

Teaching Trunks

Cats! Wild to Mild

Cats can be found almost everywhere in the world in practically all sizes and colors. Maybe you've never seen a jaguar take down a deer, but chances are you've seen a house cat go after a bird, or perhaps even just a wad of paper in the kitchen. The crouched anticipations, the agile leap, the quick swatting paws, and the pinprick sharp claws—maybe you've even felt them! All cats share these traits. They are all sleek, stalking hunters. No matter how domesticated a cat becomes, the predator instinct remains.

Cats trace their ancestry back about 30 million years, when felids first appear in the fossil record. The earliest known felid, *Proailurus* (Pro=early, ailurus=cat), was about the size of a bobcat with a long tail and slender limbs. Many species of felids, including a number of now extinct saber-toothed cats, have evolved on different continents since then. Based on DNA analysis, the 3 species of living wild cats can be divided into three groups of related species:

South American small cats

Old World small cats

Big Cats

Only members of the big cat group are found in both the Old and New Worlds. The ancestors of the jaguar and the mountain lion immigrated into North America from Eurasia several million years ago when the sea level was lower.

Whether you have a beloved pet cat at home, or you've always admired the grace and beauty of the big cats, this Teaching Trunk will bring new insights into the physical make-up, social behavior, and historical background of the magnificent family of mammals we commonly call Cats!

Kit Contents

Educators' Notebook

- With background information and classroom activities

Books

- Cats by Eyewitness
- Big Cats, Great Creatures of the World
- Blanca and Arusha: Tales of Two Big Cats by Georgeanne Irvine
- How the Leopard Got His Spots by Rudyard Kipling
- Lion Family by Jane Goodard
- Our First Kitten by Harriet Haines

Posters

- Wild Cats of North America
- Big Cats

Videotapes

- Cats: Caressing the Tiger by National Geographic
- Cats by Eyewitness

Audiotape

- How the Leopard Got His Spots, narrator Danny Glover
- Hands-On Manipulatives (bagged activities)
- Built for the Kill
- Cats: Head-to-Head
- Small Cat Facts
- Camouflage Match
- Mountain Lion's Vanishing Landscape

Specimens and Artifacts

- Design for Killing (case): Saber-toothed Cat and African Lion tooth comparison
- Gripping Power (case): Claw comparison
- Designed to Hunt (case): Domestic cat skull
- Jaguar Mask from Latin America (with laminated label)
- Egyptian Basket Cat Statue
- Mountain Lion Skull (replica)