

 SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AS YOU READ

“TABASCO THE SAUCY RACCOON”  
published by Diane Morriss, Sono Nis Press

Author Lyn Hancock and Illustrator Loraine Kemp

Teachers are busy people and we hope some of these suggestions prove useful, not only for elementary and secondary school students but for adults as well. Here are some ideas for questions, activities, discussion topics, ideas for further research, ways you can correlate your reading, your writing and your science studies, and some background material on the writing process. Please add your own ideas.

We're delighted if you share your ideas with us and we're also delighted if you send us questions or stories or illustrations sparked by reading this book. We'll even sign your personal copies with a special greeting. Tabasco used to autograph Rocky's book "There's a Raccoon in my Parka" with her pawprint but that's another story.

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#### CHAPTER ONE

1. In the illustration on page 4, Loraine chose to draw the scene from Lyn's point of view. This was awkward to set up as Lyn had to dress in her parka and Loraine had to stand on a chair looking over Lyn's shoulder to take the photograph which she would use in her research for the scene. Loraine's style of drawing is realistic and she wanted every detail to be accurate so she drew Lyn's hand not anybody's hand and she asked Lyn to look for the very parka she had worn and the very box she had carried 28 years earlier. Try drawing a picture looking down on your own hand doing something: holding a cup or a pencil or waving to someone in the distance, or whatever you can think of.
2. There are many little details to decide when you write and illustrate a book e.g. Lyn wrote the story of Tabasco's life in the 1970s (with the exception of the last chapter which she wrote in 2005). What words and images in the book show life was a little different in the 1970s?
3. Author Lyn and illustrator Loraine had to decide how to handle these changes e.g. Should Loraine draw Lyn's hair as she wore it in the 1970s (long and black) or how she wears it today (short and blonde)? Should Loraine's illustrations contain typewriters used then or computers used now? Loraine had to research how airport security counters looked in the 1970s. Did they have desk top computers then? Look at the illustration on the page before chapter 1. How did Loraine

- handle the problem? On page 5 chapter 1 Lyn bought her ticket at the Canadian Airlines counter but Canadian Airlines doesn't exist nowadays so Lyn substituted Air Canada. Do you think she should have kept the name Canadian Airlines? Does it matter?
4. Lyn followed the airline agent's advice and smuggled Tabasco on the plane instead of buying the raccoon a ticket for the baggage compartment. Do you think Lyn should have done this? Why would it be difficult to smuggle Tabasco as a passenger on a plane nowadays? Find out what the rules are now for carrying animals on a plane.
  5. Lyn, an Australian, called her mother, Mum, and her winter hat, a tuque as Australians say these words. The editor changed the spelling (and the pronunciation) to Mom and toque to fit into how North American readers write these words. Pretend you are an editor. Which way would you choose. Why?
  6. Not all editors edit the same way. In the first draft, the first editor cut out the paragraph on page 5 about Lyn's parents seeing her off at the airport because she said it interrupted the flow from one paragraph to another. But in the third draft, another editor put it back in. Read both ways silently and say which way you think is better. Then read both ways aloud and hear which way is better. An author writes differently when her words are meant to be read aloud. It is always a good idea to read your own stories aloud to a partner. Why?
  7. Lyn got Tabasco because the raccoon's family was causing problems for people. If you had a family of raccoons destroying your roof or attic, what could you do to solve the problem? What is there about Tabasco sauce that suggested it could be a solution for getting rid of unwanted raccoons?
  8. Another solution for getting rid of problem animals is to tranquilize them and put them somewhere else. What can be the problem with that?
  9. Have you or someone you know had a problem with a wild animal? Tell us about it.
  10. Stories should start with an interesting hook or lead. Although Lyn's book is about the life of a raccoon, she didn't start this story at its beginning i.e. Tabasco's birth in a house in Vancouver. She started when she took Tabasco on her first trip – aboard a plane across Canada to Toronto. It was not till page 10 that she flashbacked to the raccoon's beginnings. Why didn't she start at the real beginning?
  11. Find another flashback on page 12. Why did Lyn put that flashback into the story at that point?
  12. Writers have individual styles. What style of writing does Lyn have? Find some examples of her particular style?
  13. Lyn attracts animals. What problems could she have had with the animals that visited her balcony apartment?
  14. Why would the zoo tell Lyn not to release Tabasco, particularly in an urban area? What could be the problem? What else could the zoo do? What else could Lyn do?

## CHAPTER TWO

1. For the illustration on page 18 Loraine worked from a specific paragraph and made up a scene that she staged at Anne McClymont School. Find this specific paragraph and draw a scene of your own that you can imagine from the same paragraph.
2. Lyn and Loraine were told that it is unusual for an author and an illustrator to work together so closely on a book. They lived in different parts of British Columbia but they emailed back and forth, sometimes every night, to discuss (among other things) which incidents should be illustrated. What do you think of their choices? Which are your favourite illustrations? Why?
3. After you have read the book, choose an incident that you would like to illustrate then do it. Say why you chose that incident.
4. Which animals do you like best? Baby seals and koala bears or snakes and sharks? Give a reason for your choice. How does an animal's age and appearance affect people's desire to protect them? Are there any other factors?
5. A famous writer once said that if a domestic animal loves you, it becomes your slave, but if a wild animal loves you, you become its slave. What did he mean?
6. How does Lyn's style on page 21 paragraph 2 match the sense of what is happening? What do all the sentences of the paragraph have in common?
7. Tabasco couldn't talk like humans but she made herself clear anyway. What sounds do your pets make and what do they mean?
8. Many of the adventures and misadventures that Lyn and Tabasco had on their tour across Canada and later on their tours through Okanagan, Vancouver Island and Washington State, were deleted from the final draft e.g. in Montreal, a famous book reviewer named John Richmond interviewed Lyn in a hotel at breakfast then invited Lyn to dinner at the Montreal Press Club but he declined to invite Tabasco so Lyn hung the raccoon on a hook in the cloakroom and hoped he wouldn't make a noise. Fortunately, Tabasco slept through dinner. Editors have to make choices. What are some of the reasons for editors to change or delete the author's words? Tell the story of what might have happened at the Montreal Press Club if Tabasco had woken up?
9. Imagine that you are crossing Canada with Tabasco – by plane or bus or car or train. Tell us about an adventure that you had with him – or perhaps another animal of your choice.
10. When Lyn got to Saskatchewan, the wildlife authorities informed her by letter that she was forbidden to bring Tabasco into Alberta. What could she do? What did she do? Was she right or wrong?
11. On the tour across Canada, everybody, young and old, men and women, those who called themselves animal-lovers and those who didn't, seemed to love Tabasco. What do you think was the raccoon's appeal?
12. Some people appreciate zoos and game farms, others do not. Think of four reasons that zoos and game farms keep animals in captivity?
13. Look at the illustration on the page before Chapter 3. Lyn gave Loraine photos of children playing with Tabasco in the 1970s but Loraine decided instead to use children at Ann McClymont School in 2005 to act as models instead. Why did she

do that? If you were given the manuscript to illustrate, what steps would you take to do it?

### CHAPTER 3

1. The students at Ann McClymont School also helped Loraine to stage the illustration on page 28. Unfortunately, she didn't have Tabasco as a model fingering someone's teeth, so she had a child hold a stuffed toy (it was a wolf!) on the boy's head while other kids watched and showed their reaction. Loraine took many photographs of this scene to make sure she had enough reactions that she could draw later back in her studio. How would you have set this up?
2. On page 29 what words clue you in to the fact that Lyn was born in Australia? What other Aussie expressions do you know?
3. Some reviewers say they like Lyn's writing because she writes using all her senses - sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch - which allows readers to imagine they are right there with her in the story. Read paragraphs 1 and 2 on page 31. Can you see and hear Tabasco as he played? What words does Lyn choose to paint these scenes? Find other places in the book where you say to yourself "I can just imagine that!" and pick out the words Lyn uses which cause you to say that. Illustrate some of Tabasco's antics and write captions to your illustrations.
4. Artists have different styles as well. Find examples of different styles in different books. What do you think is Loraine's style?
5. Lyn is both a writer and a photographer. She tries to make pictures with her stories and tell stories with her pictures. Look at Lyn's photos at the end of the book and Loraine's illustrations throughout the book. Do they tell stories? Write what is happening in those stories with the best words you can to match the story.
6. Put your own pet into a story using the best picture words you can then draw a picture so that it tells a story.
7. On page 32 Lyn wanted to use the word 'macramé' but her editor didn't think young readers would know what that meant nowadays. Do you? Instead of giving a dictionary definition in the paragraph and breaking up the story, Lyn tried to put this new word in context. This means surrounding the new word with other words to describe the word in action so you can guess what it is. How did Lyn do this? Can you guess the meaning of the word 'macramé' from the context without going to the dictionary?
8. One way that writers use words to get their readers to picture the story is to use similes. On page 32 Lyn says Tabasco prances around like a boxer testing his punches and he arches his back into a skunk-like stripe. Do these figures of speech help you to have a clear vision of what the raccoon is doing? Why or why not? Can you think of better ones? Go through a chapter or the whole book and list all the similes you can find.
9. Another way is to use metaphors e.g. Lyn just doesn't say that raccoons act LIKE a vacuum cleaner or a detective or a bandit, she says they ARE. As you read through a chapter or the whole book, list the metaphors Lyn uses to describe how Tabasco looks or how he acts.
10. What's in a name? Raccoons are called different names in different languages. On page 37 read what they are called in Latin, in French, in German. What does

- each name tell you about raccoons? Tabasco himself is called a lot of different names e.g. macaroon, Goesinta, Bandit, Monster, Ruffian. He was even called a Thing. What do those names tell you about Tabasco? Can you think of more?
11. Adults go to school too. Lyn's science teacher at Simon Fraser University told her that animals don't express feelings and emotions such as jealousy. He said that animals just act by instinct, they have knee-jerk reactions, they just respond to stimuli. What do you think? Does your pet show feelings and emotions? Have you ever noticed or read about wild animals showing feelings and emotions? Pick out times when it seemed that Tabasco showed them.
    1. On page 35 Tabasco makes a lot of mess. Have your own pets made messes? Tell us about them. Make your description as vivid as possible.
    2. Some books say that raccoons wash their food before they eat. Others say they don't. What are the arguments for and against? Collect evidence for each side then divide into pairs and debate the issue. What do you think Lyn believes?
    3. Play teaches animals (and people) lessons in early life, lessons needed when they grow up. What games does Tabasco play? What lessons do they teach him?

#### CHAPTER 4

1. For the illustration of page 40 Loraine actually travelled to Simon Fraser University to take photographs of the "Reflection Pool" but she staged the people in their various stances back in Kelowna. Lyn and Loraine thought it necessary to show that the raccoon travelled to many places. Name a few other places that Tabasco visited. Draw a picture of Tabasco in one of those places.
2. There are different ways to get information across to readers. Lyn tries to show more than tell. In this chapter what do you learn about raccoons in general by reading about Tabasco in particular?
3. On page 43, Lyn asks a little boy waiting for a bus to mind Tabasco while she goes into the post office. What do you think of that? What might have happened? Pretend it was you she asked. Write what you would say to your parents that night at the dinner table? Add what your parents might say. Perhaps write it like a play.
4. There is more than one point of view in a story. On page 44, Lyn's secret – keeping Tabasco in her apartment – is nearly discovered when a little girl who lives close by asks too many questions. Tell her story as she may have told it to a friend. Perhaps write a story about the little girl and her friend making a plan to find out if a raccoon really lived in the apartment and what happened.
5. On page 47 Lyn says that Tabasco loved visiting schools. He visited Haney School in the Fraser Valley. On page 115 and 116, he visited Uplands School in the Okanagan Valley. Imagine Tabasco visited your school. Tell what happened.
6. Dogs were very curious about Tabasco: some liked him, others didn't. Imagine your dog met Tabasco. Describe what happened. What did Tabasco see, hear, feel, taste, smell? What did your dog see, hear, feel, taste, smell? Is there a sixth sense? Include that sense in your story if you can.

#### CHAPTER 5

1. Look at the illustration on page 60. Neither Lyn's sister, Jan, nor Tabasco had seen snow before. It was a perfect scene to draw as it reflected the humour that

- Lyn used to write the book. Can you think of something funny that somebody in your family did that caused people to laugh? Either draw a picture of this event or write about it.
2. Do you and your siblings (that means your brothers and sisters) get along? Are you alike or are you different? Are Lyn and her sister Jan alike or different? What evidence is there in this chapter that supports your conclusion?
  3. Read Jan's letter to her parents describing the trip to the TV studio and the trip to the Rockies. (Jan wrote a much longer letter but the editor shortened it for space and interest and spread it through the chapter.) Write a letter to your parents describing a trip you took with one of your siblings who had different viewpoints to your own. Jan calls Tabasco "a loony coon." Do you think there might have been a chance that she liked the raccoon sometimes? Why or why not?
  4. It is often said, "Don't judge a book by its cover." But a lot of readers do. Do you? How important is the cover when you choose a book to read? At first Lyn wanted for the cover the picture of Tabasco standing on his two hind legs talking to a horse (page 162). What do you think she wanted the readers to know about Tabasco from that picture? Imagine the raccoon and the horse could talk. Write their conversation. On page 75 Lyn described Tabasco's face in the wind when he leaned out the window while Lyn was driving the car. Diane wondered if Loraine would choose that scene to draw for the cover? But after much discussion, it was decided that the cover would be Lyn's photograph of Tabasco's face with his hands on his head and looking straight at the reader. If you were the publisher, which of the three ideas would you have chosen? Why?
  5. Pretend you are the illustrator and you have been hired to draw the cover of your choice. Make a display of all your covers. It is usually the publisher who makes the final decision for the cover but he or she usually asks the writer and the illustrator for their ideas as well. Pretend you are the publisher, choose the cover you like best and defend your choice.
  6. On page 81 the Day family fed sardines to Tabasco in their tent trailer in a national park in the Rockies. During the revision of the last draft of the book, one of the editors suggested to Lyn that she should add a sentence so that today's readers realize that feeding Tabasco sardines in bear country is not a good idea. Neither Lyn nor the editor wanted to delete or change what really happened as that would not be true to the real story. Pick out the sentence that shows that Lyn followed the editor's suggestion. Books are a collaboration between an author and an editor. If you were the editor, what would you have suggested? And if you were the author? Would you have written anything differently?

## CHAPTER 6

1. The illustration on page 84 shows the cocky side of Tabasco as she playfully pounces on a picker's head. Have you ever had a pet that pounces on you, grabs your leg, or is playful in another way? Draw a picture of the scene.
1. As Tabasco grew up he started to cause problems. On page 86, Jack, a biologist and a conservation officer, says that Tabasco should have been destroyed right from the beginning when his mother invaded a person's attic. What do you think?
2. Lyn is a non-fiction writer and wants to tell a story as it happened. This story happened in the 1970s when Lyn wrote books with a typewriter not a computer, and when Tabasco's favourite food was Apple Jacks not Cap'n Crunch or other brands that are sold today. Do you think she should have set the book in the present time so that all her readers would know words such as typewriters and Apple Jacks? Why or why not?
3. Find words in this chapter that show Tabasco was intelligent, observant, strong, agile, and persevering.
4. On page 97 and 98, Lyn uses a writing device called foreshadowing which means she hints at what is to come. This helps to keep the reader in suspense as to how the book will end. She hints at problems. What could those problems be? Without looking at the ending, what are the various ways this book could end.
5. Sometimes it is not till after a book is published that the author realizes errors or omissions or something he or she would have added to the book. On page 98, Lyn describes Tabasco humping down the trail like a little Cadborosaurus or a Loch Ness monster. What can you find out about these creatures? In what way, if any, do they resemble raccoons? Considering that Tabasco lived near and played in Okanagan Lake, what creature could Lyn have added to these three similes?

## CHAPTER 7

1. Tabasco had a keen sense of smell and could sense what was in her Christmas gifts in the illustration of page 102. Look through the chapter to find out what was in the packages. Have you ever wrapped a present for a pet? If so, what was in it, and how did the pet get inside the present?
2. Lyn has written 19 books and almost all of them have photographs not illustrations. Diane the publisher decided that this book would have illustrations although she did allow a few photographs at the end. Why do most books for children have illustrations? What kind of children's books have photographs? Discuss the pros and cons of illustrations versus photographs.
3. Illustrators use different techniques. Some draw, others paint. Some copy from pictures, some illustrate from real life models, some imagine, others do a little of both. By studying Loraine's illustrations, what techniques did she use?
4. When a manuscript is finished, the publisher sends it to one or more editors to read, suggest changes, and finally check for errors. Lyn thinks it important to see the manuscript in hard copy i.e. on paper as well as on the computer screen. She finds more errors in hard copy than on the screen. In paragraph 3 on page 105, there is an error that nobody including her seemed to notice. Can you pick it out?
5. Tabasco loved parties so in this chapter he goes visiting. Some people liked him but others didn't. Imagine that he visits your house. Tell the story of that visit.

6. On pages 112 to 115, Tabasco accompanies Lyn and Jack when they collar a deer. Why do biologists do that? Is that kind of research happening in your area?
7. On page 116, Jack and Lyn learn that Tabasco is not a he, she is a she. In the first draft, the editor decided that Lyn would call the raccoon a she from the beginning but in the second draft, the second editor decided to call Tabasco a male till the point in the story where the raccoon was found to be a female. Is calling the main character a male in the first part of the book and a female in the last part of the book confusing to the reader? Or not? If you had been the editor, what would you have done?

## CHAPTER 8

1. On page 118 Loraine felt it was important to show a different side of Tabasco: the raccoon knew when to accept help and support from a friend. Have you ever had two animals or heard of two animals sensing that their friend needed some attention? Have you ever had or known of two different kinds of animals that were close friends?
2. The book is nearing the end and the problems are mounting. What should Lyn do with Tabasco? Put her in a cage or release her to the wild. If so, where? Everybody has different solutions. List the pros and the cons of each method. Divide the class into two teams to debate the two methods and see which side wins.
3. On page 125, Tabasco bites Shelley. Why do some animals like some people and not others? How do your pets act with different people? What makes the difference? Do you think Jack was justified to get angry with Lyn?
4. On page 128, Tabasco is hurt and limps home to seek help. How does this compare with what a person would do in similar circumstances? What other times does Tabasco act like a person? Scientists scoff at those who think that animals act like people. What do you think?
5. What are some of the differences between wild animals and domesticated animals?
6. What do you think could have happened to Tabasco when she left home for the wild? Imagine and write the story.
7. On page 133, Jack finds himself in a predicament. Put yourself in his place. How do you think he feels? Is there any way out of that predicament?
8. Lyn says that the cage for Tabasco must be like the Black Hole of Calcutta. What does she mean by that? What was the Black Hole of Calcutta? Use the library or the internet.

## CHAPTER 9

1. For the last illustration on page 136 Loraine drew Tabasco much younger than she was in the chapter. Why do you think she did that? What would you have drawn for the last illustration? Why?
2. Explain Lyn's dilemma on page 138. What would you have done?
3. On page 144, a park ranger feeds what he thinks is a wild raccoon. Is this right or wrong? Why or why not?

4. Is there a spelling error in paragraph 6 on page 148 or do you think there are two ways to spell the same word?
5. Lyn had another dilemma when she was writing this chapter. Should she use the real name of the man who shot Tabasco or should she invent one in case he didn't want his name mentioned? What do you think? Are there any circumstances when a writer shouldn't use real names of people?
6. Lyn wrote the first draft of this book in 1978, 27 years ago. She stopped before the last chapter. It wasn't till 2005 that she finished the book. How difficult do you think it was for Lyn to write this chapter? Do you think that she would have written the death of Tabasco differently if she had written it in 1978? Why or why not? Have you ever had a pet die? Tell us about it. Do you think time has anything to do with healing wounds?
7. Chance and coincidence often play a big part in a book. What chance and coincidence played a part in Tabasco's death?
8. Often there is irony in a book. You may have to look up that word in a dictionary but you may be able to guess from context. What is ironic about paragraph 5 on page 150?
9. A famous Canadian author named Sir Ernest Thompson Seton wrote once that the life of all wild animals is tragic and to make it not so, writers would have to invent a happy ending or stop before the last chapter. Lyn considered both these options but decided against them. Why? How did she decide to end the book?
10. Endings are important in a book. When did you find out for sure that Tabasco would die? Did Lyn keep you in suspense? How? And for how long?
11. How did Lyn end the book? Read the last sentence. Was that a good way to end Tabasco's story? Why or why not?

#### AFTERMATH

1. After Mr. Jobs shot Tabasco and people found out about it by reading the newspapers, listening to the radio and looking at television (the media), people took sides. Most had sympathy for Lyn and Tabasco. But some had sympathy for Mr. Jobs. Write two letters to the editor of a newspaper, one from someone who thought that Mr. Jobs was right to shoot Tabasco and the other from someone who thought that he was wrong.
2. Reporters find it difficult to describe a happening without giving away how they feel themselves. Even if they try to present both points of view, they can show their bias (their own opinion) by the way they write the headlines, by how much space they give to the person who shares their own opinion and how little they give space to other opinions. Different newspapers in 1978 published different versions of Tabasco's death. Pretend you are a reporter and write three different versions of the story of Tabasco's death, one sympathetic to Lyn and Tabasco, one sympathetic to Mr. Jobs, and one in the middle trying to be impartial.
3. Different places have different regulations about how they treat wild animals. Pretend that you have rescued an orphan raccoon after her mother had been shot or poisoned. Find out what you have to do in your own town. What do you think of those regulations? Have the regulations changed since 1978?

4. How have attitudes of people to wild animals changed say, since the 1960s? Has this been good for the animals?
5. While she was writing the aftermath, the editor asked Lyn to add what she would do differently if she was given a wild orphan raccoon today? Lyn didn't really know the answer. Why was it difficult for her to answer? What do you think you would do?
6. Lyn ended Tabasco's story on page 152 but she didn't want to end on such a sad note. Nor did she want to end in controversy. From the end of page 157 to page 159, she describes what is happening to her today in Nanoose Bay. What is the surprise on the very last page? What do you think of it?
7. It is sad when someone or something dies, whether it is a plant, an animal, or a person. What does Lyn say to end the book on a happier, more hopeful note?

Remember, we'd love to hear about what you did in class as a result of reading this book. If requested, Lyn can send teachers another sheet on additional activities that can be done after reading her other animal books such as "There's a Seal in my Sleeping Bag", "Love Affair with a Cougar", and "An Ape Came out of my Hatbox" and some of her northern books, "Winging it in the North", "Nunavut", "Northwest Territories" and "Yukon."

Last words: Loraine and Lyn love visiting schools and libraries. If you invite them to your school, either singly or together, you can practice being reporters and interview them for your school newspaper or magazine or even the local paper. Don't forget to take photographs to accompany your article. Perhaps you could study how professional reporters and journalists write their profiles by reading some of those first.

Don't forget to plan a grabby title or lead (hook) to get your readers' attention and make sure you include "the six honest serving men" to help you write – what and where and when, and why and how and who." But also include aspects about the author, the story, or the illustrations that strike you as special. Your profile will then be unique. It will be written in your particular style.

Perhaps you could write a whole book on your own pets (or any other topic). It could be a fiction book or a non-fiction book or it could be a book of poems. It could be long or it could be short. Your class could become a publishing company and publish some, or all, of your books with covers, information about authors and illustrators, title pages, chapter headings, photographs and illustrations, even indexes and reference materials. You could write ads and articles to sell your books and raise money to buy library books or give to children in countries who have very few books at all. Then you would learn the whole writing process and to think that it all started with Tabasco the Saucy Raccoon.