

COMPARE TEXTS

Background *Wild animals are animals that live in nature. They can be as rare as a snow leopard or as common as a tree squirrel. Although many states have laws that prohibit owning a wild animal, thousands of people in the United States keep animals such as wolves, pythons, crocodiles, and bears as pets. Some people want to make it illegal to have these kinds of pets. They argue that these animals pose a safety and health risk to people and the environment. Others claim that with proper care, wild animals can safely live in captivity.*



WILD ANIMALS AREN'T PETS

Editorial by USA TODAY

LET PEOPLE OWN EXOTIC ANIMALS

Commentary by Zuzana Kukol

SETTING A PURPOSE As you read, focus on the facts and examples used to justify the points in the editorial by *USA TODAY* and the commentary by Zuzana Kukol, president and co-founder of Responsible Exotic Animal Ownership. Think about which points are convincing to you and which are not.

Wild Animals Aren't Pets

Editorial by USA TODAY

In many states, anyone with a few hundred dollars and a yen¹ for the unusual can own a python, a black bear or a big cat as a “pet.” For \$8,000 a baby white tiger can be yours. Sometimes, wild animals are even offered free: “Siberian tigers looking for a good home,” read an ad in the *Animal Finder’s Guide*.

Until recently, though, few people knew how easy it is to own a wild animal as a pet. Or how potentially tragic.

¹ **yen** (yĕn): a strong desire or inclination.



After Terry Thompson set his exotic animals free in Zanesville, Ohio, a sign on an expressway warned motorists that the animals were on the loose in the area.

10 But just as a 2007 raid on property owned by football star Michael Vick laid bare the little known and cruel world of dogfighting, a story that unfolded in a small Ohio city recently opened the public's eyes to the little known, distressing world of “**exotic**” pets. We're not suggesting that people who own these animals are cruel. Many surely love them. But public safety, common sense and compassion for animals all **dictate** the same conclusion: Wild animals are not pets.

20 If that weren't already obvious, it became more so when collector Terry Thompson opened the cages on his Zanesville farm, springing dozens of lions, tigers, bears and other wild creatures before killing himself. With animals running loose and darkness closing in, authorities arrived with no good choices to protect the public. They shot all but a handful of the animals as the nation watched, transfixed² and horrified.

Owners of “exotic” animals claim they rarely maim or kill. But is the death rate really the point?

exotic

(ig-zōt'ĭk) *adj.*
Something that is *exotic* is from another part of the world.

dictate

(dĭk'tāt') *v.* To *dictate* something is to require it to be done or decided.

² **transfixed** (trāns-fĭkst'): motionless, as with terror, amazement, or other strong emotion.

In 2009, a 2-year-old Florida girl was strangled by a 12-foot-long Burmese python, a family pet that had gotten out of its aquarium. That same year, a Connecticut woman was mauled and disfigured by a neighbor's pet chimp. Last year, a caretaker was mauled to death by a bear owned by a Cleveland collector. In Zanesville, it was the animals themselves, including 18 rare Bengal tigers, who became innocent victims.

Trade in these beautiful creatures thrives in the USA, where thousands are bred and sold through classified ads or at auctions centered in Indiana, Missouri and Tennessee. There's too little to stop it.

A 2003 federal law, which forbids the interstate transport of certain big cats, has stopped much of the trade on the Internet, according to the Humane Society of the U.S. But monkeys, baboons and other primates were left out, and measures to plug that hole have twice stalled in Congress.

Only collectors who exhibit animals need a federal license. Those, such as Thompson, who keep the animals as "pets" are left alone, unless states intervene.³ And many do not. Eight—Alabama, Idaho, Ohio, Nevada, North Carolina, South Carolina, West Virginia and Wisconsin—have no rules, and in 13 others the laws are lax,⁴ according to Born Free USA, which has lobbied for years for stronger laws.

After the Cleveland bear-mauling, then-Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland issued an emergency order to ban possession of wild animals. While it exempted⁵ current owners, Thompson might have been forced to give up his **menagerie** because he had been cited for animal cruelty. We'll never know. Strickland's successor, John Kasich, let the order expire.

menagerie

(mə-nāj'ə-rē) *n.*

A *menagerie* is a collection of live wild animals, often kept for showing to the public.

³ **intervene** (ɪn'tər-vēn'): to come between so as to block or change an action.

⁴ **lax** (læks): not rigorous, strict, or firm.

⁵ **exempted** (ɪg-zemptəd): freed or excused from following a law or duty which others must obey.



Trace and Evaluate an Argument

The editorial you have just read is an **argument**, which is a carefully stated claim supported by reasons and evidence. An argument is made up of two parts. The **claim** is the writer's position on a problem or issue. The **support** is the reasons and evidence that help prove the claim. **Reasons** are statements made to explain a belief. **Evidence** is a specific reference, such as a fact, statistic, quotation, or opinion that is used to support a claim. Support in an argument is usually for or against an issue; it is used to justify a viewpoint.

To **trace**, or follow the reasoning, of an argument:

- Identify the claim, or the writer's position on the issue.
- Look for reasons and specific types of evidence (facts, statistics, quotations, or opinions) that support the claim.
- Identify **counterarguments**, which are statements that address opposing viewpoints.

To **evaluate** an argument, or decide whether it makes sense and is convincing:

- Determine whether the evidence supports the claim in a logical way.
- Make sure ideas are presented in a way that makes sense and is clear.
- Determine whether the counterarguments are adequately addressed.

As you analyze the editorial, look at how the author constructs and supports the argument.

Analyzing the Text

Cite Text Evidence

Support your responses with evidence from the text.

- 1. Identify** What is the claim of the editorial? Where is it found?
- 2. Summarize** Reread lines 17–23. What specific evidence is used in this paragraph to support the editorial's claim?
- 3. Interpret** Reread lines 24–32. What counterargument does the author address?
- 4. Summarize** Reread lines 37–48. What legal issues make it possible for people to own exotic pets?
- 5. Evaluate** Do you think the writer's argument is convincing? Cite reasons and evidence from the text that you feel were the weakest or the strongest.

Let People Own Exotic Animals

by Zuzana Kukol

The recent tragedy in Zanesville, Ohio brought back the question of whether private ownership of wild and exotic animals should be legal.

The simple answer is yes. Responsible private ownership of exotic animals should be legal if animal welfare is taken care of. Terry Thompson didn't represent the typical responsible owner. He had a criminal record and animal abuse charges. What Thompson did was selfish and insane; we cannot **regulate** insanity.

10 People keep exotic animals for commercial¹ reasons and as pets. Most exotic animals—such as big cats, bears or apes—are in commercial, federally inspected facilities. These animals are born in captivity, and not “stolen” from the wild. Captive breeding eliminates the pressure on wild populations, and also serves as a backup in case the animals go extinct.²

regulate

(rĕg'yə-lāt') v. If you *regulate* something, you control or direct it according to a rule, principle, or law.



(t), (bbg) ©Stiede Preis/Getty Images, (b) ©Sue Ogrcock/AP Images

¹ **commercial** (kə-mûr'shəl): of or relating to commerce or trade.

² **extinct** (ĭk-sťingkt'): no longer existing or living.

Dangers from exotic animals are low. On average in the United States, only 3.25 people per year are killed by captive big cats, snakes, elephants and bears. Most of these fatalities are owners, family members, friends and trainers voluntarily
20 on the property where the animals were kept. Meanwhile, traffic accidents kill about 125 people per day.

If we have the freedom to choose what car to buy, where to live, or what domestic animal to have, why shouldn't we have the same freedom to choose what species of wild or exotic animal to own and to love?

Would the Ohio situation be any different if the animals were owned by a government and their caretaker released them? Is this really about private ownership, or is it about certain people's personal issues with exotics in captivity?

30 If society overreacts and bans exotics because of actions of a few deranged³ individuals, then we need to ban kids, as that is the only way to totally stop child abuse, and we need to ban humans, because that is the only way to stop murder. Silly, isn't it?

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION With a partner, discuss whether the editorial or the commentary most closely matches your point of view. Point out specific passages or ideas in each text with which you strongly agree or disagree.

³ **deranged** (dĭ-rānj' d): mentally unbalanced; insane.

Analyze the Meaning of Words and Phrases

When a writer makes an argument for or against an issue, he or she will often use persuasive techniques to convince readers to see things their way.

Persuasive techniques are methods used to influence others to adopt a certain opinion or belief or to act a certain way.

Persuasive techniques can make a strong argument even more powerful. They can also be used to disguise flaws in weak arguments. One persuasive technique that writers use is loaded language. **Loaded language** consists of words and phrases with strongly positive or negative connotations. (**Connotations** are meanings that are associated with a word *beyond* its dictionary meaning.)

To help you analyze loaded language:

- Look for words in the text that have strong impact. Think about how these words make you feel.
- Ask yourself if the argument is strong without the use of these words.

As you analyze “Let People Own Exotic Animals,” look for examples of loaded language.

Analyzing the Text

Cite Text Evidence Support your responses with evidence from the text.

- 1. Identify** What is the claim of the commentary? Where is it found?
- 2. Summarize** Reread lines 10–15. According to the writer, where are most exotic animals kept and what is the benefit of breeding them?
- 3. Analyze** Reread lines 16–21. What specific evidence does the writer use to support the argument that people should be allowed to own exotic animals? Explain how the evidence is or is not directly related to the claim.
- 4. Interpret** Review lines 30–33. What examples of loaded language do you find? What are the positive or negative associations of these words?

Compare and Contrast: Arguments

ELA RI.6.8, RI.6.9
ELD PI.6.6, PI.6.7

When you **compare and contrast** two arguments on the same issue, you analyze how each argument is presented. First, you trace and evaluate each argument: identify its claim, follow its support and reasoning, and decide whether it is convincing. Then you determine how each author’s viewpoint or attitude toward the issue differs.

To compare and contrast persuasive writing texts:

- Look at the evidence each writer provide as support—facts, examples, statistics. Does the evidence support the claim in a logical way?
- Determine if the writers are trying to be persuasive by appealing to your emotions, to your logic, or to both. Look for words with strong positive or negative connotations.

Analyzing the Text

ELA RI.6.1, RI.6.2, RI.6.4, RI.6.6, RI.6.8, RI.6.9, W.6.1a–b, W.6.7 **ELD** PI.6.6, PI.6.7, PI.6.10, PI.6.11

Cite Text Evidence Support your responses with evidence from the texts.

- 1. Compare** Compare each writer’s claim and the kinds of evidence that support it. Does each author include enough evidence to support the claim?
- 2. Evaluate** Examine each text and identify examples of loaded language. For each text, tell whether the author’s word choices are effective and why.
- 3. Identify** Reread lines 4–9 of “Let People Own Exotic Animals.” What counterargument does the author address?
- 4. Critique** Which argument do you think is more authoritative? Why?

PERFORMANCE TASK



Writing Activity: Argument Write an argument telling whether or not you would own a particular exotic animal and why.

- First, conduct research on owning a specific exotic animal. Take notes on the care, safety, and feeding of this animal.

- Next, decide whether you would or would not own this animal as a pet.
- Then draft your essay, starting with a clearly stated claim.
- Use your research notes to provide evidence that supports your claim.