

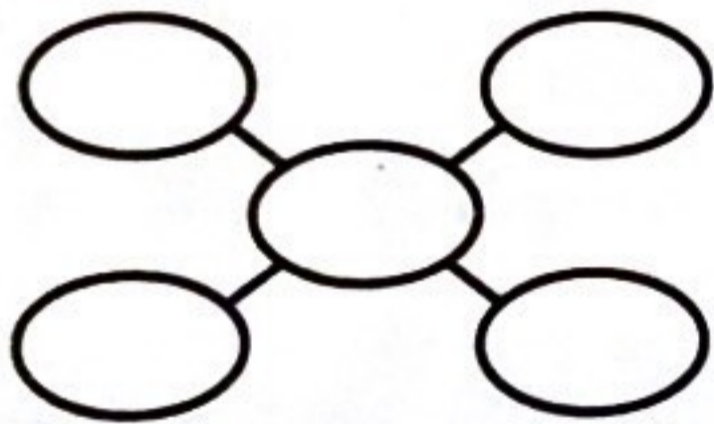
# ANCHOR TEXT



## ✓ TARGET SKILL

### Main Ideas and Details

Identify a topic's main ideas and the details that support them.



## ✓ GENRE

**Informational text** gives facts and details about a topic. As you read, look for:

- ▶ information that is clearly organized
- ▶ domain-specific vocabulary that aids understanding
- ▶ photographs and captions that enhance the text

COMMON  
CORE

**RI.5.2** determine two or more main ideas and explain how they are supported by details/ summarize; **RI.5.4** determine the meaning of

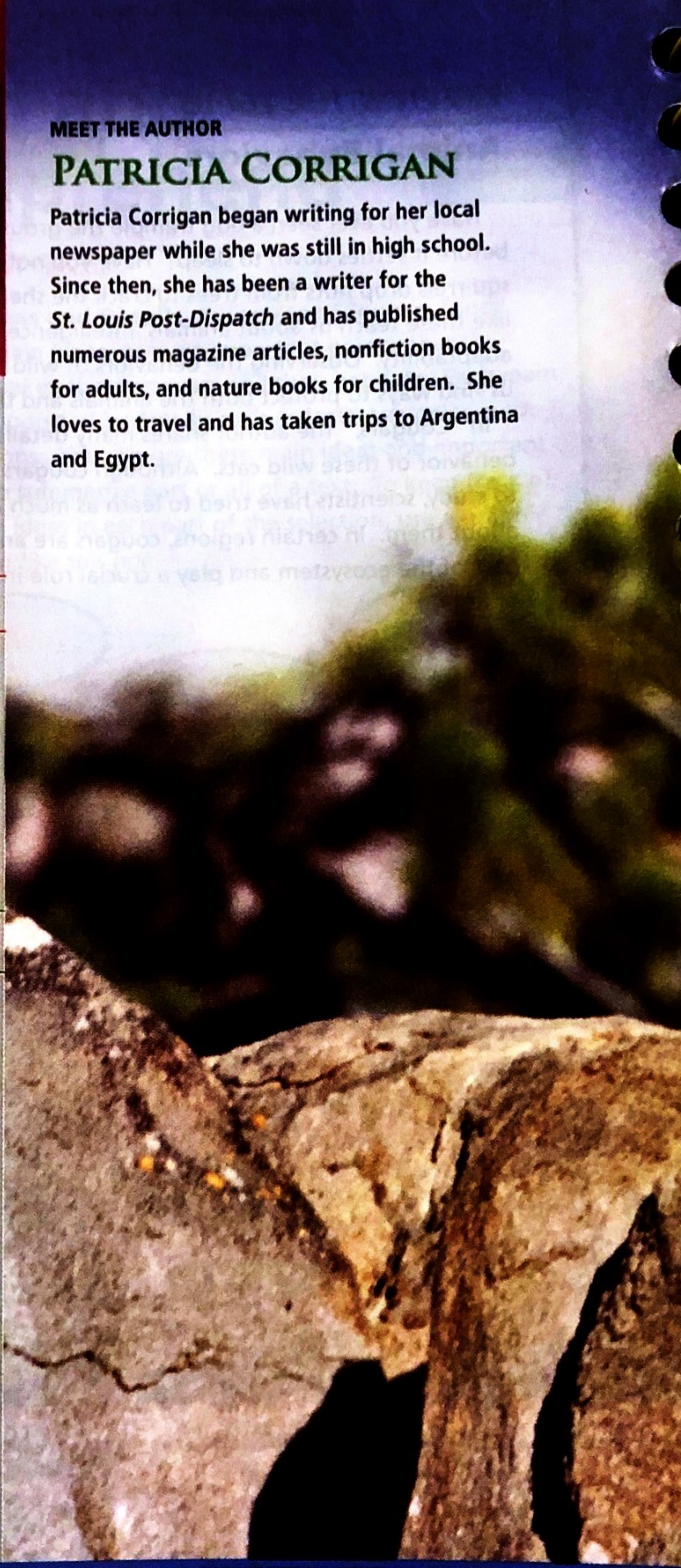
general academic and domain-specific words and phrases;  
**RI.5.10** read and comprehend informational texts



### MEET THE AUTHOR

## PATRICIA CORRIGAN

Patricia Corrigan began writing for her local newspaper while she was still in high school. Since then, she has been a writer for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and has published numerous magazine articles, nonfiction books for adults, and nature books for children. She loves to travel and has taken trips to Argentina and Egypt.





# COUGARS

BY PATRICIA CORRIGAN

## ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What can a scientist learn by observing the behaviors of a particular animal?

**C**ougars are seldom seen and rarely heard. In fact, they often live their entire lives **unobserved** by humans!

1

But we do know that these members of the cat family live in eleven western U.S. states. They are found from the southernmost tip of Alaska down to where the California border meets Mexico and east all the way to the edge of Texas. Their cousins, Florida panthers, live in Florida. In Canada, cougars are found in British Columbia and parts of Alberta. Cougars also live throughout Mexico, Central America, and South America.

In different areas of the world, cougars have different names. They may be called mountain lions, wildcats, pumas, painters, fire cats, swamp lions, or catamounts. In Mexico, Spanish for cougar is *el león* (leh OHN), which means "the lion." And sometimes they are known by nicknames like

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“ghost of the wilderness” and “ghost walker.” Fortunately, cougars are able to live in many different habitats. Over time, they have adapted, or evolved, for living in places such as snow-capped mountains, jungles thick with vegetation, cool pine forests, grassy plains, and murky swamps. For instance, cougars that live in northern mountains tend to be larger and have a thicker coat of fur than cougars that live elsewhere. They learned to climb trees. And they also can swim if necessary, but usually prefer to stay dry—like their relative,

3

the house cat!



The average cougar measures from 3.3 to 5.3 feet long and stands about 2 feet high at the shoulder. Adult male cougars weigh up to 225 pounds, and adult females usually are slightly smaller. A cougar's tail may measure up to 32 inches, almost two-thirds the length of the animal's body.

#### ANALYZE THE TEXT

**Main Ideas and Details** What is the topic of this selection? How do you know? Choose a paragraph on one of these two pages. State its main idea. How can you tell the difference between the main idea and the details? List the details in logical order.

Cougars don't hunt from trees, but a high branch makes a good lookout spot.





Cougars have good balance and can easily leap over fallen trees and onto rocks without slowing down.

The cougar is one species (SPEE sees), or kind, of wild cat. Cougars are medium-sized, along with bobcats and lynxes. Tigers, lions, and leopards all are larger and heavier.

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Cougars are muscular and sleek, with little fat on their bodies. Fat usually serves as excellent insulation and keeps an animal's body warm. But because cougars have little of this kind of insulation, they have another natural defense against the cold: their fur coats keep them warm.

The layer of hair closest to the skin, called the underfur, is woolly and short. The top layer is made up of longer hairs, called guard hairs. These hairs are hollow and trap the air to keep cold temperatures from reaching the animal's skin.

Unlike humans, cougars have no sweat glands, so the cougars that live in warm climates cool themselves the same way dogs do, by panting to release heat from their bodies.

#### ANALYZE THE TEXT

**Domain-Specific Vocabulary** The author defines several domain-specific words on pages 298–299. How does the author's use of these words help strengthen the text? Does she seem more or less credible as a science writer? Why?



Cougars' coats are usually tawny, or orange-brown. They also may be gray, sandy brown, reddish-brown, and tan. All adult cougars have black markings on the sides of the muzzle, or snout, where the whiskers are. Some people say this area looks as if the cougar has a "mustache." If cougars were less secretive, scientists might be able to tell individual animals apart by the dark patterns on the muzzles, but few of the animals are ever seen.

The chin is white, as is the area right under the pinkish-brown nose. The tips of their tails also are black. The underside of most cougars is light, sometimes nearly white. At first glance, adult cougars resemble female lions.

Their coloring helps them blend in with their surroundings. It is good camouflage (KAM uh flahj) and helps them hide from their prey (PRAY), or the animals they hunt for food.

Cougars have good eyesight. In fact, vision is their best-developed sense. Researchers believe that they can see moving prey from long distances. The cougar's yellow eyes have large, round pupils that take in all available light. That helps the animal see at night almost as well as during the day.

A **keen** sense of hearing is important for cougars. They even can move their small, rounded ears to take in sounds coming from different directions. Cougars also have a strong sense of smell, which can really be useful when following prey. Still, their sense of smell is not as well developed as their senses of sight or hearing.

6

Like all of their cat relatives, cougars have whiskers. These sensitive hairs are also called vibrissae (vy BRIHS ee). They grow on either side of the animal's nose and mouth, above the eyes, and sometimes on the chin.

These whiskers **vary** in length, but most of the whiskers found on the muzzle are long enough to stretch past the side of the face and back to the edge of the ear. The cougar uses whiskers to gather information through touch. With its whiskers, a cougar can determine the height of the grass, the width of the space under a rock, and whether a bush would be easy or difficult to push through.

7

Cougars make a variety of sounds, or vocalizations. Their meow, which is a sign of **contentment**, is much louder than that of a pet cat. They also purr when they are contented. Cougars hiss first and then growl when they feel threatened. Unlike lions, cougars cannot roar.

Like all cats, cougars groom themselves. Grooming helps keep their coats clean. They use their rough tongues to remove any loose hair and to untangle any matted hair. Female cougars groom their babies constantly, and young siblings have been seen grooming one another.

**Mothers pick up their kittens by the scruff of the neck to move them one at a time to a new den site.**





When a cougar sees an enemy nearby, it may try to look **ferocious** and scare it away by showing its teeth and growling.

Cougars have very strong jaws. And they have three kinds of teeth, 24 in all. The carnassial (kar NASS ee uhl) teeth are located on both the top and bottom jaws. They are long and sharp, used for slicing or shearing. The canine (KAY nyn) teeth are thick and sharp, used for puncturing. The incisors (ihn SYZ ohrz) are small and straight, used for cutting and some chewing. But cougars don't chew their food very well. They mostly gulp down large chunks.

8

Most adult cougars are solitary, which means they live alone. They protect their territory from intruders, including other cougars. Each cougar needs a lot of space, an average of as much as 200 square miles for adult males and less than half that for adult females. They may walk as far as 30 miles in a day, searching for food or patrolling their territory.





Males and females look alike, but it is the female that cares for the young.

Newborn kittens have soft, fluffy-looking fur that is speckled with brown spots. This coloring helps camouflage them.

The spots disappear when the kittens are about eight months old. Kittens also have curly tails, which straighten out as they get older.

**9** The kittens are born with blue eyes, which stay closed for about the first two weeks. Their eye color soon changes to yellow.

Kittens are totally dependent on their mother for food. They nurse for up to three months. Immediately after birth, and often in the next few weeks, the female licks the kittens to clean their fur. This helps them stay safe from enemies that might find the den site by **detecting** the scent of the newborn kittens.

If a female cougar thinks that her kittens are in danger in a **particular** spot, she often finds a new hiding place and moves them. A mother cougar will do whatever is necessary to keep the kittens away from dangerous predators, or enemies, such as wolves.

When the mother leaves to hunt for food, the kittens stay hidden and quiet at the den site. When the kittens are about two months old, their teeth have grown and they nurse less. Their mother begins to bring them food every two or three days. The mother makes no special effort to catch small prey for her small offspring. At first, the young kittens just want to play with the food, no matter what she brings. One of the first lessons the mother teaches her kittens is how to eat this new food.

By example, she shows them how to bite, how to tear meat off the bone, and how to chew. She also teaches the kittens that their rough tongues are good for cleaning the meat off bones. After about six months the kittens are good at eating this food, and they begin to explore away from the den site.

10

#### ANALYZE THE TEXT

**Explain Scientific Ideas** What key ideas has the author shared about cougar kitten development on these two pages?

This young cougar still has some of its baby spots. It is practicing stalking its prey.





The kittens stay with their mother for about eighteen months. During this time, she teaches them many things about surviving in their habitat. As the kittens **mature**, the mother cougar takes them hunting. They learn how to find and carefully follow prey. This is called stalking.

They also learn when to pounce, or jump out suddenly, to capture the prey. They are taught how to hide their kill and protect it from other animals. With a lot of practice, they learn to hunt for themselves.

Then, the young cougars go out on their own to find a territory and a mate. If they find a good habitat with plenty of prey animals and water in the area, cougars may live about eight to ten years.

11

12

13



Cougar eyesight may be five times better than human eyesight.

