

Refashioning EFL Education: Reading *The Jungle Book* in the Anthropocene

Shubhneet Kaur Kharbanda (University of Delhi)

Abstract

Being the 'Generation Anthropocene' (Macfarlane 2016) requires new notions, terminology and concepts to deal with current ecological, socio-political and economic crises and to chart out a course of action for the future. Such times also call for interdisciplinary undertakings that encourage exploration and discussions about what led to the Anthropocene and how it impacts humanity, as well as those with whom humans share the planet. To conceptualize ways of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) that incorporate the broader goals of sustainability and are more in sync with the realities of teaching in the Anthropocene, it is imperative that English language teachers reformulate their professional practices. Posthumanism, this article suggests, can provide a useful paradigm and support a nuanced articulation of the role of teaching EFL in subverting the tradition of anthropocentrism and relocating the human in synergetic networks with other nonhuman entities. A late twentieth century reaction to anthropocentrism can be found in a posthumanism that destabilizes the limits and symbolic boundaries presented by the notion of the human. Children's animal stories, with specific emphasis on Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), can be refashioned in EFL education by foregrounding them in a posthumanist and holistic understanding of the human and non-human alike. This article seeks to highlight interspecies relationships and to problematize stable human-non-human animal borders through a posthumanist reading of *The Jungle Book*. It also offers some suggestions for teaching *The Jungle Book* in the EFL classroom with a focus on embodiment and performance.

Keywords: English as a foreign language; posthumanism; animal studies; children's literature; animal stories

Human-created climate change, pollution, deforestation, global mass extinction, rapid exploitation of natural resources, an increasing human population, large-scale animal farming and land use, and nuclear

Kaur Kharbanda, Shubhneet. 2025. 'Refashioning EFL Education: Reading *The Jungle Book* in the Anthropocene.' *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 24(2): 179–202. <https://doi.org/10.35360/njes.v24i2.62139>. Copyright (c) 2025 Shubhneet Kaur Kharbanda. This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

destruction continue to impact the planet and have serious effects on all life forms that inhabit it. It is important, however, to recognize that the consequences of anthropogenic natural resource exploitation affect people unequally. Some individuals and groups are more directly responsible for the misuse and overuse of these resources than others and often reap immediate benefits. In contrast, those who are less advantaged bear the brunt of the resulting harm, alongside countless non-human beings, who suffer the consequences of this exploitation. Both Amitav Ghosh (2016) and Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2019), for instance, debunk the idea that humanity as a whole is equally responsible for the ecological crisis, highlighting the disproportionate roles played by industrialized, colonial powers. They contend that the Anthropocene is not a universal crisis but one deeply rooted in the violence and extraction of colonialism. DeLoughrey (2019) critically examines how the concept of the Anthropocene often reflects perspectives from the Global North, particularly in its formulation of the ‘human’ as an undifferentiated, industrialized, and predominantly masculine figure (11). She contends that this universalizing narrative neglects the diverse experiences and contributions of marginalized communities, particularly those in postcolonial and Indigenous contexts.

Historically, such marginalized communities consist of ethnicities that have been discarded from the sphere of anthropocentric thought by the ruling colonial European powers and restricted to nonhuman life or *zoe*—bare, non-human life (Braidotti and Hlavajova 2018: 2). This exclusion reflects a hierarchical division between *bios*—life with political significance—and marginalized forms of existence (3). Significantly for this article, these excluded communities also include several other species of the planet, vegetable and animal forms, and even the genes and genomic codes forming the foundational fabric of life, or the ‘epigenetic landscapes’ (2). The concept of epigenetic landscapes emphasizes how environmental and systemic factors have shaped and continue to shape biological and social realities beyond the genetic level. These landscapes, dynamic and responsive, reveal the entanglement of human and non-human life, further challenging anthropocentric hierarchies. Together, these perspectives highlight the need to reconsider the intricate interplay between the political, biological, and ecological dimensions of existence, and to rethink the boundaries between human and nonhuman life in favour of a more inclusive ethical framework (Braidotti and Hlavajova 2018).

A late twentieth century reaction to anthropocentrism can be found in posthumanism. The recognition of a ‘posthuman condition’, a state in which the boundaries between human and nonhuman, life and death, and nature and technology are increasingly blurred, has brought together exhilarating developments along with a vexing reminder of old pending problems that remain to be solved (Braidotti and Hlavajova 2018). For instance, technological advances in artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and climate adaptation present opportunities for reimagining life and its potential. These developments, however, coexist with persistent issues such as ecological degradation, systemic inequalities, and the exploitation of marginalized human and non-human groups. Such tensions reflect the dual nature of the posthuman condition, wherein progress is inextricably linked to the enduring legacies of anthropocentrism and injustice.

For the posthuman to emerge as an inclusive and unfixed notion, it must be premised upon a critical understanding, as well as a critical revision, of the notion of the human. As Zoe Jaques (2015) emphasises, ‘an awareness of the posthuman gives the voices of alterity space to speak out against normative, dominant modes of being’ (6). Critical posthumanism in its drastic revision of humanism proposes to leave behind the traditional humanist ways of treating the human as the autonomous self-willed individual agent. Instead, it considers the human as a conglomeration that undergoes co-evolution with other life forms and is entangled with the environment as well as with technology.

As a critical approach and theoretical methodology, critical posthumanism analyses how cultural representations and discourses have considered the human as unique and complete in itself, and how these representations and discourses have essentialised certain attributes such as reason and linguistic ability as singularly human. In contrast, the deconstruction of the marginalization of ‘other’ bodies and forms as sub-human or non-human serves as posthumanism’s theoretical philosophical methodology. As a theoretical methodology, it draws on several critical approaches, such as animal studies, theories of vital materialism, actor network theory, cybernetics, machine ethics, and monster studies. These feed into and endow posthumanism as they reconstruct the boundaries of the human and disturb the received hierarchies between the human, on the one hand, and the non-human, the machine and the inhuman, on the other (Nayar 2014: 14–15).

Literature and other art forms contribute significantly to the epistemological concerns of posthumanism, as literature and art, too, deal with ‘the unfamiliar, the unrealized, and the unknown, only on a more concrete, embodied, contextualized, and/or personal level’ (Karkulehto, Koistinen and Varis 2019: 5). Literature and art can imagine, interrogate and nurture the subjective and embodied attributes of the non-human experience that the objectifying methods of the natural sciences tend to leave out. It is through such imaginary explorations that sensitivity and other similar personal engagements can occur, which can augment the human comprehension of non-human beings and entities, which, in turn, can lead to conspicuous epistemological and ethical changes in understanding (Bernaerts et al. 2014).

This article relies on a body of multidisciplinary posthumanist thought to examine how children’s fiction can contribute to English as a foreign language (EFL) education in the Anthropocene. To conceptualize how EFL teaching can incorporate the broader goals of sustainability and be more in synchrony with the realities of teaching in the Anthropocene, it is imperative that English language teachers reformulate their professional practices. Theoretical and philosophical paradigms such as critical posthumanism, I wish to argue, can contribute to an articulation of the role literature can play in EFL teaching to subvert the tradition of anthropocentrism and relocate the human into synergetic networks with non-human entities.

Post-anthropocentrism and animals in children’s literature

In any society the transition from childhood to adulthood raises concerns about what it means to be human. These concerns are addressed through various formal and informal means. Literature has often been a potent resource for imaginative explorations of philosophical concerns, including what it means to be human. As Maria Nikolajeva (2016) points out:

In real life, we can never penetrate another mind, whether human or non-human. Fiction allows us to do so. While we will never be able to know for sure what animals think or feel, we can, through our ability for imagination, speculate about their thoughts and feelings. While we have limited real-life experience of superhuman creatures, we can explore their non-human interiority through fiction. While those of us who have no direct experience of hybrid bodies can only guess what it may be like, fiction offers us vicarious experience of hybridity. (142)

Texts written for children or young adults are partly aimed at enabling them to adapt to the world around them as ‘humans’. As Victoria Flanagan (2014) argues, ‘children’s literature is a distinctive literary genre precisely because it acts as a tool of socialisation and, therefore, explicitly seeks to intervene in children’s perceptions of themselves and the world in which they live’ (34). The transitional position of the child reader on the way to becoming an adult also presents an opportunity for making worthwhile interrogations about human ontologies.

By shaping young readers’ understanding of identity, society, and the world, children’s literature can challenge and reconstruct preconceived notions about categories such as self and other, human and nonhuman, or the natural and the technological. The demarcations of humanness become porous, with human uniqueness diffusing, breaking down and reaching out to non-human entities. As Jaques (2015) explicates,

children’s fantasy animates and gives a voice to a host of imaginary, impossible and real beings so that drawing boundaries between truth and fiction becomes sufficiently challenging as to question a rigidly hegemonic, humanist ontology, in keeping with the aims of posthuman thinking. (6)

In this sense, children’s literature offers the possibility to critique the rigid defining lines that separate and essentialise the human.

When children’s literature features non-human entities, it can allow for the questioning of boundaries and invite readers to envision new possibilities. Critical posthumanism deconstructs the supremacy of the human species by being cognizant of transspecies inter-connectedness, which emphasizes that all life is embodied and embedded in the environment. As Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan (1995) argue, life on Earth is a product of interspecies relationships, and human survival relies on these connections. Such an approach allows for a departure from an Anthropocentric worldview to a post-anthropocentric perspective. Post-anthropocentrism challenges the worldview that places humans above other species, instead emphasizing the interconnectedness of all beings. This dependency highlights our embodiment—the fact that we are physical beings shaped by the air, food, and ecosystems around us, calls for a shift in perspective that acknowledges the value and agency of nonhuman species, and advocates for a more inclusive, symbiotic understanding of life that transcends human exceptionalism.

The categorical distinction between the human and the animal is a critical focal point of posthuman discourse. Posthumanism critiques the traditional understanding of the 'human' by pointing out that humans have always defined themselves against the 'animal'. By segregating and eschewing certain characteristics of life as 'animal' and other as essentially 'human', humans have created the boundaries around the human, thereby demarcating it as a universal category. Throughout the course of history, the uniqueness of human life has been established based on attributes such as the human autonomy, rationality, reasoning and possession of a spoken language. As a consequence, animals have been defined as inferior to humans as they lack these very attributes. Significantly, humans have been the ones to define what qualities are to be considered human.

The ontological divide between the human and the animal has not gone uncontested, however. Donna Haraway (2008) describes the 'three great historical wounds to the primary narcissism of the self-centered human subject' (11): The Copernican revolution, the Darwinian theory of evolution, and the Freudian unravelling of the unconscious. The Darwinian wound, as she explains, 'put Homo sapiens firmly in the world of other critters, all trying to make an earthly living and so evolving in relation to one another without the sureties of directional signposts that culminate in Man' (11). Her assertion that 'the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached' (Haraway 1991: 151), questions the hierarchies of life constructed by mankind to assign a unique status to itself. She defines her idea of the 'companion species' as the co-evolution of humanity with other species (Nayar 2014: 23). Since humanity shares space with non-human animals, it must respond differently to them. For Haraway, Pramod K. Nayar (2014) points out, 'response' is 'response-ability', a relationship with the fellow species based on ethical considerations (23). Her ideas align with posthuman thought in that they offer an understanding of the human as necessarily linked and dependent upon the non-human 'other' (19).

The contribution of animal studies to critical posthumanist thought is the suggestion that species borders are invalid and that life form differences should not be seen as marks of inferiority in comparison with humans. Animal studies aim to do away with anthropocentric discourses by evoking species-crossing, hybridity co-evolution, and mutual dependency. According to Cary Wolfe (2009), such studies look at 'human

evolution as itself a specific form of animality, one that is unique and different from other forms but no more different, perhaps, than an orangutan is from a starfish' (572). Wolfe (2003) identifies the discourse and modes of cultural representation of speciesism not only in popular culture, but in science writing, rights campaigns and law, which all contribute to make natural the exploitative interactions of human and animal. Jacques Derrida (2002), too, has articulated his concern with the question of the animal by calling it 'asinine' to talk about 'the animal' in the singular and dismissing the multiplicity of other living things (416).

Animal stories in children's literature provide a means by which to consider the relationship between humans and non-human animals. Simon Flynn (2017) defines animal stories as 'particularly concerned with the border between the "human" and the "animal"' (421). Nevertheless, Flynn notes, animal fables, especially, have not been read as being concerned with animals whatsoever. In traditional readings of animal fables, he continues, the 'animal' becomes the signifier, the 'human' the signified, yet such readings undermine the subversive potential of the fables:

The problem with such a predictable model is that it fails to account for the slipperiness of many animal stories. The genre unsettles rather than reinforces the boundaries between the 'human' and the 'nonhuman animal'. Much of its energy can be seen to come from the intermingling of human and 'animal' levels of meaning. (421)

The 'slipperiness' identified by Flynn (2017) is frequently a feature of stories with talking animals. For Steve Baker (1993), 'the animal story's invitation to pleasure is invariably an invitation to a subversive pleasure' (159). He continues: 'It is the simple fact that everyone, including quite young children, knows that animals don't really talk which prompts such genuine delight in the anomalous convention of the talking animal ... it is the very instability of the anthropomorphized animal's identity which can make contact or even proximity with it so hazardous' (159). Baker's reading of children's stories with talking animals in light of their subversive potential is useful in that it brings attention to such stories as complex deliberations on difference and boundaries.

Animal stories in children's literature lend themselves to a critical posthumanist reading owing to their plethora of anthropomorphized beings. Anthropomorphism often has negative connotations and, as Greg Garrard (2012) points out, 'until recently [has] been used exclusively as a

pejorative term implying sentimental projection of human emotions onto animals' (154). Anthropomorphism is, as Sarah E. McFarland and Ryan Hediger (2009) note, 'the natural human tendency to view an animal's actions in terms of our own conscious motives' (3). Many animal studies scholars, however, postulate that anthropomorphism, while inadequate, may be the best way to get to know another species (e.g., Danielsson 2017:1). Characterization and detailed narratives of non-human characters provide a vital means to access their species characteristics, consciousness, and needs. Unlike crude anthropomorphism, non-human narratives can constitute a more critical anthropomorphism; they offer 'both a verbalization of the characters' or narrator's otherness, and a connection and comprehension between species' (1). It is the only means by which to formulate any notion 'of what takes place in the mind of an animal' (Bekoff 2002: 48), although that notion comes with its own limitations. Anthropomorphism allows humans to more 'readily understand and explain the emotions or feelings of other animals. But this is not to say that other animals are happy or sad in the same ways in which humans (or even other members of the same species) are happy or sad' (48).

Despite the limitations of anthropomorphism, talking animals in children's literature allow readers to 'imagine a communication with other species that is language-based, even though we risk falling into the trap of crude anthropomorphism' (Danielsson 2017: 13). Karla Armbruster (2013) proposes that 'a yearning to genuinely know the otherness of non-human animals runs through most, if not all, talking animal stories, as well as the motivations of their readers' (19). Naama Harel supports Armbruster's reading of animal stories (201):

The nonhuman narrators, who tell their own story in a way which is impossible outside the world of fiction, are indeed pronouncedly anthropomorphicized, yet they can still raise significant questions about nonhuman existence and its relationship with human existence. Anthropomorphic representation should not necessarily lead to anthropocentric interpretation, which excludes the nonhuman protagonists. (49)

In short, animal encounters in children's literature present unique opportunities to explore how talking animal characters present a slippery mix of the human and the non-human animal, which seems to exist in a liminal space between the categories (Flynn 2017: 423). As such, they draw attention to the human as necessarily linked and dependent upon the

non-human ‘other’ (Haraway 2013 19), indirectly emphasizing that all life on Earth is a product of interspecies relationships, and that human survival depends on such connections.

Reading the ‘animal’ in The Jungle Book

Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* (1894) introduces readers to a notable fictional ‘wild child’, Mowgli, who troubles the boundary between the human and the non-human animal. Previous interpretations of Kipling have often portrayed him as a staunch advocate for the imperial ideologies of the late nineteenth century, emphasizing permanence of the colonizing rule. For instance, Edward Said (1993) defines Kipling as an author whose works, particularly *Kim* and *The Jungle Book*, reflect and reinforce British imperial ideologies. He highlights how Kipling’s narratives align with the colonial project by emphasizing the supposed moral and civilizing authority of the British Empire. Other critics, such as Caroline Koegler (2020), have drawn attention to how the merging of human-animal boundaries, which can be found in *The Jungle Book*, have tended to strengthen racial hierarchies and justify colonial oppression. She explicates how colonial narratives have dehumanized non-European characters, strategically oscillating between presenting them as subhuman or romanticized ‘savages’ to strengthen imperialist agendas. Along the same lines, Shefali Rajamannar (2012) argues that utilizing animals in *The Jungle Book* enabled Kipling to depict the hierarchies of imperialism as inherently ‘natural’ by invoking ‘The Law of the Jungle’, a code embraced willingly and unquestionably by all the jungle animals in the novel, thereby leveraging the animal kingdom to bolster the British Empire’s agenda (131). In contrast, other critics have recognized the multifaceted and occasionally contradictory discourses present in Kipling’s works (Sullivan 1993). I expand on such readings by applying a critical posthumanist perspective on the story collection to suggest that Kipling’s portrayal of animals permits alternative interpretations of the established imperial narratives found in his work.

The term ‘wild child’ provides a useful starting point for a posthuman interpretation of *The Jungle Book*. The term refers to a human child raised by wild animals and is often used interchangeably with ‘feral child’ or ‘wolf child’, although each term has its own connotations. The term ‘wolf child’ often acts as an umbrella term even when no wolves are involved in the particular case. The term ‘wild’, with reference to an animal, plant,

place, or human person, suggests absence of human control, domesticity, culture, and civilization. The feral child occupies a space between the binary division of the categories 'wild' versus 'civil' and 'domestic', and 'animal' in contrast to 'human'. Kipling's Mowgli, the wild child, I would like to suggest, challenges the presumed stability of the categories of the human and the animal, as argued also by Walsh (2016): 'As a human child raised by wolves, Mowgli "the Frog's" amphibious identity can be read as initiating a destabilising questioning of the relationship of the human to the animal' (31–32).

Human/animal language

Within the species hierarchy, the human is perceived to possess essential qualities that make it *Homo Sapiens*. Possession of language, or the spoken word, attributed to humans is considered crucial in sustaining the divide between the human and the animal as a language and language(less) divide. The underlying assumption is that the categories 'animal' and 'language' are singular, univocal entities. Such an idea works to obliterate the plurality that arguably exists within the ambit of the two categories.

An anthropocentric view of language makes the question of language fundamental to species identity. It is commonly accepted that language is a medium to express the interior lives of beings who possess such a life. Throughout the twentieth century, experiments in animal training suggest that sign language can be taught to animals, such as chimpanzees and gorillas, thereby indicating that animals do in fact possess an interior life. Erica Fudge (2002), on her part, encourages the inversion of the question 'Can animals learn to speak human language?' to 'Can humans learn to speak animal language?' (127–128). She insists that by inverting the question, the assumption of the inherent superiority of humans, which exists in much of language research, is also subverted. Fudge questions the primary status accorded to human language by asking 'Why is it that our language is primary? Why not attempt communication in the other direction? If we are so superior, surely we should be able to speak ape?' (127–128). Wolfe (2010) similarly brings to light how recent research in the cognitive sciences and communication studies questions the uniqueness of language as an essential human attribute.

Elizabeth Ann Everhart (2012) responds to anthropocentric views on language by arguing that 'while Mowgli does *seem* to have the upper hand when it comes to language acquisition, this could be explained without

having to resort to the trope of the human mastering all that the nonhuman have to offer' (14). To argue her point, she notes that Mowgli is taught jungle language by the bear, Baloo. This language is a conglomeration of different animal languages necessary for survival in the jungle. Baloo explains his reasoning to Bagheera, the panther:

I am now teaching him the Master Words of the Jungle that shall protect him with the birds and the Snake People, and all that hunt on four feet, except his own pack. He can now claim protection, if he will only remember the words, from all in the jungle. (Kipling 1894: 39)

That all animals in the jungle can understand each other's language suggests a possibility that 'these common languages could be a way of expressing some fundamental similarities across a variety of species, a kind of vestige of a common ancestor' (Everhart 2012: 13).

The fact that Hathi, the wild elephant in Kipling's stories, is the keeper of Master Words and 'knows about all these things' (Kipling 1894: 41) further undermines the uniqueness and exclusivity of Mowgli's knowledge and reinforces the notion 'that humans are not the only ones to use symbolic language' (Barcz 2015: 253). In addition, Kipling breaks the longstanding anthropocentric distinction that humans alone are privileged holders of language but also of reason, by stating that 'the Law of the Jungle ... never orders anything without a reason' (Kipling 1894: 6). Animals with their own set of laws in the jungle are given their own kind of animal logic, inviting the reader to recognize -animals as unique beings in nature, worthy in their own right' (Budiansky 1998: 194). This perspective also connects with Tess Cosslett's (2006) argument that language should not be considered a key differentiator between humans and animals, or between 'wild' and 'civilized' humans (132). The idea ultimately aligns distantly with Darwin's (1989) view that many of humanity's most distinctive traits likely evolved through natural selection, either directly or indirectly (64).

Becoming human/animal

Posthumanism conceives of life as a process of 'becoming' by way of forging interconnectivity between, and merging with, different types of species, bodies, functions, and technologies. This interconnectedness is not about transcendence or human supremacy, but rather embodiment

within what Rosi Braidotti (2013) claims to be a new materialist notion of life, that is, human life as a becoming-with other forms of life (104).

The Jungle Book displays a dislocation of essential qualities from a fixed location which undercuts attempts to sustain the human-animal divide. Mowgli's cohabitation with animals in the jungle, albeit described in passing, can be seen as a process of 'becoming animal':

He grew up with the cubs, though they, of course, were grown wolves almost before he was a child. And Father Wolf taught him his business, and the meaning of things in the jungle, till every rustle in the grass, every breath of the warm night air, every note of the owls above his head, every scratch of a bat's claws as it roosted for a while in a tree, and every splash of every little fish jumping in a pool meant just as much to him as the work of his office means to a business man. (Kipling 1894:16)

Mowgli's process of becoming animal is a learned behaviour, where Father Wolf 'trains him as befits one of the free people' (Kipling 1894: 16). This process of training to 'become' deconstructs the hierarchisation of species and attacks the idea that human nature—*Anthropos*, *bios*—is essentially and categorically distinct from that of animals, nonhumans, or *zoe*. Rather it reveals how the extended self is deep-rooted in a nature-culture continuum (Braidotti 2013: 65).

Indeed, Mowgli's hybrid identity complicates the process of categorising beings into neatly carved ontological categories. Shere Khan's denunciation that 'no man's cub can run with the people of the jungle' (Kipling 1894: 29) reinforces the ambiguity of Mowgli's identity as neither fully human nor fully animal. Despite his initial valorisation and acceptance into the wolf pack by Mother Wolf, who refers to him as her 'little naked son' (33), he is later rejected by the pack, which declares: 'What has a man to do with us? Let him go to his own place' (28). The villagers, however, also reject him and identify him as belonging to the jungle:

'Wolf! Wolf's cub! Go away!' shouted the priest, waving a sprig of the sacred tulsi plant.

'Again? Last time it was because I was a man. This time it is because I am a wolf. Let us go, Akela.' (Kipling 1894:103)

These contrasting descriptions highlight how different groups perceive and identify Mowgli, emphasizing the difficulty of ascribing fixed attributes to him.

The difficulty of ascribing fixed attributes to Mowgli can be traced back to tensions between his behaviour and his physicality. Here, John Locke's (1690) notion of how definitions and ideas of 'man' are formed can offer an explanation. Locke identifies the 'human shape' as fundamental to the symbolic formulation of what a 'man' is, irrespective of what other, less visible, characteristics a human manifests:

And whatever is talked of other definitions, ingenious observation puts it past doubt, that the idea in our minds, of which the sound man in our mouths is the sign, is nothing else but of an animal of such a certain form; since I think I may be confident, that whoever should see a creature of his own shape or make, though it had no more reason all its life than a cat or a parrot, would call him still a man; or, whoever should hear a cat or a parrot discourse, reason, and philosophize, would call or think it nothing but a cat or a parrot. (n.pag.)

Locke (1690) argues that definitions are shaped by our experiences, that is, by perception and form, but *The Jungle Book* goes further, by asking what happens when one's 'form' says one thing, but one's life says another. Mowgli looks human, yet his behaviour is often compared to various non-human animals in the jungle: 'Mowgli would cling like a sloth, but afterward he would fling himself through his branches, almost as bold as the gray ape' (Kipling 1989: 17). In contrast, non-human animals such as Baloo, Bagheera and Kaa, the snake, speak with reason, teach moral lessons, and act with intellect, yet they are never mistaken for humans.

The tensions addressed in *The Jungle Book* arise because, as Haraway (2008) and other posthumanists contend, the boundaries between the human and the animal are not fixed or inherent; rather, they are socially and historically constructed (Rajamannar 2012: 9). Mowgli's hybrid identity complicates the process of categorising beings into neatly carved ontological categories. His expulsion from the 'man pack' as well as the wolf pack exemplifies failed attempts to place him in any category based on essentialist ideas of *humanness* or *animalness*. Mowgli himself struggles to self-identify clearly and unequivocally. Looking at the villagers from a distance he points out that 'they are very like me' (Kipling 1894: 25), but he also believes the Monkey People when they claim that 'I was their blood brother except that I had no tail, and should be their leader some day' (42). Mowgli's hybrid identity allows using the terms 'man-child', 'wolf-cub', 'man-cub' and 'gray ape' to describe him, in keeping with his ontological hybridity. Such substitutions, however, worry the

boundaries of humanism, since the ‘performative force’ of the term ‘human’ is ‘radically undercut by the equally plausible substitutions it allows’ (Wood 1999: 99).

It must be noted that Kipling occasionally seems to wish to maintain a clear border between the human and the animal. The description of the Monkey People, the Bandar-log, as they ‘would sit in circles on the hall of the king’s council chamber, and scratch for fleas and pretend to be men’ (Kipling 1894: 60) does little to disrupt the assumed superiority of humans. The following description of the Bandar-log supports this interpretation, but it is noteworthy that the narrator here is Baloo:

I have taught thee all the Law of the Jungle for all the peoples of the jungle—except the Monkey-Folk who live in the trees. They have no law. They are outcasts. They have no speech of their own, but use the stolen words which they overhear when they listen, and peep, and wait up above in the branches. Their way is not our way. They are without leaders. They have no remembrance. They boast and chatter and pretend that they are a great people about to do great affairs in the jungle, but the falling of a nut turns their minds to laughter and all is forgotten. We of the jungle have no dealings with them. We do not drink where the monkeys drink; we do not go where the monkeys go; we do not hunt where they hunt; we do not die where they die. Hast thou ever heard me speak of the Bandar-log till today? (Kipling 1989: 43)

The description is worth quoting in full to illustrate the distinction that Baloo makes between the monkeys and the other animals in the jungle. The Bandar-log display a lack of reason, and are shown to work by instinctual habits, yet their critic in the quotation above is also non-human animal, a fact that undermines essentialist conceptions of either monkey, bear or man.

In one respect only does Mowgli’s human form and his behaviour correspond unambiguously and that is his way of looking. Bagheera articulates the jungle people’s anxiety about his gaze:

‘Look at me’, said Bagheera. And Mowgli looked at him steadily between the eyes. The big panther turned his head away in half a minute. ‘That is why’, he said, shifting his paw on the leaves. ‘Not even I can look thee between the eyes, and I was born among men, and I love thee, Little Brother.’ (Kipling 1894: 22)

As Sue Walsh (2016) points out, ‘the act of looking becomes with Mowgli an act of control with respect to the jungle animals’ (53). Mowgli’s gaze is an articulation of Derrida’s (2002) contention of the orthodox thesis that the animal is able to react, but not to respond, to what it sees (33). For the

jungle animals, Mowgli's gaze unambiguously brings forth the 'man' in him.

In other respects, however, Mowgli exemplifies that the human always consists of the animal. 'Mowgli's Song' is the ultimate expression of his posthuman subjectivity:

As Mang flies between the beasts and birds,
so fly I between the
village and the jungle. Why?

These two things fight together in me as
the snakes fight in the
spring. The water comes out of my eyes;
yet I laugh while it falls. Why?
I am two Mowglis, but the hide of Shere
Khan is under my feet. (Kipling 1894: 111–112)

Mowgli's realisation that he is 'two Mowglis', with 'two things [that] fight together' in him, underscores Nayar's (2014) claim that 'only when the human recognizes that the other is within and that the other shares life with itself, can the human be more responsible to life itself' (49). Mowgli's acceptance of himself as a wolf also redefines what it means to be a wolf. As argued by Haraway (2008), 'in their reaching out to each other through their prehensions or graspings, beings constitute each other and themselves' (6).

Mowgli can be said to occupy the position of a posthuman relational subject 'constituted in and by multiplicity, that is to say a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated' (Braidotti 2013: 49). He refuses to be categorized as human or animal, and stands out as a 'non-unitary subject ... [with] an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others':

'Man-Pack and Wolf-Pack have cast me out', said Mowgli. 'Now I will hunt alone in the jungle.'

'And we will hunt with thee', said the four cubs. So Mowgli went away and hunted with the four cubs in the jungle from that day on. (Kipling 1894: 107)

This is where the story ends for child readers, as Kipling (1894) reserves the part of the story where Mowgli 'was not always alone, because, years afterward, he became a man and married', for 'grown ups' (107). This

ending evokes a conception of children as beings who align with ‘much posthuman thinking in their ability to accept (and enjoy) the possible and reject the absolute’ (Jaques 2015: 8), as opposed to adults who ‘draw boundaries and develop a sense of critical detachment that makes it harder to inhabit a fictional world’ (Tatar 2009: 22). As Brian Boyd (2007) suggests, ‘children are fascinated with the boundaries between humans and other animals and between the animate and the inanimate, not because they have serious problems distinguishing one from another’, but rather because they enjoy ‘the sheer pleasure of surprise, of seeing that there could be other ways to be’ (225). In their ability to seek ‘pleasure in their confusion of boundaries’ (Haraway 1991:151), children emerge as beings who delight themselves in discarding absolute ontologies in favour of posthuman ways of thinking about ways of being. As Haraway (1997) asks:

Who are my kin in this odd world of promising monsters, vampires, surrogates, living tools, and aliens? How are natural kinds identified in the realms of technoscience? What kinds of crossings and offspring count as legitimate and illegitimate, to whom and at what cost? Who are my familiars, my siblings, and what kind of liveable world are we trying to build? (52)

Haraway’s (1997) questions pertain to the ontological status of species, interspecies relations and connections. These are the kinds of questions that *The Jungle Book* also raises in a reader. Mowgli’s incorporation of the wolf and his treatment of wolves as his family demonstrate how fellow species can feel linked to each other. If posthumanism, as Wolfe (2010) opines, challenges the ontological and ethical divide between humans and nonhumans (62), then Mowgli can be read as representing the culmination of the posthuman vision by invoking a recognition of a ‘constitutive dependency’ (Wolfe 2010: xxv–xxvi) with other life forms and with evolutionary history, a history wherein species co-evolve and in which communications and events across forms of life configure any life form.

Implications for the EFL classroom: Embodied education

An implication of the above analysis is that children’s literature in education can be refashioned to foreground a posthumanist understanding of the human and nonhuman. Children’s books, such as *The Jungle Book*, can be a good choice for a posthuman pedagogy by acting as an effective medium for encouraging posthuman ways of thinking and experiencing

human connectedness with nature, even when humans are cut off from natural spaces.

Louise M. Rosenblatt (1995) advocates that literature plays an important role in expanding the understanding of self in the world, as a reader enters into a transaction with the text and participates in a lived-through experience. EFL educators who engage in story reading sessions with children can vouch that most children are keen to perform stories. Children's active oral and physical responses to stories, which Lawrence Sipe (2002) recognizes as 'expressive, performative engagement' (476) should not be considered by teachers as 'off-task' or 'inappropriate' (479). Instead, educators should recognize such performative responses as reflections of 'deep pleasure' and 'bliss' (479). Indeed, Sipe interprets responses such as repetition of phrases, jumping, making noises, and shouting as 'sophisticated acts of literary pleasure' (479).

Narratives such as *The Jungle Book* and related follow-up activities with young learners can provide EFL educators scope to develop awareness and foster the feeling of what David Almond (2011) calls 'necessary wilderness' in children (110). Letting young learners act out or indulge in spontaneous dramatization of *The Jungle Book* allows them to participate in the narrative by imitating and physically interpreting the events of the story (Sipe 2002: 477). The physical embodiment of animal narratives, engagement with posthumanist children's literature, and 'becoming' animals in an uninhibited manner can help children acquire embodied knowledge (Dewey 1958; Johnson 2007) of the natural world, which is to say that their initial spontaneous responses, their sensory and physical participation, can aid in the process of comprehending human-animal connectivity.

Embodiment, as explained by Kevin Rathunde (2009), suggests that 'it is through our bodily perceptions, movements, emotions, and feelings that meaning becomes possible. In other words, anything that is meaningful to us is shaped in some fashion by your incarnation as creatures of flesh' (71). It is through narrative engagement and play that encourage 'becoming' animal that one can realize posthumanist theory in practice and foster children's 'embodied knowledge of nature' (71). 'Becoming' an animal means 'invoking intense sensory experiences that connect children, through their bodies, to the natural environment' (16). Embodied education postulates that children form relationships with animals in the story worlds or real world, which can simultaneously work

towards enhancing cognitive as well as sensory experiences (Balmford et al. 2002) and encourage children to form a conception of humanity that is intricately entwined with nature.

To recognize species' inter-connectivity and co-dependence, and to encourage an understanding in childhood wherein we 'know ourselves as human, only insofar as we live in connection with and experience nonhumans' (Fawcett 1989: 18), it is essential that EFL educators emphasize a view of humanity that is innately connected to nature. In a world where technological advancements are widening the gap between humans, on the one hand, and natural environments and other species, on the other, nurturing a sense of 'necessary wilderness' through physical proximity with nature, or forging a relationship with it through memory by bringing the outside 'inside' (Almond 2011: 110), becomes an absolute necessity.

Tables 1–4 in the Appendix offer a suggestion of four role-play-based activities for an EFL classroom in grades 1–6 using *The Jungle Book*. These activities aim to develop an understanding of human-animal relationships, interconnectedness, and ecological awareness along with enhancing language skills. The overall aim of the four activities described in the four tables is to encourage young learners to explore non-human perspectives, with the aim of fostering empathy and ecological awareness, while simultaneously developing their language skills. The physicality of children's animal play and re-enactment of stories can be understood as an embodied, posthumanist interpretation of the urge humans may have to stay in connection with animal life.

Conclusion

It has been stated before, yet should be reiterated, that the posthuman ethos in the Anthropocene necessitates a re-examination, not just of what it means to be human, but of the non-human as well. Reading about and then embodying non-human creatures in children's stories can encourage young learners to a creative examination of the very idea of the 'human', ideally probing such learners to ponder why the imaginative beings in these narratives should not be granted a similar position of worth and respect as human subjects. Encouraging young readers in the EFL classroom to explore the hybrid characters in Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, specifically, through various forms of embodiment, can draw their attention to critical issues of the animal-human relationship and propel

them to consider a more inclusive idea of the human through a posthuman consciousness. Such critical and embodied engagements are crucial to the ideological transformations that are imperative to survive on a planet that is reeling under the consequences of neglect and the lack of respect towards the nonhuman species at large.

References

- Almond, David. 2011. The necessary wilderness. *The Lion and the Unicorn* 35(2): 107–117. doi:10.1353/uni.2011.0010.
- Armbruster, Karla. 2013. What do we want from talking animals? Reflections on literary representations of animal voices and minds. In *Speaking for animals: Animal autobiographical writing*, edited by Margo De Mello, 17–33. London, Routledge.
- Baker, Steve. 1993. *Picturing the beast: Animals, identity and representation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Balmford, Andrew, Lizzie Clegg, Tim Coulson, and Jennie Taylor. 2002. Why conservationists should heed Pokemon.” *Science* 295(5564): 2367. doi:10.1126/science.295.5564.2367b.
- Barcz, Anna. 2015. Posthumanism and its animal voices in literature. *The Humanities and Posthumanism* 1(7): 248–269. doi: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.15.
- Bekoff, Marc. 2002. *Minding animals: Awareness, emotions, and heart*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bernaerts, Lars, Marco Caracciolo, Luc Herman, and Bart Vervaeck. 2014. The storied lives of non-human narrators. *Narrative* 22(1): 68–93. doi:10.1353/nar.2014.0002.
- Boyd, Brian. 2007. Tails within tales. In *Knowing animals*, edited by Laurence Simmons and Philip Armstrong, 217–243. Leiden: Brill.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2013. *The posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Flynn, Simon. 2017. Animal stories. In *International companion encyclopaedia of children’s literature*, edited by Peter Hunt, 418–435. New York: Routledge.
- Braidotti, Rosi, and Maria Hlavajova. 2018. Introduction. In *Posthuman glossary*, edited by Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova, 1–14. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Budiansky, Stephen. 1998. *If a lion could talk: How animals think*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

- Cosslett, Tess. 2006. *Talking animals in British children's fiction, 1786–1914*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Danielsson, Karin Molander. 2017 'And in that moment I leapt upon his shoulder': Non-human intradiegetic narrators in *The wind on the moon*. *Humanities* 6(2): 1–14. doi: 10.3390/h6020013.
- Darwin, Charles. 1989. *The descent of man*. New York: New York University Press. First published 1871.
- DeLoughrey, Elizabeth. 2019. *Allegories of the anthropocene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2002. Animal that therefore I am (more to know). Translated by David Wills. *Critical Inquiry* 28(2): 369–418. doi: 10.1086/449046.
- Dewey, John. 1958. *Experience and nature*. New York: Dover.
- Everhart, Elizabeth Ann. 2012. Dark ecology and nineteenth century fiction. MA diss., University of Maryland.
- Fawcett, Leesa. 1989. Anthropomorphism: In the web of culture. *Undercurrents* 1(1): 14–20. doi: 10.25071/2292-4736/37636.
- Flanagan, Victoria. 2014. *Technology and identity in young adult fiction: The posthuman subject*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Flynn, Simon. 2017. Animal stories. In *International companion encyclopaedia of children's literature*, edited by Peter Hunt, 418–435. New York: Routledge.
- Fudge, Erica. 2002. *Animal*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Garrard, Greg. 2012. *Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge.
- Ghosh, Amitav. 2016. *The great derangement: Climate change and the unthinkable*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Haraway, Donna. 1991. A cyborg manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century. In *Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature*, 149–181. New York: Routledge. doi: 10.1007/978-1-137-05194-3_10.
- Haraway, Donna. 1997. *Modest_witness@second_millennium.female_man©_meets_oncomouse™: Feminism and technoscience*. New York: Routledge.
- Haraway, Donna. 2008. *When species meet*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Harel, Naama. 2013. Investigations of a dog, by a dog: Between anthropocentrism and canine-centrism. In *Speaking for animals*:

- Animal autobiographical writing*, edited by Margo De Mello, 49–59. New York: Routledge.
- Jaques, Zoe. 2015. *Children's literature and the posthuman: animal, environment, cyborg*. New York: Routledge.
- Karkulehto, Sanna, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, and Essi Varis. 2019. Reconfiguring human, nonhuman and posthuman: Striving for more ethical cohabitation. In *Reconfiguring human, nonhuman and posthuman in literature and culture*, edited by Sanna Karkulehto, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, Karoliina Lummaa, and Essi Varis, 1–20. New York: Routledge.
- Kipling, Rudyard. 1894. *The jungle book*. London: Macmillan.
- Koegler, Caroline. 2020. Posthumanism and colonial discourse: Nineteenth century literature and twenty-first century critique. *Open Library of Humanities* 6(2): 29. doi: 10.16995/olh.613.
- Locke, John. 1690. *An essay concerning human understanding: In four books*. London, T. Tegg and Son. Accessed 12 January 2025: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/10615/10615-h/10615-h.htm>.
- MacFarlane, Robert. 2016. *Generation anthropocene: How humans have altered the planet forever*. The Guardian, 1 April. Accessed 11 November 2024: www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/01/generation-anthropocene-altered-planet-for-ever.
- McFarland, Sarah E., and Ryan Hediger. 2009. Approaching the agency of other animals: An introduction. In *Animals and agency: An interdisciplinary exploration*, edited by Sarah E. McFarland and Ryan Hediger, 1–20. Brill.
- Margulis, Lynn, and Dorion Sagan. 1995. *What is life?* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Nayar, Pramod K. 2014. *Posthumanism*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Nikolajeva, Maria. 2016. Recent trends in children's literature research: Return to the body. *International Research in Children's Literature* 9(2): 132–145. doi:10.3366/ircl.2016.0198.
- Rajamannar, Shefali. 2012. *Reading the animal in the literature of the British Raj*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rathunde, Kevin. 2009. Nature and embodied education. *The Journal of Developmental Processes* 4(1): 70–80. doi: 10.1177/1053825919861403.
- Rosenblatt, Louise M. 1995. *Literature as exploration*. New York: Modern Language Association of America. First published 1938.

- Said, Edward. 1993. *Culture and imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Sipe, Lawrence. 2002. Talking back and taking over: Young children's expressive engagement during storybook read-alouds. *The Reading Teacher* 55(5): 476–483. Accessed 11 November 2024. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20205086>.
- Sullivan, Zoreh T. 1993. *Narratives of empire: The fictions of Rudyard Kipling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tatar, Maria. 2009. *Enchanted hunters: The power of stories in childhood*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Walsh, Sue. 2016. *Kipling's children's literature: Language, identity, and constructions of childhood*. London: Routledge.
- Wolfe, Cary. 2003. *Animal rites: American culture, the discourse of species, and posthumanist theory*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Wolfe, Cary. 2009. Human, all too human: 'Animal studies' and the humanities. *PMLA* 124(2): 564–575. doi:10.1632/pmla.2009.124.2.564.
- Wolfe, Cary. 2010. *What is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Wood, David. 1999. Comment ne pas manger: Deconstruction and humanism. In *Animal others: On ethics, ontology, and animal life*, edited by H. Peter Steeves, 15–35. New York: State University of New York Press.

Appendix. Activities aimed at grades 1–6

Table 1: Activity 'Who am I in the jungle?' for grades 1–3

Objectives	Language skills	Procedure
To emphasize the unique abilities and roles of different species. To encourage empathy by asking students how they would feel or behave	simple present tense and descriptive vocabulary	Each pupil picks an animal from the jungle and describes their day-to-day life (e.g., 'I am a wolf. I protect the pack and hunt for food'). Pupils emphasize the unique abilities and roles of different animals. Other pupils guess the animal based on the description provided. The teacher helps pupils to brainstorm animal characteristics and behaviours. S/he models how to describe an animal's life and provides vocabulary

in the animal's place.		support, encouraging pupils to use descriptive words
------------------------	--	--

Table 2: Activity 'Escape from Shere Khan' for grades 2–5

Objectives	Language skills	Procedure
To develop problem-solving and teamwork by simulating a jungle escape. To understand how different animals contribute to the survival of everyone.	<u>Speaking:</u> Use problem-solving language (e.g., 'Let's climb the tree to escape!'). <u>Listening:</u> Follow and respond to instructions from teammates. <u>Vocabulary:</u> action verbs (<i>run, climb, hide</i>) and jungle-related nouns (<i>cave, vine, clearing</i>).	The teacher narrates the escape scenario, introduces obstacles, and guides pupils to use appropriate language for the scenario. Pupils role-play as Mowgli, Baloo, Bagheera, and other jungle animals escaping Shere Khan. They must work together using their unique skills (e.g., Bagheera's stealth, Baloo's strength) to overcome obstacles. After the role play, the teacher can guide the pupils in discussions about the importance of interdependence among species and ask pupils to consider the idea of human superiority.

Table 3: Activity 'Council of the Jungle' for grades 4–6

Objectives	Language skills	Procedure
To explore interspecies cooperation. To discuss the impact of human actions on the jungle and its inhabitants.	<u>Speaking:</u> Practice persuasive and formal language (e.g., 'As Baloo, I propose that we...')	The teacher facilitates the role-play by setting the context of the conflict. Pupils take on roles from the jungle council: Akela, Bagheera, Baloo, and others. They discuss a pressing issue, such as Shere Khan threatening the peace or humans encroaching on their territory. Each character shares their perspective and proposes a solution. The teacher can

	<u>Listening:</u> Summarize others' viewpoints (e.g., 'Mother Wolf suggests that...'). <u>Vocabulary:</u> terms such as <i>territory</i>, <i>protection</i>, <i>threat</i>, and <i>alliance</i>.	initiate a discussion that propels pupils to think about the need for cross-species understanding and collective action to preserve the jungle. The teacher provides language support, such as sentence starters and negotiation phrases, to help pupils articulate their arguments and solutions. The teacher also prompts reflection after the activity, encouraging pupils to connect the role-play to real-world environmental and ethical challenges, emphasizing the importance of mediation and empathy in resolving conflicts between humans and non-humans.
--	--	---

Table 4: Activity 'Jungle Law debate' for grades 4–6

Objectives	Language skills	Procedure
To highlight inter-dependence between humans and animals. To discuss themes of coexistence, trust, and the shared need for survival.	Using persuasive language, sentence connectors (<i>however</i>, <i>therefore</i>), and modal verbs (<i>should</i>, <i>must</i>)	The teacher acts as moderator and introduces the debate topic, i.e., whether Mowgli should stay with the wolves or return to the humans in the village. S/he assigns roles to pupils (e.g., Mowgli, Baloo, Bagheera, Shere Khan) and guides them in understanding each character's perspective and provides sentence starters to help formulate arguments. The teacher ensures turn-taking, encourages pupils to back their arguments with evidence from the text, and offers feedback on language usage, such as persuasive phrases and modal verbs.