

## **The Re-call of the Jungle: Jo-Jo's Search for the Lost Home in *Jo-Jo The Orangutan***

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### **Abstract**

Living beings share and coexist in the planet called Earth. God's bestowed gifts to humanity are flora and fauna, and it is the duty of all living beings to live in harmony. This balance in harmony is disturbed when humans and animals transcend and trespass each other's' areas. *Jo-Jo The Orangutan* follows the story of the titular animal character Jo-Jo who is an orangutan. The story navigates the conflicts that the orangutan experiences between the green and gray dualities of his/her existence within the lush green jungle and intruding gray city. The research paper examines the themes of deforestation, animal abduction, habitat destruction, highlighting the need for conservation of forest and wildlife, and it also focuses on how literature aids as a tool to promote awareness. The study in addition advocates for a reconciliatory approach to coexist, to motivate empathy, foster better human-animal relationships, and safeguard the rich tapestry of nature. It also disseminates the need to preserve, cherish and respect the Earth and its beings.

**Keywords:** Memory, Animal abduction, Deforestation, Habitat destruction, Conservation, Earth, Wildlife.

### **Introduction**

*Jo-Jo The Orangutan* is a charming illustrated picture book for children created by the author Juan Scaliter and illustrator Denise Turu. The book features vibrant illustrations and a heartwarming story of an orangutan named Jo-Jo, who was thriving in a vibrant green jungle with his mother until he was tragically abducted and confined to a cold gray city.

Deprived of care, Jo-Jo longed for his lush home, until a compassionate woman rescued him and took him to a new green jungle. Under her love, care and affection, Jo-Jo was finally able to find solace in the new green paradise. Through engaging storytelling, the author Juan sheds light on animal abduction, deforestation, habitat loss, and the importance of nature, potentially highlighting the unique characteristics of orangutans and the need to preserve these endangered creatures. Juan has employed the technique of anthropomorphism, which involves attributing human characteristics to animals or deities. He illustrates this technique by designating Jo-Jo as the narrator, thus imbuing the protagonist Jo-Jo with the narrative voice of humans.

Inspired by a real-life incident which Juan had learned about from Dr. Karmele Llano Sánchez, a veterinary volunteer, during one of his trips to Indonesia as a journalist, both Juan and Denise decided to create this thoughtful book. Dr. Karmele Llano Sánchez currently serves as the Executive Director of International Animal Rescue in Indonesia. During one of her rescue missions, she and her team encountered Jo-Jo, an extremely emaciated and

abandoned orangutan chained on a pallet in the street. They successfully rescued Jo-Jo after making necessary agreements with the government (Dr. Carmele Llano Sánchez).

The research paper explores themes of deforestation, animal abduction, and habitat destruction, emphasising the urgent need for the conservation of forests and wildlife while highlighting the literature's role in promoting awareness. Additionally, it fosters empathy in individuals, encouraging them to protect and respect Mother Earth to lead a sustainable life.

### Jo-Jo's First World of Green

Forest with its serene beauty, towering trees, gentle breeze, rustling leaves, creeping sun, fragrant florals and majestic faunas, is a rich tapestry of nature. One of the intelligent groups of primates in the forest is the 'Orangutans'. They are magnificent apes inhabiting the rainforests of Indonesia and Malaysia. In Malay and Indonesian, "orang" represents "person," and "utan," being derived from "hutan," means "forest." Therefore, the term "orangutan" literally means "the person of the forest" ("Orangutan."). Orangutans are highly patient, attentive, inquisitive, intelligent mammals, and are closely related to humans, having 97% of DNA in common with humans (Orangutan facts).

The name Indonesia is derived from the Greek words 'indos', meaning "India," and 'nesos,' meaning "island" (Indonesia). Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago, is a paradise of lush forests and vibrant ecosystems, where the majestic orangutan protagonist Jo-Jo was born. Nestled at the crossroads of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, this rich landscape serves as a vital bridge between Asia and Australia. In the heart of this extraordinary environment, Jo-Jo thrives among towering trees and diverse wildlife, surrounded by the beauty of nature which defines his green home (Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Vancouver, Canada).

The story of *Jo-Jo the Orangutan* unfolds through a poignant flashback, as the animal protagonist Jo-Jo unfurls the tale of his life. Jo-Jo was born amidst the rustling leaves of a lush jungle, where green hues filled his world. The vibrant colour green was his primary memory as the jungle was as wide as a green ocean. Besides green, Jo-Jo's memory was also accompanied by the unique and comforting scent of Jo-Jo's mother which, ". . . IS NOT SOLD . . . NEITHER MANUFACTURED NOR INVENTED" (6). Whenever Jo-Jo drowns in sadness or fear, he closes his eyes and retreats to his childhood period, which he affectionately refers to as "greenfancy" (5). In this reverie, sweet memories of Jo-Jo's jungle home, allow him to briefly cast aside the heaviness of his sorrow, longingness, and loneliness, which reminds him, that "SMELLS ARE THE COLOURS WE USE WHEN WE WANT TO DREAM" (7).

Jo-Jo while living with his mother in the green scenery must have been the happiest amidst the green leaves swaying in the wind. This feeling of Jo-Jo mirrors one of the opening lines of Keats' poem *Endymion*:

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:  
Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep  
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep  
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing. (lines 1-5)

Keats' notion that joy is eternal, refers to the profound impact of cherished memories which provide solace and warmth. Similarly, Jo-Jo's happiness is deeply rooted in the memories of greenfancy and childhood spent with his mother. This everlasting memory will never fade as it soothes Jo-Jo's mental state, providing him with an enduring sense of comfort and joy that transcends time.

## The Second World of Gray

In a world where nature's beauty thrives, the serene existence of wildlife often faces various threats. For Jo-Jo, a vibrant creature of the jungle, this stark reality emerged through a haunting memory that contrasts sharply with the joyful memories of his life. Unlike the two happy memories, there existed a third memory, heavy with pain, that contrasts with the sweetness of the previous recollections. It was his memory of being abducted by humans. The helpless young orangutan Jo-Jo was trapped, captured and carried away in a cage to another jungle which lacked the enthralling colour green, radiant happiness and optimism that nature offered. Instead, it was a gray world that was depressing, filled with sadness, sorrow and pessimism. Though this bitter memory is as old as the others, it occupies a larger space in Jo-Jo's heart due to its agony. It was a world devoid of the vibrant greens that Jo-Jo cherished. In this new daunting jungle, fear surrounded Jo-Jo, as he who embraced in the jungle, is now being chained to a lamp post on the streets. "IT HAD VERY TOUGH LEAVES THAT TRAPPED ME. THEY DIDN'T BEND IN THE RAIN AND THEY TASTED AWFUL. AND IF I TRIED TO MOVE THEY HURT ME. IT WAS A SAD FOREST, WITH SAD LEAVES THAT SURELY MISSED GREEN." (13)

The chains tasted terrible and hurt whenever Jo-Jo attempted to move. To Jo-Jo, this gray jungle was a sorrowful forest, filled with dull leaves that missed the verdant splendour of Jo-Jo's past. Amidst this struggle, Jo-Jo found solace in the rainy days which were the only moments of happiness in the current bleak existence. The rain cleansed the Earth and put away the winds to sleep, and each drop felt like a personal message for Jo-Jo, all being a reminder of Jo-Jo's former life.

After the rain, humans often appeared, and Jo-Jo attempted to offer them water, hoping for some connection. However, they rejected Jo-Jo, grunting in displeasure, leaving Jo-Jo bewildered and hurt. ". . . AND THEY GRUNTED VERY STRANGELY, AS IF THEY WERE ANGRY. I NEVER KNEW WHY" (16). Listening to the whispers of leaves in the former green jungle and receiving growlings at the new gray jungle further added to his sorrow. Days passed, yet Jo-Jo remained shackled to the gray tree that served as a cruel prison. Jo-Jo's hope began to wane and so was his spirit and skin.

Exhausted and heartbroken, Jo-Jo slept, yearning for the lush world, where he once dwelled and embraced the comforting scent of his mother. Jo-Jo's yearning mirrors the poet John Keats's words in the concluding lines of the poem *Endymion*, ". . . and quickly dress/ My uncertain path with green, that I may speed/ Easily onward, thorough flowers and weed" (70-72). Jo-Jo's struggle in the gray jungle is evident with his longing for the green lush jungle where he was the "Jungle-man" (28).

The reasons that form the bridge between the two worlds of Jo-Jo are deforestation, habitat destruction and animal abduction. The word 'deforestation' comprises three major words: 'de', 'forest' and 'ation'. The prefix 'de' represents 'removal, reduction or doing the opposite of,' the root word 'forest' represents 'an area that is densely covered in trees,' and the suffix 'ation' represents 'the action or process of doing something' ("ation."). Thereby, the word 'deforestation' literally means 'the action of cutting down trees.' In other words, the green lungs of nature ("Why are forest called lungs of nature?") are destroyed by humans for logging, urbanisation, mining, agricultural expansion, grazing, the demand of land, resources and more.

Elizabeth Kolbert, an American journalist and author in her Pulitzer Prize-winning book *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, says, "Vast forests are razed. Humans do this deliberately, in order to feed themselves" (8). Ultimately, deforestation leads to a range of serious consequences, which includes climate change, soil erosion, global warming,

habitat destruction, loss of biodiversity, and so on. The consequences pose serious threats to ecological balance, and the well-being of countless species, including humans.

One such species which is adversely affected by deforestation is the orangutan, which, in addition to suffering habitat loss, also faces the threats of abduction and illegal trade. Abduction is the unlawful or forcible carrying away of a person or animal according to *Merriam-Webster dictionary*. Thereby, animal abduction refers to animal trafficking or kidnapping. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines "theft" as the "crime of stealing something," while "abduction" refers to the act of forcibly taking someone to a different location. This is a significant shift in language that highlights the awareness of animals as "sentient beings" ("Pet abduction bill becomes law in England and Northern Ireland"). Jo-Jo, a young sentient being, found himself torn between the painful realities of his/her life caused by the other sentient beings with selfishness. The New Yorker magazine's environment observer and commentator, Elizabeth Kolbert says,

. . . to be more specific, rate of change. When the world changes faster than species can adapt, many fall out. . . . It doesn't much matter whether people care or don't care. What matters is that people change the world. . . . As soon as humans started using signs and symbols to represent the natural world, they pushed beyond the limits of that world. . . . If you want to think about why humans are so dangerous to other species, you can picture a poacher in Africa carrying an AK-47 or a logger in the Amazon gripping an axe, [sic] or, better still, you can picture yourself, holding a book on your lap. (266-277)

This passage by Kolbert from the book *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* emphasises the complex relationship between human activity and environmental changes, highlighting the critical issue of the rate of change in relation to species adaptation. The author further argues that the emergence and use of signs and symbols to represent the natural world reflects the diminishing state of nature itself, highlighting the urgent need for conservation. When the author states "to hold a book on your lap," she conveys her deep concern that the future generations will have to learn about nature solely through texts, as if it were a historical subject rather than a vibrant, living entity.

Thus, the selfish actions of humans, driven by their desires for profit and possession, had shattered Jo-Jo's world and thrust the orangutan into captivity. Jo-Jo became a victim of human greed that cost him his green home and mother's embrace. Above all, Jo-Jo was deprived of the freedom to sway between trees happily as the 'Jungleman' of the forest, and was also stripped of duty as the gardener who nurtures diversity.

### Home Again

Overwhelmed with sadness, Jo-Jo, chained to a grim gray pole, was yearning for his freedom, thinking of the green trees. Days passed like an eternity, until a compassionate woman encountered Jo-Jo. Unlike the other human beings in the city, who roared and growled, she approached JoJo quite gracefully. "SHE SHARED SOME WATER WITH [JO-JO], LOOKED [JO-JO] IN THE EYES (SHE SAW [JO-JO]!)" (19). She knelt beside Jo-Jo, offering some water, with her eyes reflecting an understanding of Jo-Jo's plight. She looked into Jo-Jo's soul, sensing his profound sadness and deep longing for the green jungle.

With her hands, she took hold of the chain of gray leaves that bound Jo-Jo. She "BROKE THE CHAINS OF THE GRAY TREE" (19) and wrapped him in a warm hug. Jo-Jo felt comfort in her embrace and sensed a faint trace of the rich scents of the green world he craved. She led Jo-Jo away from the city that he despised and carried him to a paradise, a vibrant green jungle alive with colours and sounds that soothed Jo-Jo's restless heart.

After long rains and nights, Jo-Jo in the new green jungle, began to heal. The echoes of the orangutan's desperate calls faded which were instead replaced by the gentle rustling of leaves in the jungle life. The woman, who rescued the orangutan lovingly named him, Jo-Jo, caressed him as if he were a delicate leaf and she as if the winds of the jungle that Jo-Jo had longed for. Though the woman lacked a scent similar to the orangutan's mother, Jo-Jo cherished her presence, and in a way, he began to regard her as family.

Finally, Jo-Jo's troubles in the gray city melted away, replaced by the joy of discovering the new green home. "NOW I LIVE IN A NEW JUNGLE. I NO LONGER HAVE TO CLOSE MY EYES TO REMEMBER" (24). In the green paradise, Jo-Jo never closes his eyes to remember the sweetness of his childhood; instead, he embraces the beauty of the new jungle, finding solace among the trees and the whispers of the wind. Though Jo-Jo's footsteps remain limited, his story through literature has spread far and wide, reaching the hearts of those who are willing to listen.

Jo-Jo and Dr. Karnele currently reside in an orangutan project shelter. In sharing the journey from captivity to liberty, Jo-Jo became a beacon of hope, teaching the world about resilience and the profound bond between a creature of the jungle and the compassionate human soul who set him free. It also highlights the urgent need for wildlife conservation and preservation of their natural habitats. Literature, as a powerful tool, has become a catalyst for awareness, revealing the profound need of the hour, and inspiring readers to recognize the vital role they play in protecting forests and the diverse creatures' 'green home.'

## **Conclusion**

Children's Literature inculcates good habits in children by igniting their moral compass. In particular, the animal fables encourage children to foster kindness and prioritise compassion over dominance and harsh treatment. Thus, the theme of the story *Jo-Jo The Orangutan* and the illustrations in the book illuminate young minds to learn about the misery and suffering of animals, caused by deforestation and animal abduction. It also instils a sense of kindness, empathy and the necessity to conserve forests and wildlife to lead a sustainable life.

Thus, the alarming shift of deforestation has not only led to the decline of trees and forests but also resulted in the disappearance of numerous wild animals, which includes 'Orangutans.' These primates require extensive forest habitats for their survival and they play a crucial role in maintaining the ecosystem as they are the "gardeners of the jungle" (28). By consuming various fruits and dispersing their seeds as they move from tree to tree, orangutans contribute significantly to the 'biodiversity' of the environment. Therefore the issues of deforestation and the abduction of wildlife are interconnected demanding attention and action. Consequently, it is the duty of every citizen globally to preserve harmony, foster respect, and compassion and coexist with other 'Living beings,' ensuring the sustainable stewardship of the natural world.

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