



Walton Ford (American, born 1960). *Buddha Purnima*, 1998. Watercolor, gouache, ink, and pencil on paper. Courtesy of Paul Kasmin Gallery

Educator packet for the special exhibition

## ***Tigers of Wrath: Watercolors by Walton Ford***

on view at the Brooklyn Museum, November 3, 2006–January 28, 2007

# Buddha Purnima

## Storytelling and Natural History

Content recommended for K–5 students

### Description

In this large watercolor, an Indian gharial (a crocodile-like reptile) with a common langur on its back is walking into a river. The tail of the gharial hooks around a rose-apple tree, and the langur clutches some of the freshly picked fruit to his chest. Fallen fruit and langur bones are scattered on the bank, and American crocodiles can be seen in the receding river, devouring other langurs. In the background, Mughal-style buildings can be seen on the banks.

The watercolor depicts a traditional jataka story (a Buddhist moral tale) about a monkey who lived on the banks of the Ganges. The monkey ate delicious rose-apples and gave some to the crocodile to take home to his wife. The wife said, “Those are delicious. I’d like to eat the monkey who eats those every day. I’d like to eat his heart.” Attempting to trick the monkey, the crocodile tried to take him on his back to his wife. But the monkey, aware of the deceit, told the crocodile that he left his heart back in the tree, fooling the crocodile into returning to the shore.

The title of this artwork refers to the sacred day in the Buddhist calendar that celebrates Lord Buddha. Animals are treated kindly on this day and will often share food with humans.

### Artist Background

As a child, Walton Ford visited the dioramas in the American Museum of Natural History and was drawn to the wealth of information contained within: the wall text, the painted landscape backdrops, and the animals. Other inspiration came from the 19th-century naturalist-painter John James Audubon. Ford spent time in India in the mid-1990s and like Audubon, he includes an incredible amount of detail about the animals and their habitat. However, unlike Audubon, Ford adds twists to his work—the American crocodile would not be found swimming in the Ganges, as Ford depicts in

*Buddha Purnima.*

The works in *Tigers of Wrath* are watercolors; the animals depicted are life-scale (another legacy from Audubon) and are often surrounded by notes, the Latin names for the animals, and the artwork’s title.

### Questions for Viewing

What’s going on in this image? Describe the body language of the gharial and the langur. What kind of relationship do you think they have?

This painting shows us a moral tale about a monkey and a crocodile. What do you imagine the moral of the story could be? Compare your ideas to the story provided in Description.

Read the story. What part of the story is Ford showing us? What happened just before this scene? What is going to happen next?

What else did Ford include in his painting that is not part of the story? Why do you think he added these details?

### Activities

#### *Storytelling Activity*

Have students choose either the langur or the gharial and write a story about what they do every day. Encourage students to research these animals to supplement what they can see in the image.

There are many examples of moral tales whose main characters are animals with human characteristics, such as *Just So Stories* and *Aesop’s Fables*. Choose one and have students illustrate a scene from the story. Compare the fantastical stories to observations the students have made of the actual animals.

#### *Art Activity*

Have students choose a mammal, reptile, or bird and create a naturalist’s notebook to document the animal’s appearance, habitat, feeding habits, and activities. Encourage students to combine sketches and notes into diagrams.

Use the information in the notebooks to create a final life-size portrait of the animal in its habitat.

## Resources

Walton Ford: *Tigers of Wrath, Horses of Instruction*. With texts by Steven Katz and Dodie Kazanjian. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002. This monograph of Ford's work includes an interview and quotes from primary source 19th-century documents.

The following Web site has information on conducting observational writing and scientific reports (from scientists at the American Museum of Natural History). <http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/sciencewriting/index.htm>

Explore the prints in Audubon's *Birds of America* at: [http://www.audubon.org/bird/boa/BOA\\_index.html](http://www.audubon.org/bird/boa/BOA_index.html)

*Tigers of Wrath: Watercolors by Walton Ford* is organized by the Brooklyn Museum.

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