

# FALL of the BEASTS SPIRIT ANIMALS

Dear Educator Friends:

Writing for the Spirit Animals series has been a blast. The books are full of adventure and magic, but so much of their emotional impact comes from the connections between humans and animals. By unifying the concerns of human and animal, the Spirit Animals books reinforce the connection we have with the natural world. That connection is a source of great narrative power, and something to consider when writing animal-centric stories.

My young adult novels *Endangered* and *Threatened*—survival stories about young people’s relationships with realistically depicted apes—started my journey into writing about animals, which has broadened in my work on Spirit Animals. I thought your students might be able to use some of the tips I’ve learned here. I hope these tips and activities help inspire their own animal stories.

I’ve found writing about animals has helped me become a better observer and a more empathetic thinker, and given me a great sense of perspective on human concerns. I wish your students the best of luck with their animal writings.



Yours truly,

Eliot Schrefer

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## Animal Writing Tips from Eliot Schrefer

### ❑ Write **realistically** or...write like an animal.

It’s all too easy to write about an animal and think that there’s secretly a human zippered inside. It’s much simpler to relate to something that thinks and acts like a human. Writing realistically about an animal means constantly questioning yourself: Is this actually what a dog (or seagull, or chimpanzee) would do in this situation? Try to peel back your human assumptions and see the animal for what it really is.

### ❑ Don’t get too **mushy**.

Our hearts naturally go out to animals in danger. There’s something essentially innocent and vulnerable about most animals, and when they’re hurt or wounded, it’s like a sucker punch to the gut. Recognize this, and don’t go overboard.

### ❑ It’s not all about the **cuties**!

Those poor snakes, goldfish, crabs, insects, geese, geckos, and manta rays! An animal doesn’t have to be cuddly to be worthy of its own story.

### ❑ Focus on the **small things**.

Readers will really believe your descriptions if they’re not just about the big picture, but about the details. In my time researching orangutans for my next book, for example, I noticed that they walk on their wrists, with their hands splayed out. They show the whites of their eyes only when they’re afraid. They tend to swivel their hips when they’re nervous. If you’re writing about an animal, it’s the small details that sell your story.



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## Activity 1: Write Your Own Spirit Animals Story

If you had your own Spirit Animal in the world of Erdas, what would you do to help the Greencloaks defeat the Conquerors? In this activity, you'll come up with your own Spirit Animal character and write a story about a quest that you and your animal complete. Now, let's get started!

### Taking Notes

The world of Erdas is fictional, but the animals that live there are realistic, so Spirit Animals authors get great ideas from real world research. Before you write your story, take notes on both real-world animals and the fictional Erdas location you've selected. You can use this two-column note-taking chart to get started. These are the details that will make your story interesting and authentic for readers.

Once you've finished filling in this chart, you're ready to start writing! You can write in the voice of a human character, a spirit animal, or a narrator. Use the notes you've jotted down to make your story as detailed as possible.



### RESEARCH CHART

#### My Spirit Animal:

Use the Internet or books to search for fun facts about your animal, then take some notes and use these details in your story. For instance, here are some details about the real-world animals represented by the four original Great Beasts:

1. Leopards can leap 10 feet straight up.
2. Wolves hearing is so good they can hear leaves falling.
3. Pandas have little half-thumbs that help them hold bamboo.
4. Falcons ride on thermal air currents and rarely flap their wings.

#### Our quest:

The Spirit Animals stories spread far and wide across the map of Erdas, and readers have been introduced to more than a dozen cities. Choose a city and create a quest for you and your animal to complete in that city. Here are some sample story starters, but you can also create your own:

1. Defend Clarobo in Amaya from an attack by the Conquerors.
2. Rescue a character from the Howling House in Eura.
3. Find a new way to reach Dinesh's island in the Lake of the Elephant in Zhong.
4. Intercept a shipment of Conqueror weapons arriving at Port Tanteo in Nilo.

#### Real World Facts About My Animal:

- Diet: \_\_\_\_\_
- Natural habitat: \_\_\_\_\_
- Natural abilities: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### My Animal's Mission:

- Erdas continent: \_\_\_\_\_
- Location: \_\_\_\_\_
- Local culture: \_\_\_\_\_
- Goal: \_\_\_\_\_
- Obstacle: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



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## Activity 2: An Animal Point of View

Rewrite a passage from a Spirit Animal's perspective. Start by reading an excerpt from *Spirit Animals: Fall of the Beasts Book 1: Immortal Guardians*.

### First, read this excerpt:

Meilin and Jhi began the walk up the long and winding path to Greenhaven castle, an imposing gray stone structure that rose high over the sea. Though it was an intimidating place, Meilin felt an unexpected joy when she saw it. Greenhaven was as much her home as Zhong. All the same—if she'd had her way, she might never have come back.

*Rollan*, she thought as she scanned the ramparts of the imposing stone fortress the Greencloaks called home. *Where are you?*

She'd known the situation was serious when Rollan sent his own spirit animal to call her back from Zhong. She'd been ready to bunk down for the night after a long day helping build a new bridge for the capital when the falcon had rushed into her cabin. A small golden tube had been banded to one of Essix's legs.

Even in her exhaustion, the falcon had managed a disdainful look as Meilin unscrewed the top of the cylinder and tugged out a rolled-up letter. Meilin had imagined what Essix would say if she could: *Essix the Falcon is not a messenger pigeon! Essix eats messenger pigeons for breakfast!*

The note had been ominously short.

*Meilin,*

*I know you had to spend some time away for your sanity, and I'm not asking this lightly. But you must come to Greenhaven as soon as you can. Evertree in danger. Will explain when you get here.*

*—Your Rollan*

Rollan had once described the feeling of being far from the gyrfalcon as having someone scratch at his eyelids. Sending Essix all the way to Zhong must have been excruciating. Meilin couldn't wait to see her friend's face when he was reunited with his spirit animal. She couldn't wait to see his face in general, actually.

Essix had flown on ahead as soon as Meilin's boat arrived, but now returned, alighting on Meilin's shoulder with a squawk of delight. Then, with a shriek, Meilin was bowled over by an unseen assailant. She panicked for a moment, before she felt the long, stinky licks of a wolf's rough tongue on her cheek.

"Briggan!" she cried, laughing with joy through her tears as she wrapped her arms around the wolf's neck. "Conor!" she shouted, hoping Briggan's human partner was nearby. "Where are you? Get this oversized dog off me!"

But Briggan kept licking, and before she knew it Meilin was joined on the ground by her friends Abeke, Conor, and then Rollan, laughing and hugging as they rolled on the flagstones of the path, heedless of the scene they were making.

One of the Greencloaks making his way up the path giggled, and the phrase "*Four Heroes of Erdas*" passed through Meilin's mind. She remembered her dignity and stood up, primly brushing soil and grass from her traveling clothes.

Rollan stayed on the ground and looked up at her, ripping up a handful of grass and adding it to the bits already dusting his shiny, unkempt hair. Meilin's heart kicked when she saw that the lean Amayan boy looked just the same, with his dark hair and impish grin. At least some things hadn't changed during her time in Zhong.

"Embarrassed to be seen with us, milady?" Rollan joked. Essix landed neatly on his shoulder.

### Then, think about it from Essix's point of view:

Essix is the most independent of the Great Beasts and, as Meilin points out, probably had strong opinions about this mission. How did Essix feel about being sent away by Rollan to find Meilin? Essix and Meilin both have strong personalities, so how well did they get along on the trip back? How did Essix feel about finally being reunited with Rollan? You can gain a new perspective on the Spirit Animals saga by writing the story of Essix's mission from the falcon's point of view. Ready to give it a try?

### Now, write your story!



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