



GCSE

C700U20-1A



WEDNESDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2020 – MORNING

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE – Component 2
19th and 21st Century Non-Fiction Reading
and Transactional/Persuasive Writing**

RESOURCE MATERIAL FOR USE WITH SECTION A

Trekking with the Gorillas of Rwanda

If there is a safari that brings you any closer, on foot, to wild beasts capable of mauling you, I'm not sure I care to be on it.

One second you are exhausted, struggling through thickets of bamboo in Rwanda's National Park, pulling yourself up a steep slope, step by painful step. The next, you turn a corner and you gasp. Seated perhaps 30 feet away is one of the roughly 900 mountain gorillas remaining on Earth, a female, lovingly cradling an infant in her lap. She wraps one arm around the 6-month-old while scratching her own ear with a finger.



We freeze, then tiptoe forward to give all eight trekkers in our group a clear view. Cameras are lifted faster than pistols at a gunfight. Soon two siblings tumble out of the brush, abruptly disrupting the female's one-on-one time. As they wrestle and roll, the mother flops on her back in surrender.

At the time of my trip, the gorilla family we saw consisted of a dominant male — the enormous silverback, Munyinya, — six females, five juveniles, and six infants. Thirty years ago, the gorilla population in Rwanda's National Park had been thinned by poaching, disease and habitat loss to an extremely endangered 250. Conservation efforts have brought the number gradually back to 480.

Access to the national park is severely restricted, with only 80 visitors permitted to take one of the guided gorilla treks each day. Groups of up to eight people are allowed to spend just one tightly monitored hour with the gorillas.

The park's guides have expert knowledge of the national park, making it rare that guides do not find the gorillas. The trekkers have an early 6am start and it can take more than three hours of intense hiking to reach them. Our group ranged from a 29-year-old Italian woman to a 61-year-old Mexican man and we all managed just fine, although even the fittest of us were huffing and puffing twenty minutes in. Walking sticks were provided to each trekker, although everyone stumbled down a hill on their backside at some point.

Our guide offered one basic rule for gorilla watching: stay at least 22 feet away. They sometimes like to show off, so don't freak out if the silverback suddenly starts beating his leathery chest but if a gorilla moves toward you, just move calmly out of the way.

Although the guides do carry a gun, in more than 30 years, they have never had to shoot a gorilla and no visitor has ever been harmed in an incident involving one.

Our guide then demonstrated a few of the sounds that are used to communicate with the apes. ‘Mmmmm mah-mmm,’ he growled. Translated roughly, he said, this meant ‘good morning’. I wondered if there might also be a sound that, translated roughly, meant ‘smile for the camera’.



We found Munyinya in a shaded alcove, sitting upright with his legs crossed and his great furry hands draped over his knees. His size and the sweeping crown of his head distinguished him from the others. Surveying his domain, first left and then right, he could not have looked more like a king. As two youngsters tussled at his feet, he nudged one away so he could groom the other with long, nimble fingers.

Throughout our hour with the apes, the enduring wonder was just how close we could get. Keeping our voices low, our telephoto lenses poked through branches to find the new mother suckling her infant. There were magical moments when a juvenile twirled its way down a bamboo stalk and scampered past my leg, and a large female, perched just above us in low-hanging branches, methodically stripped bamboo stems.

Conservation in the park has become a national priority and much of the income from tourists is dedicated to fighting poaching. Rangers find many traps in the park each month. The intended prey are usually antelope and buffalo, but gorillas also occasionally find their way into the snares, one of the guides told us.

Permits to visit the gorillas are limited and expensive. But so long as the tourists keep coming, and the Rwandans continue to protect the gorillas’ habitat, they should continue to thrive.