Meet Luna the Puma

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CHAPTER ONE

Oh, it feels good to stretch. I just woke up. It is a clear night and the moon is full. I can smell grass, oak trees and bay leaves. There is also a hint of deer.

Deer is my favorite food. I am very hungry. Yesterday at dusk I was creeping up on a raccoon. Then a raven spotted me, cawed and dove down over my head. That warned the raccoon, and all the other animals, that I was there. The raccoon quickly scurried up a tree into a hollow. So, I went hungry last night. I don’t have to eat every night, but I am hungry. I hope my luck will change tonight.

What can you smell when you are outside?

What do you smell now?

Color the drawing
I should probably introduce myself. My name is Luna. I am a female Puma. I live in an area humans call Sonoma County, California. Some people call my species cougars, panthers, or mountain lions.

Mountain lions, like myself, can live in many different **habitats** including: evergreen forests, **chaparral**, oak woodlands and deserts. I just need cover to hide in. There are pumas living as far north as the Yukon in Canada and as far south as Patagonia in South America.

*Do you have more than one name?*

*What do people call you?*

*Name some animals that live in lots of different habitats.*

Name some animals that only live in one type of habitat.

* **bolded** words are defined in the glossary on page 14.
It is a warm summer night and the crickets are chirping. I hear the breeze moving the leaves of the trees overhead. I am good at walking quietly. When I am creeping up on something I test the ground with my front foot then place my back foot on the same spot where my front foot was. Even when I’m not hunting I always walk with care, aware.

If the ground is soft I might leave tracks behind. Have you ever seen a puma track? My tracks are much bigger than a house cat, though the shape is very similar. Unlike dogs, wolves and foxes you won’t see claw markings in my tracks, because I pull my claws in when I walk, like other cats.

Next time you go for a nature walk see if you can walk as silently and carefully as a puma.

Why do you think cats have retractable claws?

What other difference do you notice about these tracks.

Color each type of track a different color.
CHAPTER TWO

I am at the eastern edge of my territory. I look carefully with my eyes that can see in the darkness, looking for signs of other pumas.

I have not been here for days and I want to refresh my markings. We have many ways to mark our territory. Every scat tells me something. I see a scrape on the ground and sniff to explore it. Ah, it is the male who shares my territory. It’s not fresh. It’s been a while since he passed by. I scrape nearby, my back feet scratching up the earth, leaving the scent stored between my toes. Then I spray, peeing my message on the mound. I mark my territory to let other female pumas know this is my hunting grounds and to stay away.

**How do people communicate with each other?**

**How do animals communicate with each other? Give at least three examples (think of pets, birds, insects, other mammals.)**
I come to a high fence. It surrounds a vineyard and is there to keep deer away from the vines. I don’t feel like going the long way around.

I crouch, then spring. I stretch out my long back legs keeping my sturdy tail straight, so it balances me like a **rudder** as I jump. I land easily on the other side, my front paws and strong front legs acting like shock absorbers. I can jump much higher than this fence - 15 feet high if I want to!

*Measure out 15 feet, that’s about 10 steps in a straight line for you. Now imagine this going upwards. How tall are you?*

*How much higher can a puma jump than your height?*
CHAPTER THREE

I walk on through the still night. I freeze. Not far off the trail I can see a deer sleeping. I move ever so slowly closer. Close enough now, 15 feet, that is an easy leap for me. At a run I can jump up to 40 feet.

Pounce. I have it. I use my powerful jaws to kill the deer.

I don’t want other animals to be attracted by the smell of the stinky intestines. There is soft ground nearby where I can bury them. I use my paws to move the earth and leaves. Then I drag the intestines of the deer over to my hole and cover them with earth again.

I use my tiny, flat front teeth to scrape the fur away from the skin of the deer before eating the meat. There is more food here than I need for today, so I will cache the rest, covering it with leaves and soil. I will return tomorrow to eat more. This deer should last me three more nights if coyotes don’t find it and eat it.

How many different shaped teeth are there in the mountain lion skull?

What do you think the different types of teeth are used for?

Do any of the teeth remind you of tools you have in your house?
Pumas like me are important. What do you think would happen if we were not here to eat the deer? There would be so many deer that they would eat up most of the bushes. Think about all the other animals that need leaves, flowers, seeds and fruit from the bushes.

Add insects, birds and other animals to the picture that eat and live in the bushes.
CHAPTER FOUR

The last time I gave birth to kittens was eighteen months ago. I had three kittens, two females and a male. They had spots on their fur, unlike me. When they were first born I fed them milk.

I had a nice place for my kittens to hide when I went out to hunt. Every time I had to go hunting or walking my territory I had to leave them all alone and they were completely helpless. Any kind of predator would eat my kittens if they saw them – birds of prey, bobcats, coyotes, raccoons, or snakes.

Once they were about two months old my cubs ventured out of the den and started eating meat. After that they followed me everywhere I went except when I was hunting. Then they’d wait for me and I’d come back to show them to the food.

*Why do you think the kittens have spots?*
My cubs used to play together. They would sneak up behind fallen logs and pounce on each other and tumble. While I was trying to get a nap they sometimes crept up and tried to catch my tail. A snarl from me would stop that trick, but playing is a good way for them to learn the skills needed to survive.

*What skills do you think the kittens are learning by the games they play?*

*Draw a picture of the kittens playing.*
CHAPTER FIVE

By the time my son was 5 months old he was the only kitten left. He would watch me hunt. Over the next few months he learned to hunt on his own. He started with small things like mice and rabbits. He was so proud the first time he caught a deer!

We spent many months together as I taught him all I know. He finally left me a week ago to make his way on his own. I was tired of sharing my food with him and it feels good to be alone again.

It is not easy for young males and he will travel many miles. There are other mountain lions with territories they don’t want to share, so he is on the move, sneaking around hoping not to bump into another male. He will most likely only be strong enough to take a territory of his own when he is 4 or 5 years old. I will probably never see him again.

*How old was the young male when he left his mother?*

Below is a map of mountain lion territories. The white outline is the male’s territory. The colored outlines are the females.

*How many females live inside the male’s territory?*
CHAPTER SIX

The sun rises and the day begins to warm. People are moving about. I have heard that many people are afraid of me. I wish they knew that I’m not interested in catching them. I avoid humans. I watch them sometimes as they pass by making so much noise it’s easy to slip away and hide before they see me.

Time to find a place to sleep for the day. There are some thick bushes in this drainage, good cover and lovely shade. I will just push in here where I will be well hidden and scrape the ground a little to make it comfortable. In a few months I hope to have new kittens. This might be a good den site. I’ll remember it.

Look at the picture on the top right. Circle some places in the picture where you think would be the best places for her to sleep.

Can you spot the puma in the bottom right picture?
MOUNTAIN LION ADAPTATIONS

From her nose to her tail Luna has many features that help her survive. Look at the diagram below and use the information from the story to list at least five parts of her body that are adapted to help her live. Name the body part and how she uses it to survive.

1.___________________________________________________________________________

2.___________________________________________________________________________

3.___________________________________________________________________________

4.___________________________________________________________________________

5.___________________________________________________________________________
WRITE A POEM

Imagine you are Luna. Write a poem about what it feels like to be a mountain lion. Start with some adjectives that would describe a mountain lion. Then imagine how the world would seem through a mountain lion’s senses. Finally, put it together to write your poem.

Adjective that describe Luna:

I see:

I hear:

I smell:

I feel:

I taste:

Your poem:
GLOSSARY

**Cache** – prey is covered and hidden under leaves and dirt

**Chaparral** – thicket shrubland found in California

**Habitats** – places where communities of plants and animals live together

**Intestines** – the long tube where food passes through and is digested after it has been in the stomach

**Rudder** – a vertical blade that stabilizes and balances a boat and can be used to steer it when moved

**Scat** – animal poop

**Scrape** – a hollow in the ground with a mound of dirt behind it made by a mountain lion scraping the soil with its paws

**Territories** – areas of land ruled by an individual animal and defended against others
What did you learn about mountain lions from this story?

What else would you like to know about mountain lions?

Watch videos of mountain lions and learn more about ACR’s Living with Lions Project
Here: https://www.egret.org/living-with-lions