

# **Fact and Opinion in Persuasive Writing: Should the US Government Make a Plan to Protect the Jaguar?**

**Grade:** 6-12

**Subject:** Critical Thinking, Reading Comprehension, Social Studies

**Group size:** Whole class, small groups

**Duration:** 4 class periods

**Materials:**

1. Copies of “Fact and Opinion” and “Taking Notes” worksheets
2. Copies of “Fish and Wildlife Service Completes Determination on Jaguars” article
3. Copies of “U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refusal to create plan to save jaguar forces conservation group to act” article.
4. Dictionary

**Objectives:**

1. Students will be able to understand the difference between fact and opinion.
2. Students will be able to analyze a news article and take notes.
3. Students will be able to identify thesis statements, supporting statements, and conclusions.
4. Students will be able to develop fact and opinion statements.

**Vocabulary:**

Pro

Con

Evidence

Fact

Opinion

Thesis

Persuade

Endangered Species Act

Habitat

Extinct

Imperiled

Determination

Conservation

Nonbinding

Exemptions

Jurisdiction

**Procedure:**

Day 1: Review vocabulary list and background information about the Endangered Species Act. Vocabulary list and ESA information available below.

Day 2: Fact or Opinion – review concepts of fact and opinion and go through worksheet. Discuss “pro” and “con” statements with students on a personal level (i.e. “should people be able to kill animals that are found on their property?”) so that they can apply that concept to jaguars.

Day 3: Distribute the “Fish and Wildlife Service Completes Determination on Jaguars”, and “U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refusal to create plan to save jaguar forces conservation group to act” articles. Read articles and discuss concepts and terms that they aren’t familiar with. Discuss Endangered Species Act and recovery plans (information available below). Why is this important? Why do we care about this?

Day 4: Complete “taking notes” worksheet and review as a class (teacher’s guide available below). After they have completed the worksheets, as a class discuss the goal of each article - to inform or persuade? What do students think about each article? Should the Fish and Wildlife Service be required to create a recovery plan for the jaguar, as the Endangered Species Act requires?

Optional/additional exercise: Ask students to find a “pro/con” article in a newspaper or magazine, choose a side, write a letter to the editor or persuasive paragraph that backs up their opinion with points from the article.

### **Pre-exercise discussion points:**

1. Discuss with students what an opinion is. Ask them to give examples of statements that are opinions that do not use the words, “I think”. For example, “Jaguars are the coolest animals on Earth.” How do we know that all people feel that jaguars are the coolest animals? We could find people who would argue that statement, which makes it an opinion.
2. Discuss how facts are different than opinions – opinions can be argued, but facts cannot. Facts can be proven – for example, “The jaguar is a member of the feline family.” As your students use their critical thinking skills, they will start to see that facts and opinions are not always a black and white issue, especially when a particular viewpoint is not an accepted fact.
3. Discuss how the structure of a new article is typically divided into the following sections:
  - a. Thesis or introductory paragraph: states the purpose for writing the article.
  - b. Body or supporting paragraphs: a number of paragraphs that discuss points in support of the thesis statement.
  - c. Conclusion: a summary of the proceeding points and how they support the author’s view on the issue.
4. Discuss two reasons that someone might write an article:
  - a. To provide facts on an issue
  - b. To try to influence people to see/argue with a particular point of view.
5. A brief informational sheet about the Endangered Species Act and the associated recovery plans is included below. It could also be distributed to the class.

**Name:**

**Date:**

### **Fact or Opinion Worksheet**

Read each statement. Look up words that you don't know. Write "F" if you think the statement is a fact. Write "O" if you think the statement is an opinion (a belief or an opinion of an individual person).

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Jaguars are spend most of their time alone and do not live in groups.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Jaguars are strong animals with a big chest, large head, and short and strong arms and legs.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Jaguars used to live in the United States, but now there are less than 5 jaguars living here because of habitat loss and poaching.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Jaguars are the most beautiful animals on Earth.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Jaguars are an important animal and the United States government should make sure that they have what they need to live in our country.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Ranchers kill jaguars because they eat their cattle.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Jaguars should be allowed to eat a rancher's cattle because they are such beautiful animals.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Jaguar mothers have one to four cubs per litter.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ People should not be allowed to live in places where jaguars live.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Jaguars live from the southwestern United States all the way to the southern tip of South America.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ Hunting jaguars for their skins should be illegal and people who do this should be put in jail or fined.

## Fact or opinion worksheet page 2

### ON YOUR OWN:

Can you write three fact statements about jaguars? EXAMPLE: jaguars are carnivores.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Can you write three opinion statements about jaguars? EXAMPLE: jaguars are beautiful.

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:**

**Date:**

### **Taking Notes Worksheet**

Read the articles “Fish and Wildlife Service Completes Determination on Jaguars”, (Article 1) at and “U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refusal to create plan to save jaguar forces conservation group to act” (Article 2) While you’re reading, underline all words you don’t know. Make a list, look them up in the dictionary, and write down the definitions. Take notes and think about the thesis of the articles, the arguments that are presented, and the reasons for those arguments. Answer the following questions as you read:

1. What is the main idea of each article?

Article 1:

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Article 2:

2. What’s the opinion of the author?

Article 1:

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Article 2:

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3. What does “pro” mean? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What does “con” mean? \_\_\_\_\_

## Taking Notes Worksheet page 2

5. Which of these articles are “pro” jaguar and which one is “con” jaguar?

Pro: \_\_\_\_\_

Con: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Does the article list facts about jaguars, or opinions?

Article 1:

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Article 2:

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7. Why do you think that?

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### **Taking Notes Worksheet page 3**

Next, identify the main idea of each article and list the ideas that support each point of view.

#### **“PRO” Argument**

Thesis of the article:

Idea #1:

Idea #2:

Idea #3:

#### **“CON” Argument**

Thesis of the article:

Idea #1:

Idea #2:

Idea #3:

## Teacher's Guide for Fact or Opinion Worksheet

Read each statement. Look up words that you don't know. Write "F" if you think the statement is a fact. Write "O" if you think the statement is an opinion (a belief or an opinion of an individual person).

1. **Fact** - Jaguars are spend most of their time alone and do not live in groups.
2. **Fact** - Jaguars are strong animals with a big chest, large head, and short and strong arms and legs.
3. **Fact** - Jaguars used to live in the United States, but now there are less than 5 jaguars living here because of habitat loss and poaching.
4. **Opinion** - Jaguars are the most beautiful animals on Earth.
5. **Opinion** - Jaguars are an important animal and the United States government should make sure that they have what they need to live in our country.
6. **Fact** - Ranchers kill jaguars because they eat their cattle.
7. **Opinion** - Jaguars should be allowed to eat a rancher's cattle because they are such beautiful animals.
8. **Fact** - Jaguar mothers have one to four cubs per litter.
9. **Opinion** - People should not be allowed to live in places where jaguars live.
10. **Fact** - Jaguars live from the southwestern United States all the way to the southern tip of South America.
11. **Opinion** - Hunting jaguars for their skins should be illegal and people who do this should be put in jail or fined.

## Teacher's Guide for Taking Notes Worksheet – page 1:

What is the issue being discussed in both articles?

- Whether or not the United States should draft a formal recovery plan for the jaguar.

**“PRO” Article:** “U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refusal to create plan to save jaguar forces conservation group to act”

**Thesis:** A recovery plan for the endangered jaguar is legally required by the Endangered Species Act.

### Supportive statements:

- FWS’s action effectively dooms the jaguar to extinction in the U.S. despite the fact that there are individual jaguars in the United States, that there has been an increase in documented occurrences during the last decade, and that large swaths of prime jaguar habitat remain within the southwestern United States.
- “It doesn’t make sense that the agency would be willing to let the jaguar fade from the Southwest just because there is a larger population across the border.”
- Many threatened or endangered species, including bald eagles, grizzly bears, gray wolves, Canada lynx, and woodland caribou, have significant ranges outside of the United States. Under previous administrations, FWS has prepared recovery plans for all of these species
- “Animals do not recognize man-made political boundaries,” said Clark. “They do not know whether they are in the United States, Mexico or Canada, but they do know a good home when they see one.
- FWS has failed to respond to repeated calls over the last decade from scientists requesting that the wildlife agency develop a recovery plan for the American jaguar, as required by law.
- Most recently, in 2007, the prestigious American Society of Mammologists issued a resolution stating “jaguars continue to decline throughout significant portions of their remaining range” and “habitats for jaguars in the United States, including Arizona and New Mexico, are vital to the long-term resilience and survival of the species.”
- “Biologists have been celebrating the jaguar’s return to the American Southwest. Yet our government is for all intents declaring the jaguar to be a ‘tourist,’ and is giving up on preserving the jaguar, which is a beloved symbol of the Southwest,” said Craig Miller, Southwest representative for Defenders of Wildlife.
- “The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has the duty to protect and recover imperiled wildlife, but when they ignore science for politics, citizens must ensure that wildlife laws are upheld. The future of America’s jaguars is at stake.”

## **Teacher's Guide for Taking Notes Worksheet – page 2:**

**“CON” Article:** Fish and Wildlife Service Completes Determination on Jaguars

**Thesis:** A U.S. recovery plan for the endangered jaguar would not advance the conservation of the big cat.

### **Supportive statements:**

- The vast majority of jaguars and jaguar habitat lay south of the United States.
- Jaguars occur from southern South America to the U.S.-Mexico border area. The United States contains one percent of jaguar habitat.
- Too few jaguars and too little habitat in the United States signify that a recovery plan would have little influence on protecting the jaguar population.
- There are instances when recovery plans for listed species might not be sensible. Exemptions include species whose ranges extend entirely under the jurisdiction of other countries and when species would not benefit from a recovery plan.
- While the Service has determined that a formal U.S. recovery plan does not benefit the jaguar, the agency continues to be committed to its on-the-ground efforts.
- The Service protects jaguars within its borders, and works cooperatively with other Latin America countries to conduct research, protect habitat and reduce the killing of jaguars.
- The Service will continue to fund research in northern Mexico to improve knowledge of jaguar conservation. It supports the Borderlands Jaguar Detection Project to monitor occurrences in Arizona.
- The Jaguar Conservation Team, an Arizona-led effort, has summarized the current knowledge of U.S.-Mexico borderland jaguars and identified actions to facilitate the presence of jaguars in the U.S. and help them persist here and in Mexico. Various levels of protection and conservation plans for the jaguar are in place in many of the 20 countries through the cat's core range.

## Vocabulary List

1. Pro – an argument in favor or in support of something.
2. Con – an argument against or opposed to something.
3. Evidence - something that provides proof.
4. Fact - a thing that has actually happened or that is true; thing that has been or is the state of things as they are; reality; actuality; truth.
5. Opinion - a belief not based on absolute certainty or positive knowledge but on what seems true, valid, or probable to one's own mind.
6. Thesis – a statement that can be debated.
7. Persuade – to convince.
8. Endangered Species Act - The Endangered Species Act (ESA) was passed in 1973 in order to protect those plant and animal species that are at risk of becoming extinct. Species that receive protection under the ESA are classified into two categories, "Endangered" or "Threatened," depending on their status (how many are left in the wild) and how severely their survival is threatened. A species that is listed as Endangered is in danger of becoming extinct throughout a significant portion of its habitat range (the areas where it lives). Threatened species are those that are likely to become Endangered in the foreseeable future.
9. Habitat – the area where a plant or animal naturally grows or lives; native environment.
10. Extinct - no longer in existence; something that has ended or died out.
11. Imperiled – something that is in danger.
12. Determination - a decision arrived at by thought and investigation; conclusion

13. Conservation - the act of conserving; prevention of injury, decay, waste, or loss; preservation.
14. Nonbinding – something that does not hold someone to an obligation, duty, promise, etc.
15. Exemptions - freedom or release from a liability, obligation, etc.
16. Jurisdiction - the territory over which authority is exercised

## **Background information about the Endangered Species Act**

In 1973, President Richard Nixon declared current species conservation efforts to be inadequate and called on the 93rd United States Congress to pass comprehensive endangered species legislation. Congress responded by creating the Endangered Species Act of 1973 which was signed into law by Nixon on December 28, 1973.

The stated purpose of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is to protect species and also "the ecosystems upon which they depend." It encompasses plants and invertebrates as well as vertebrates.

The ESA only protects species which are officially listed as "endangered" or "threatened". A species can be listed in two ways. The first is for the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to take the initiative and directly list the species. The second is via an individual or organizational petition which prompts FWS or NMFS to conduct a scientific review.

There are two categories on the list, endangered and threatened. Endangered species are closer to extinction than threatened species. A third status is that of "candidate species". Under this status, the FWS has concluded that listing is warranted but immediate listing is precluded due to other priorities.

By law, FWS and NOAA Fisheries are required to create a Recovery Plan outlining the goals, tasks required, likely costs, and estimated timeline to recover endangered species (i.e., increase their numbers and improve their management to the point where they can be removed from the endangered list). The ESA does not specify when a recovery plan must be completed. The FWS has a policy stating that the plan should be completed within three years of the species being listed, but the average time to completion is approximately six years.

## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



# News Release

January 17, 2008

## **FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE COMPLETES DETERMINATION ON JAGUARS**

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### **Contacts**

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Jeff Humphrey, 602-242-0210

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has formalized its determination that a U.S. recovery plan for the endangered jaguar would not advance the conservation of the big cat. The vast majority of jaguars and jaguar habitat lay south of the United States.

Jaguars occur from southern South America to the U.S.-Mexico border area. The United States contains one percent of jaguar habitat. Four male jaguars, thought to originate from a core population 130 miles south of the border, are known to have crossed into New Mexico and Arizona since 1996.

Recovery plans are typically prepared for each plant and animal listed under the Endangered Species Act. They are voluntary, nonbinding documents that identify the threats to a species, lay out recommended actions that reduce or eliminate threats, estimate conservation costs and set goals by which recovery can be measured. Too few jaguars and too little habitat in the United States signify that a recovery plan would have little influence on protecting the jaguar population.

The Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service - the two principal federal fish and wildlife management agencies - recognize that there are instances when recovery plans for listed species might not be sensible. Exemptions include species whose ranges extend entirely under the jurisdiction of other countries and when species would not benefit from a recovery plan.

species would not benefit from a recovery plan.

While the Service has determined that a formal U.S. recovery plan does not benefit the jaguar, the agency continues to be committed to its on-the-ground efforts.

The Service protects jaguars within its borders, and works cooperatively with other Latin America countries to conduct research, protect habitat and reduce the killing of jaguars.

The Service has funded jaguar work in Belize, Argentina and Brazil. The Service will continue to fund research in northern Mexico to improve knowledge of jaguar conservation. It supports the Borderlands Jaguar Detection Project to monitor occurrences in Arizona. The Jaguar Conservation Team, an Arizona-led effort, has summarized the current knowledge of U.S.-Mexico borderland jaguars and identified actions to facilitate the presence of jaguars in the U.S. and help them persist here and in Mexico. Various levels of protection and conservation plans for the jaguar are in place in many of the 20 countries through the cat's core range.

The jaguar south of the border was included in the initial list of animals protected under the Endangered Species Act in 1972, but protection was not afforded in the U.S. The oversight was corrected in 1997 when protection was extended to jaguars in the states. The Endangered Species Act protects international species by making it unlawful to possess, sell or import an endangered species (or its parts - such as its pelt) into the United States from another country, without a permit.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

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Note: The jaguar recovery plan determination is available at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/> or from the contacts listed above.

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**June 3, 2008**

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## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refusal to create plan to save jaguar forces conservation group to act

*Defenders of Wildlife files suit to compel FWS to create a recovery plan for jaguars in the Southwest*

TUCSON, Ariz. – Warning that the imperiled population of jaguars in the United States faces serious threat of extinction, Defenders of Wildlife filed suit today in the federal district court of Arizona to overturn a recent decision by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) not to prepare a recovery plan for the endangered jaguar, as required by the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In February, FWS claimed that despite the presence of jaguars in the United States, this cat, the largest and most powerful in the western hemisphere, is a “foreign” species and as such does not qualify for formal recovery planning.

FWS’s action effectively dooms the jaguar to extinction in the U.S. despite the fact that there are individual jaguars in the United States, that there has been an increase in documented occurrences during the last decade, and that large swaths of prime jaguar habitat remain within the southwestern United States.

“It is absolutely mind boggling that FWS has let it get to the point where legal action is necessary to compel them to do their job,” said Jamie Rappaport Clark, executive vice president of Defenders of Wildlife. “When the eagle was in danger of extinction in the United States, FWS didn’t give up and say ‘there are plenty in Canada, so we don’t need them here in the States.’ It doesn’t make sense that the agency would be willing to let the jaguar fade from the Southwest just because there is a larger population across the border.”

FWS’s decision to deny recovery plan protections for the jaguar is the latest example of an increasingly common trend by the Bush administration to refuse full ESA protections for imperiled species whose ranges extend beyond our borders into Mexico, Canada and other nations. Many threatened or endangered species, including bald eagles, grizzly bears, gray wolves, Canada lynx, and woodland caribou, have significant ranges outside of the United States. Under previous administrations, FWS has prepared recovery plans for all of these species. In light of the myriad of threats faced by jaguars within the United States, FWS’s decision that the jaguar is a “foreign” species not deserving of a recovery plan would greatly increase its chances of domestic extinction, an outcome that is plainly at odds with the letter and spirit of the ESA.

Recovery plans serve as a basic road map to achieve the ESA’s ultimate goal of recovering imperiled species by identifying the threats to their existence and the actions needed to stop and reverse their slide towards extinction.

“Animals do not recognize man-made political boundaries,” said Clark. “They do not know whether they are in the United States, Mexico or

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## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refusal ...

Canada, but they do know a good home when they see one. This cross-our-fingers-and-hope approach to conserving cross-border species could result in the U.S. losing some of the most amazing species on the planet.”

According to Defenders, FWS has failed to respond to repeated calls over the last decade from scientists requesting that the wildlife agency develop a recovery plan for the American jaguar, as required by law. Most recently, in 2007, the prestigious American Society of Mammologists issued a resolution stating “jaguars continue to decline throughout significant portions of their remaining range” and “habitats for jaguars in the United States, including Arizona and New Mexico, are vital to the long-term resilience and survival of the species.”

“Biologists have been celebrating the jaguar’s return to the American Southwest. Yet our government is for all intents declaring the jaguar to be a ‘tourist,’ and is giving up on preserving the jaguar, which is a beloved symbol of the Southwest,” said Craig Miller, Southwest representative for Defenders of Wildlife. “The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has the duty to protect and recover imperiled wildlife, but when they ignore science for politics, citizens must ensure that wildlife laws are upheld. The future of America’s jaguars is at stake.”

[Learn more about what Defenders is doing to save the jaguar.](#)

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