

Dear Komodo Dragon



by Nancy Kelly Allen
illustrated by
Laurie Allen Klein

Dear Komodo Dragon

Lots of children have pen pals but one little girl has a real-life dragon—a Komodo dragon—for a pen pal! Leslie plans to be a dragon hunter when she grows up. When she and Komodo become pen pals, the wise-cracking dragon adds a generous helping of humor to letters that are chock full of accurate, interesting facts. Leslie learns not only about the world's largest lizard, but also about the dangers they face. As their friendship builds, will Leslie change the way she thinks about dragons?



Award-winning author **Nancy Kelly Allen** is a retired school librarian who spent her days reading to children and her nights writing for them. Eventually, writing led her down the trail to publication. She has written over forty children's books, including *The First Fire: A Cherokee Folktale* for Arbordale. Nancy has a master's degree in Education from Morehead State University and a master's in Library and Information Science from the University of Kentucky. Nancy lives with her husband and two dogs in a log cabin in Kentucky. Visit her website at nancykellyallen.com.

Award-winning illustrator **Laurie Allen Klein** has been a freelance artist for nearly 25 years. Over the last several years, she has worked as the on-staff artist for a marine park, where she does everything from painting life-size sea animal murals, to illustrating children's activity books. Laurie has illustrated *Saving Kate's Flowers*, *Balloon Trees*, *Fur and Feathers*, *The Ghost of Donley Farm*, *If a Dolphin Were a Fish*, *Little Skink's Tail*, *Meet the Planets*, *Solar System Forecast*, *They Just Know* and *Where Should Turtle Be?* for Arbordale. Laurie lives in Florida. See more of her artwork at www.lauriekleinarts.com.



Nancy Kelly Allen



Laurie Allen Klein

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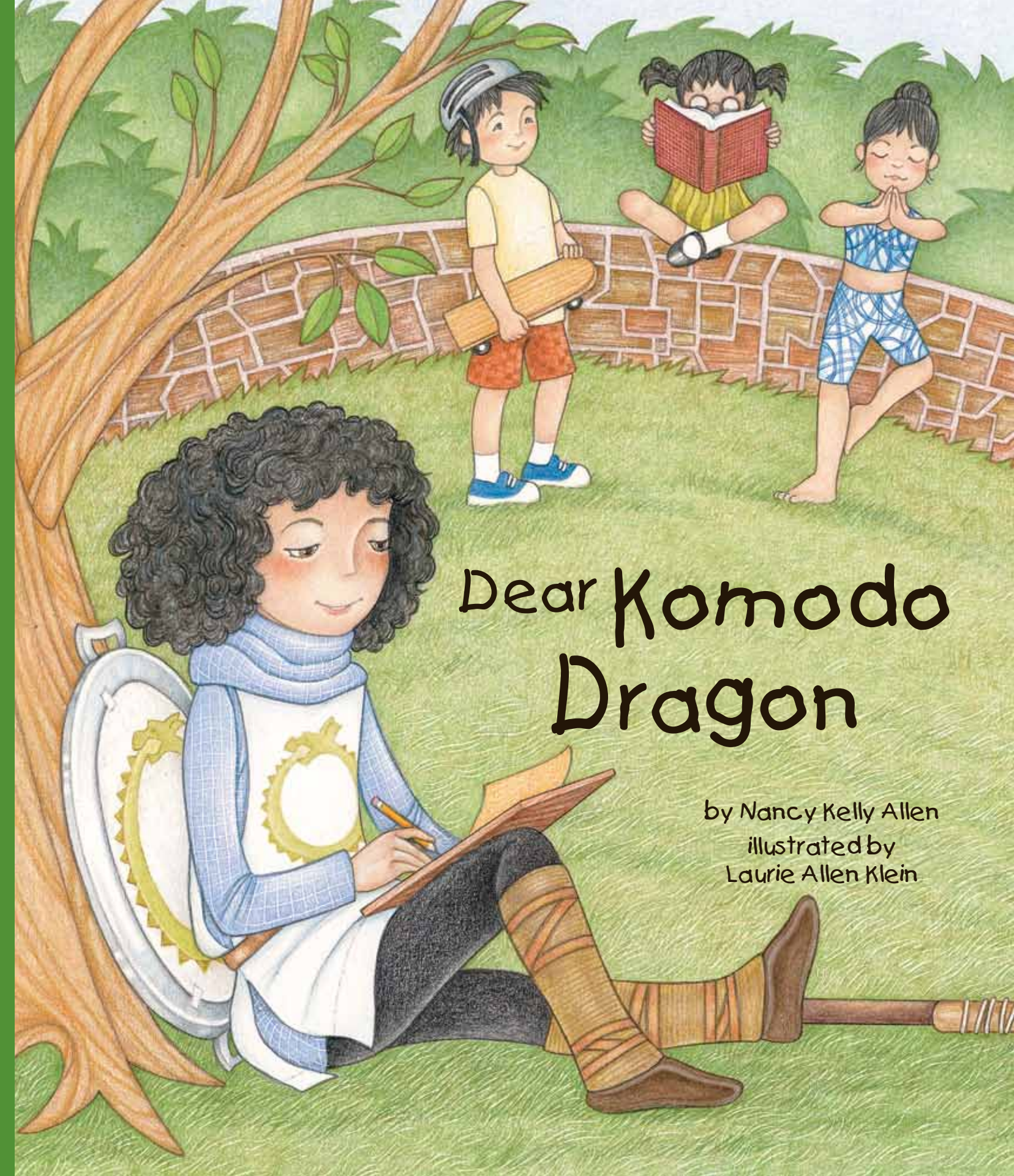
Thanks to Christine Lewis and Kate Davis, Zoo Educators at the Birmingham Zoo, and to Alison F. Manka, School and Aquarium Programs Manager at the Greensboro Science Center, for verifying the accuracy of the information in this book.

The *For Creative Minds* includes

- Dragons by the Numbers
- Conservation
- Physical and Behavioral Adaptations

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Over on Komodo Island
living, breathing dragons,
giant, man-eating dragons,
sharp-clawed and fierce,
stomp through woods
and lurk in the grass,
ready to attack.

These are Komodo dragons,
real dragons,
and one is my pen pal.



HERE
BE
DRAGONS



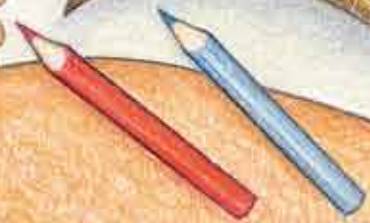
Dear Komodo Dragon,
I've never seen a real dragon, but
I've always wanted to. Tell me
something about you.

Sincerely,
Leslie

P.S. I'm going to be dragon hunter when I grow up.



ORA



ME
(LESLIE)



LINDWORM



WYVERN



ASIAN LUNG



EUROPEAN
DRAGON



Dear Dragon Hunter Leslie,
I'm not bragging when I say Komodo dragons are the biggest and heaviest lizards. My daddy is ten feet long. About half of my body is my tail and that's a handy thing to have. It propels me through water, and I can use it as a weapon in a fight.

My spiffy good looks come from my third eye in the top of my head. It helps me sense when the light changes.

See ya (but not with my 3rd eye),
Komo





Dear Komo,
Do you have any brothers and sisters? If not, you can have mine.
Hee! Hee!
More than I need,
Les



For Creative Minds

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Dragons by the Numbers

1

number of months a Komodo dragon can go without food

I'm so stuffed I couldn't eat for a month!

300

pounds (136 kg) a full-grown Komodo dragon weighs with a full belly

I'm big, I'm bad, and I'm on the hunt.

5

number of islands where Komodo dragons live in the wild

It's a little snug, but it's home.

1980

year Komodo National Park was established

Finally! Those humans were eating me out of house and home.

13

baby Komodo dragons hatched at the National Zoo in 1992

Well this isn't my island . . .

3,000

estimated number of Komodo dragons left in the world

We'd better get hatching!

30

years in a Komodo dragon's lifespan

I'll be an old dragon by the time you finish college!

95

degrees Fahrenheit (35 °C) in Komodo dragons' natural habitat

Ahh, nice and warm.



Conservation

Komodo dragons live in Indonesia, a country in Southeast Asia. These giant reptiles have been around for millions of years. They are the largest living lizards in the world!

There are many threats to Komodo dragons. Humans and Komodo dragons both like to eat deer and pigs. If people overhunt the prey on an island, there is not enough food left for Komodo dragons. Natural disasters, like earthquakes and volcanoes, can destroy their habitat. A large human population shares the island of Flores with Komodo dragons. This can lead to problems.

Komodo dragons need help so that they don't die out. The Indonesian government protects them. On the islands of Komodo, Rinca, Gila Montag, and Gili Dasami, the Komodo dragons live in the wild. Humans are banned from hunting on these islands. Game wardens work in the park to stop hunters from poaching the lizards and their prey.

Scientists and conservationists in Indonesia and around the world can help Komodo dragons. Many local people work to protect their special lizards. There are Komodo dragons in more than 30 zoos. These zoos teach the public about Komodo dragons.

You can help protect Komodo dragons too! The United States is the world's largest market for animal products. You should not buy products made from Komodo dragons or their prey.



This world map shows Indonesia in red. If you traveled from Africa to Indonesia, what ocean would you cross? If you traveled from North America to Indonesia, what ocean would you cross?

Remember that the Earth is shaped like a ball (globe). A map is a flattened image of that globe.



Physical and Behavioral Adaptations

An adaptation helps animals live in their habitat. It helps them get food and water, protect themselves from predators, survive weather, and even make their homes.

Adaptations can be physical or behavioral. **Physical adaptations** affect animals' bodies. **Behavioral adaptations** affect the way an animal acts. Komodo dragons have both physical and behavioral adaptations that help them live in their habitat.

Sort the following traits into physical or behavioral adaptations.

A. Komodo dragons have a third eye on top of their heads. They can sense light and dark with this eye.

B. Razor-sharp teeth and strong jaws and neck muscles help the dragons hunt and feed. If they lose any teeth, they can regrow them.

C. Food can be scarce so they eat quickly before another Komodo dragon arrives and fights them for the food.

D. They have bacteria and venom in their mouths. Once bitten, the prey escapes but soon dies. The dragon follows and feasts.

E. They are aggressive and will attack animals, even other Komodo dragons. This behavior protects their territory and food supply.

F. Komodo dragons feed on any animal they can catch. They often attack animals that are larger than themselves, such as water buffalo.

G. The stomach expands easily, allowing Komodo dragons to eat up to 80% of their body weight in one meal.

H. They swim to another island if the food supply is low.

I. Komodo dragons use their claws to protect themselves in fights with other dragons or to help capture large prey.

J. They have short legs, but those legs are powerful. Komodo dragons run up to a speed of 12 miles per hour (20 kph).

K. They have long, sharp claws to climb trees and catch prey, birds and snakes, and to dig underground tunnels.

L. Komodo dragons have a long forked tongue. The tongue carries scents to a special organ in the roof of their mouth that helps them smell.

M. They stay still for hours to hunt for prey.

Physical: A, B, D, G, J, K, L
Behavioral: C, E, F, H, I, M

For Ava and Harper—NKA

Laurie Allen Klein Dedication—LAK

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