Connections

ALPHABET BOOKS:

- Display a variety of alphabet books from simple one-word-for-each-letter books to more complex examples. Discuss the author or illustrator's interpretation of art and language.

A few suggested titles

<i>John Burningham's ABC</i>	John Burningham	Primary
<i>The ABC Bunny</i>	Wanda Gag	Primary

Animal Alphabet Bert Kitchen Primary
Anno's Alphabet Mitsumasa Anno All Ages
Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions Margaret Musgrove
 Illustrated by L&D Dillon All Ages
A Northern Alphabet Ted Harrison All Ages
Play Mas'! A Carnival ABC Dirk McLean
 illustrated by Ras Stone All Ages
A Prairie Alphabet Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet
 Illustrated by Yvette Moore All Ages
A Seaside Alphabet Donna Grassby
 illustrated by Susan Tooke All Ages
The Z Was Zapped Chris Van Allsburg Intermediate

Thematic Connections

OUTDOOR RECREATION:

- Have students list all the outdoor activities shown in the paintings. These could be charted in a separate column with the plants and animals.

ENVIRONMENT / ECOLOGY:

- Discuss how mountains affect our way of life and how they help provide some of our basic needs:
 - water (snow and ice) for reservoirs
 - rivers that flow to the ocean, providing transport; silt in deltas for farming, and habitat for fish
 - minerals for mining
 - trees for the forest industry
 - a natural environment for a wide range of plants and animals
 - a natural environment for sports and recreation

Interdisciplinary Connections

SOCIAL STUDIES / PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY:

- Use a world map and/or an atlas. Have students locate the Alps in Europe, the Himalayas in Asia, the Andes in South America, and the Coast Ranges and Rockies in North America. Have students use the key or legend to compare the elevations of the various mountain ranges of the world.
- Focus on the Rockies and the Coast Ranges to have students determine how colors are used to show elevation. Find the names of some of the highest peaks.
- Use several reference books from the school library. Have students research the ways mountains are formed: volcanic explosions, ice-age formations, and sedimentary strata thrust upwards through pressure. Have them determine how the Rockies and the Coast Ranges were

formed.

SCIENCE:

- Discuss how mountains change over time and what causes the changes: a) natural forces: wind, ice, snow, glaciers, rain, running water, b) man-made forces: forestry overcutting, logging roads that allow increased progression of natural forces.

CONSERVATION:

- Why is conservation of natural resources important?
- What are some conservation measures now in place?
- What is sustainable logging?

ART:

- Compare the naturalistic style of art by Andrew Kiss in *A Mountain Alphabet* with more interpretive styles, for example, the later works of members of the Group of Seven, or Emily Carr.
- Compare the various effects produced by different mediums, for example, oil paintings by Andrew Kiss in *A Mountain Alphabet* and watercolor paintings by Tony Onley.
- Art and language enrichment activity: Have pairs of students design a travel brochure to advertise a holiday in a mountain region. Have several brochures for other areas available for reference and to use as models. Consider the recipients and their needs. What facilities might they want? What interests would the people who receive these brochures have? Consider the balance of information and illustration.

ENGLISH / LANGUAGE ARTS:

- Have the students make their own alphabet book as a class project. Decide on the subject; perhaps their own school, town, or neighborhood. Have each student be responsible for one or two pages. Challenge them to write sentences with words beginning with only their initial letter. (Exceptions may be made for rarely used letters.)
- Language appreciation and grammar: Teachers can easily develop a chart using students' information from "their" page of the book. Answers must be based on the initial letter and the correct context of the word in the sentence. For example:

	NOUNS	VERBS	ADJECTIVES
A	aspen, autumn	are	*avalanche, aglow
B	bear, berries	browses	black, boreal
C	climbers	cling	*canyon
D	deer, danger, daisies, dandelions		detect

*avalanche and canyon are usually used as nouns but here they are used as adjectives

- Use the laminated pages for descriptive paragraph writing. Have students examine the background first (as a painter paints the background first), describe it in a sentence, and then move forward in the illustration, continuing to build the description. The words of the author may be incorporated into the paragraph.
- Take one page and have students imagine it as a postcard that they are sending to a friend. Have them write about the experiences and activities in this scene. Alternatively, copy one of the illustrations on one side of a postcard-size sheet of stiff paper and have students write their message on the other side. Let them mail the postcard to a friend or relative.
- Enrichment for older students: Debate the conflicting positions of protecting nature versus needing to build a country's economy on natural resources.

Other Tundra Teacher Guides:

[Amazing Grace](#), [Charlotte, Dippers](#), [The Legend of the Panda](#), [The Long Road](#), [Lucy Maud and the Cavendish Cat](#), [Silent Night](#)

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