

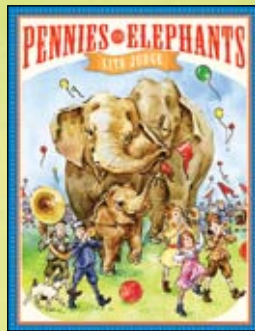
This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and children's author. Visit her Web site, www.tracievaughnzimmer.com, to find hundreds of guides like this one.

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Books by Lita Judge



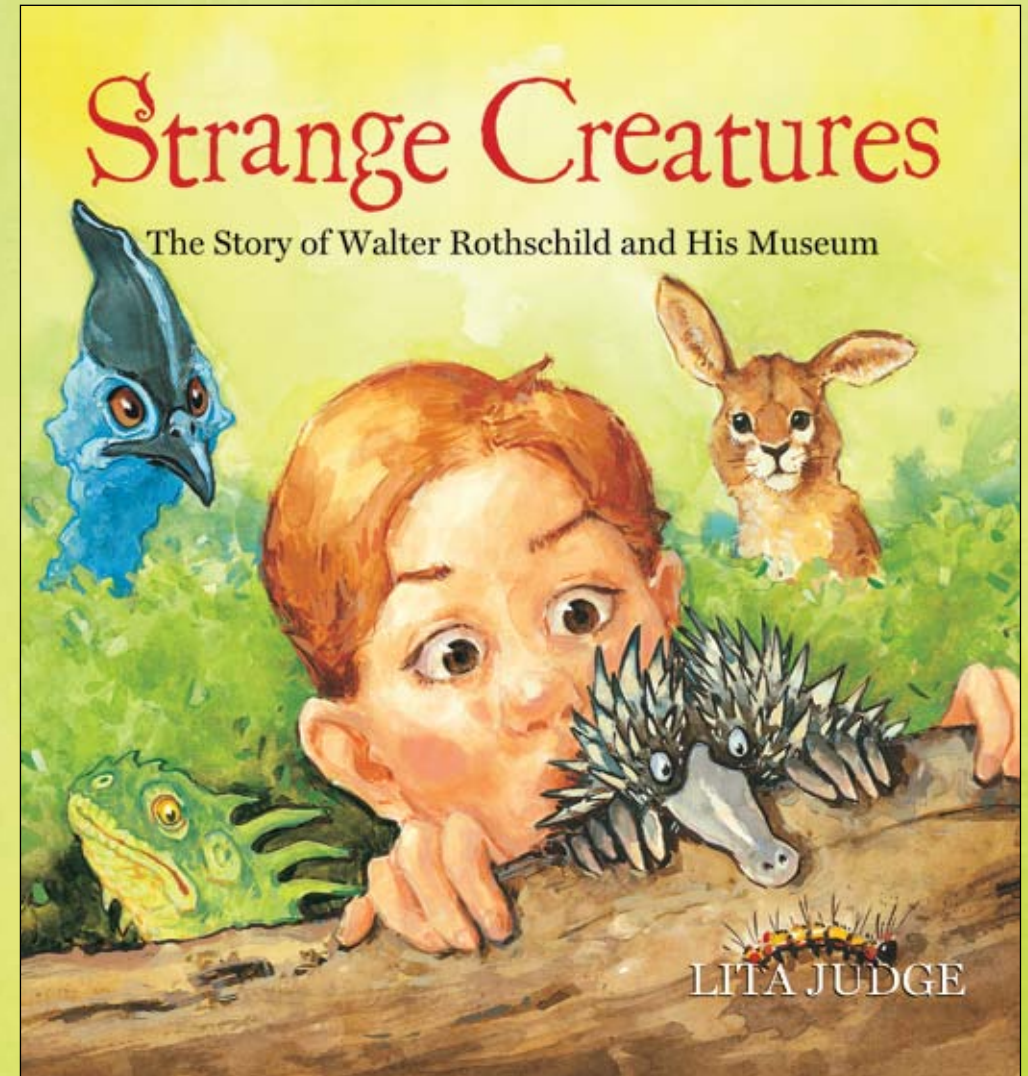
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DISCUSSION GUIDE

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About the Book

Walter Rothschild was a very unusual boy. He was born into a family of bankers and was nearly the richest boy in the world. But that's not what made him unusual. Walter was so shy he barely spoke. He had no friends, but he loved every creature that crawled, slithered, or flew. At the age of seven, Walter saw his first circus parade. He was so excited that he declared to his parents: "I'm going to collect animals from all over the world and build a museum!" *Strange Creatures* is the story of how a painfully shy boy followed his passion and became a brilliant scientist, forever changing our understanding of the world's diversity of creatures.



Prereading

If you could spend your day doing only one thing, what would it be? Why? How do people become fascinated with certain hobbies or ideas? If you could study only one subject all day at school what would it be?



Comprehension Check

- 1 List all the reasons that Walter is unusual. What is the oddest thing about him?
- 2 Why do you think Walter had no friends?
- 3 What did Walter's parents expect him to do? Why?
- 4 What event captured Walter's imagination? What idea did it give him?
- 5 Why did his parents agree to give him a kangaroo? What other animals came to live with Walter?
- 6 Who was Albert Günther? Why did he become important to Walter's life?
- 7 Did Mr. Rothschild support his son's explorations and ideas or not? How do you know?
- 8 How did Walter pursue his dreams even while working at the bank?
- 9 What compromise did Walter and his parents make? Why was this important?
- 10 Describe Walter's museum. Would you consider it a success or not? Why?

Discussion Questions

- 1 Should a really shy child be forced to be with other people or not? Why?
- 2 If you were Walter's parents what choices would you have made?
- 3 Why was Walter considered brilliant by some people and "half-baked" by others?
- 4 Would you have liked to be Walter's childhood friend or not?
- 5 Why was Walter's work so important to science and the world? If you could open a museum on anything what would it be and why?



Projects

Reading

Create a character map of Walter Rothschild's life. Some headings which may help you organize your chart: Early life, Family background, Important events, Education, Surprising facts or details, Major accomplishments. Share your map with a friend and compare information.

Writing

Create two journal entries as if you were Walter. What do you think he would write about? What would he say about his dreams? His animals? His expeditions and museum? Share with a friend what topic you decided to write about.



Vocabulary

Fill out the following chart based on the vocabulary from Walter's story. Try to define the **bold** words as they are used in context.

Words from Walter's story	What I think it means by reading the sentence: (context clues)	Actual definition from a dictionary (or use in a sentence to show what you know)
"His parents feared that other children would tease him at school, so they kept him home, where he was tutored by a governess ."		
"He was so excited, his feet hopped, his knees wobbled, and words started swarming in his mind."		
"He dreamed it would have animal specimens like a natural history museum, but also live animals."		
"Far-off jungles and uncharted islands were still waiting to be explored."		
"Walter reluctantly reported to his new life at the family firm."		

Music

Sing this song about Walter to the tune of "Brother John"

Walter Rothschild
 Walter Rothschild
 Would not speak
 Was quite meek
 Studied every creature
 Examined every feature
 Shared it all
 Big and small



After singing the song together, divide the class and sing it as a round! Or, have children write a new tune about Walter using classic children's rhymes or songs.

Art

Inspired by Walter (and Lita Judge!) study a creature that you may not have looked at quite closely before. Use a magnifying glass for something small or study a pet from a new angle. Make notes about their movement, color, and shapes before you begin sketching.



Science

Walter and other scientists love to categorize everything! Fill out the following chart based on what you know about these creatures.

	Mammals	Reptiles	Insects
Definition/ Characteristics			
Appearance			
Examples			



About the Author/Illustrator

Lita Judge feels a connection to Walter Rothschild. As a shy child, she, too, grew up with wild creatures. Her grandparents were ornithologists who cared for birds of prey. Every summer, Lita helped tend the eagles, owls, and hawks her family studied. And she shared another connection, too: her grandparents' scientific mentor, Ernst Mayr, began his career on an expedition collecting for Walter Rothschild.



Lita is the author-illustrator of several picture books, including *One Thousand Tracings*, which was an ALA Notable Children's Book and received the International Reading Association Children's Book Award. *School Library Journal* said about her book *Pennies for Elephants*, "This uplifting tale will surely captivate—and hopefully inspire—contemporary children." Lita lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. For more information about Lita and her books, please visit www.litajudge.com



A Conversation with Lita Judge

1 What inspired the book *Strange Creatures*? How did you bring his story to life?

I stumbled across an old photograph of Walter Rothschild in a zebra-drawn carriage and was fascinated by this eccentric, charming character. I couldn't find much information about him at first, but amazingly I discovered that my grandparents, who were both scientists, had worked with a man that started his scientific career under the guidance of Walter Rothschild! I traveled to England and visited Walter's museum to learn more. After absorbing his collection, talking to the museum's director, and exploring the museum archives I felt his contribution to science was significant but regretted that so few knew anything about his life. I thought kids could relate to Walter because he was a shy little boy who had big dreams and found a way to achieve them.



2 Compare your writing process to your art process. Which one do you prefer? Which feels most natural to you?

Because I'm both an illustrator and a writer I don't really separate my writing from my illustration. I build a story up from scratch using both storyboard and text. When I'm stuck on one part of the process, I find the other part informs and guides me. I enjoy the back and forth of this creative process. I'm probably more comfortable drawing because I see stories visually.

3 What advice do you have for young writers and artists?

Read a lot of books! Look at a lot of art! And write and draw every day. Be patient with yourself, celebrate your creative work, and never give up. Be open to revision and advice from other writers and artists, but also have faith in your own work.

