

# The Bear

## The Message

"The greatest thrill is not to kill but to let live" - James Oliver Curwood.

This quote is taken from the book, 'The Grizzly King;' that inspired the film 'The Bear.' It underlines the message of the film, which is unique in presenting the animal's point of view.

Describe the part of the film that you think demonstrates this quote most strongly.

Imagine that you are the director, Jean-Jacques Annaud, and prepare your storyboard for the scene (see opposite, photocopy amount required). Think of camera angles for maximum effect, close-ups etc.

Is your scene filmed from the bear's point of view? If not, prepare another storyboard from the bear's point of view. What difference does this make to how you feel about the action?

## The Bear

The Kodiak Grizzly of North America is an inland variety of the coastal Alaskan Brown Bear. They can be up to 9 feet long and weigh 1,700 pounds, with a life expectancy of 25 years in the wild. They still live in Alaska, north-west Canada, and in a few national parks in the U.S.A., but they are an endangered species.

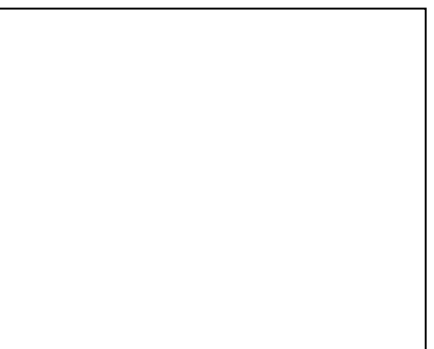
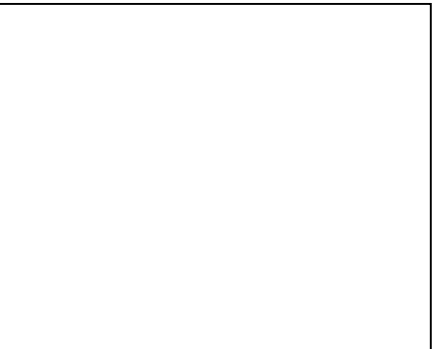
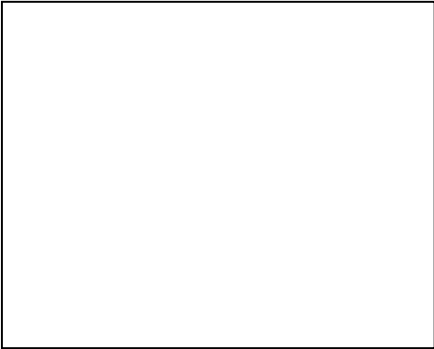
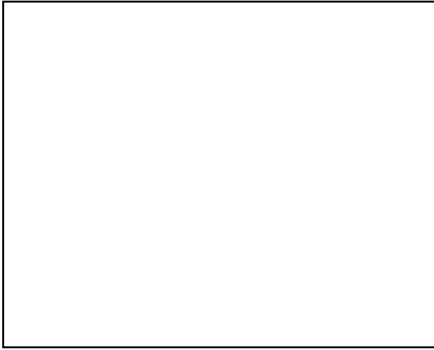
Research other endangered species of animal in other parts of the world. What are the reasons that make them endangered? List your findings below.

Endangered Species	Reasons

Do you think there is a growing awareness of conservation issues today? Why do you think this is?

Shot

Dialogue/Description



## Location

The story is set in British Columbia, however, it was filmed in a different location, as the most beautiful wilderness of the Canadian Rockies was only accessible by helicopter. The director scoured the world in search of a suitable location. The Italian Dolomites and the Austrian Tyrol were finally chosen for filming, providing all the best options in terms of accessibility, accommodation for the crew etc., and the particular kind of landscape and light required. The very last image of the film was shot in the far North West Territories of Canada in the outer reaches of the Beaufort Sea.

Research what other mountainous areas he might have considered. List them in the chart below.

Mountain Range	Country

## Narrative

'The Bear' tells its story from the point of view of the animal. This is obviously different to the way in which most films tell their story.

Look back at the list you made above of how you understood a story in a film. Which of the things that you wrote down do not apply to 'The Bear'?

Most stories are about relationships between people and the ways that they react to each other. One of the things that you may have noticed above is that dialogue, people speaking, is an important method by which we understand what is happening in a film. In 'The Bear'; there are only 657 words of dialogue between the hunters. All that we learn from this is that one is an old hunter and the other is a younger, more inexperienced hunter. How does this small amount of dialogue help us to understand the plot? Because there is not a lot of dialogue, what we actually see on the screen is very important in helping us understand what is happening, perhaps far more than in other films. We must construct meanings from what we see.

As well as the narrative of the film unfolding visually, the bears themselves tell their own story. Their actions may seem very realistic, but they are, in fact, acting.

While working on another film, the director, Jean-Jacques Annaud, met Desmond Morris and Konrad Lorenz, leading psychologists in human and animal behaviour. He learned that people and animals often behave in very similar ways. He wanted to show in his film 'The Bear' that the higher animals have feelings, gestures and looks very like humans. By filming the story from the bear's viewpoint, he felt he would make his audience feel empathy and understanding for their fellow animals.



The bears in the film were not from the wild, but grew up in comfortable captivity. The cub Youk was brought up in France by Jean-Phillipe Varin in a large park with a group of other young bear cubs. The large bear Kaar was trained for the film by Doug Seus in the mountains of Utah. From the storyboarding of the film, this task took four years and involved the meticulous learning of the behaviour of the wild bear. It took five weeks for the older bear and the bear cub to tolerate each other from when they first met and a further five months for a real friendship to develop. As in the film it took some time and perseverance on the part of the bear cub to establish a bond with the older bear. How did this happen in the end?



Storyboard a scene that you can remember from the film where the bears' behaviour is almost human, conveying human emotions.

'The Bear' is a nature film that tells a story. It is not a documentary about bears. Think of the differences between a feature film and a documentary, write your ideas in the chart below. Consider the way the information is presented, how it is filmed, where you see it, and what the film is trying to do.

Documentary	Feature film

Gerard Brach, the screenwriter, first told Jean-Jacques Annaud, the director, about the book 'The Grizzly King:' a childhood favourite, on which the film was based. They rewrote the story so that it was no longer from the hunters' point of view, but from that of the hunted, the bear.

James Oliver Curwood (1878-1927) of Owosso, Michigan, wrote the book in 1916. It was one of 40 adventure books he wrote about North American wildlife. After working as a newspaper reporter in Detroit, he spent long periods of time in the Canadian wilderness, first as a hunter of wild game and later as a conservationist, active in preserving nature.

Think of the differences in understanding the story as a book and as a film.

Write the major differences in the chart below.

Film	Book

How do you think these differences affect your understanding of the story?

Most stories are about situations that have to be resolved. Often the ending is unexpected. How much does the outcome depend on the characters in the film? Did 'The Bear' end in the way that you thought it would?

Think of an alternative ending to the film. How would this have affected its message? Storyboard your alternative ending.

# Attitudes

The life of a bear hunter in British Columbia in 1885 was hard. Thoughts of ecology and conservation were very far from the minds of men in those times. The pressures of pioneering life clouded moral issues. The men needed to hunt bears so that they could sell their fur and earn enough to survive. Who do you think they sold the fur to, and for what purpose? How do we feel about this today?

Why do you think there were no women in the film? What kind of life do you think the pioneering women would have led?

The hunters' attitude to their own animals was very different from their attitude to the animals in the wild. Why do you think this was?

Recall two scenes from the film. One where the hunters have returned to their camp to find that the wounded bear has mauled their horses, and the other where the younger hunter's Airdale dog has been badly hurt by the bear. Describe the two scenes and the hunters' responses. Now consider them from the bear's point of view. How does this affect how you feel about what happened?

Consider the attitude of the younger hunter to the bear cub when he captures it and takes it back to the camp. Does he treat it in the same way as he would have treated his Airdale dog? What is the difference? Describe the cub's behaviour in captivity. Do you feel most sympathy for the cub or for the man?



Look carefully at the picture of the hunter with the bear cub. What is its saddest aspect? Recall this part of the film. Does this help to establish the innocence of the cub?

Consider the attitude of the two hunters to their bear hunting life. Their characters and behaviour were very different. List some words to describe them in the chart below.

Younger hunter	Older hunter



How were they changed by their experiences?



Recall and describe the series of events that led up to the confrontation between the hunter and the bear in this picture, describe what happened in the end. Prepare a storyboard from your description. Remember how camera angles were used for maximum effect.

How much do you think the character of the younger hunter influenced the action and the eventual outcome?

What do you think would have happened if the older hunter had been the first to sight the bear? Make a storyboard showing how different the action might have been.

## How the film was made

When Claude Bern, the producer, first read the synopsis, or breakdown of the film:

An orphan bear cub A big solitary bear Two hunters in the forest The animals' point of view as well as being deeply impressed by the idea of the film, he thought it would be 'inexpensive' to make. In fact, the production turned out to be particularly elaborate because of the original nature of the film, bringing the final budget to \$25 million.

The filming itself was a complex operation, involving a large crew, animal trainers, extensive safety precautions, a long shooting schedule, special effects, and an additional sound track. Prior to this there had been up to four years of animal training, the long search for the right location, and scientific and veterinary advice.

The editing of the film was an enormous task. One million feet of film were shot from which 10,000 feet were selected. As there was hardly any dialogue in the film, Noelle Boisson, the editor, had to rely on the power of the images and the effect they created by the way that they followed one another to tell the story.

Storyboard a sequence from the film that you can remember in some detail. Photocopy your storyboard and cut out each shot. Now rearrange the shots to show the same sequence in a different way. Compare your two sequences. This gives you some idea of the choices you have as an editor.

Throughout the film the only sound is the terse dialogue of the men, a range of animal noises, occasional music to build suspense or emphasize beauty, and the incredibly lush sounds of nature. Only some of the sound recording that took place on set could be used, because the trainers were constantly coaching the animals, so a separate soundtrack had to be created and added later.

Laurant Quaglio, the sound designer, spent three months listening to the sound recorded during shooting to make a selection for the final track. The sound technician spent nights recording bears and cougars roaring, cub's snoring, owl's hooting, dogs' barking etc; and a sound studio was built in one of the bear's cages. Finally there was enough material to be fed into a specialized computer to create the final soundtrack.

Philippe Sarde, the composer, created a musical score, inspired by Eastern European Jewish folklore, that had an emotional timeless quality.

Next time you are watching a video film, turn down the sound. Watch the film for a few minutes in silence. Consider how important all the elements of sound (speech, music, street sounds etc.) are to your understanding of the film.

## Special Effects

At the beginning of the film there is a statement that "No animal was mistreated or injured during the production of this film. Some scenes have been simulated' Jean-Jacques Annaud, the director, invited Jim Henson, who created "The Muppet Show" to use animatronics (a technique that permits the remote-control animation of objects and characters) for scenes where there was violent behaviour between the animals. The special effects team made a big bear, a mother bear, a cougar head and paw, and dogs.

List the parts of the film where you think these animatronics were used and why.

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Bretislav Pojar, the Czech animator, provided the dream sequences in the film. He used colour to create mood and animated puppets to give a fresh, fairytale quality. Do they make you sympathise with the bear cub and understand his viewpoint?