



Primary supplement

In their own image...

Joseph Campbell, a writer on primitive mythology, suggests that men do not discover their gods... they create them. In the introduction to his book *Of Wolves and Men*, Barry Holostun Lopez suggests that the same is true of animals – the scientist, the native American, the cattle baron have each created their own notions of the wolf and its place in the scheme of things.

Over the centuries, writers have portrayed the wolf in many guises: as greedy and fraudulent; a symbol of war and betrayal; as the Devil and werewolf. In such fairy tales as *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Three Little Pigs*, the wolf is a savage creature out to cause death and destruction.

Stories about bears, and the fear and respect they inspired, can be seen in the cave paintings that were made over 10,000 years ago. Anyone killing a bear was sure to be seen as a great hunter with tales of his exploits passing into folklore.



Fiction

In recent years, of course, the bear has been rehabilitated, at least in the pages of children's fiction where we can find friendly bears that talk and play and go to school. But real bears, such as the brown bear of Europe, are isolated and threatened by the loss of habitats and food supplies.

In the classroom, any work on European carnivores should be aimed at helping children to appreciate that some of their images of these animals may be stereotypical or even false. Children can then be encouraged to express their own feelings through talking and writing. Such empathy may well lead to a better understanding of the real nature of creatures such as the wolf, the bear and the lynx.

ACTIVITY 1

Who's afraid of...?

Purpose

- To develop alternative versions to traditional stories.

Procedure

Examine the story of Little Red Riding Hood. Either tell it to the class, read one of the many versions available or recall it with the help of the class.

In groups, ask the children to brainstorm ideas for an alternative Little Red Riding Hood, one that is told by the wolf and that puts him and his actions into a good light. These ideas can then be put into an order and used as the basis for a new story.

Mary Rayner's book *The Small Good Wolf* may be useful here. This is the story of Little Red Riding Hood given a fresh twist and which puts what happened into a totally different light.

A similar exercise may be carried out with the story of The Three Little Pigs. Maybe the wolf was simply testing the strength of the structures to make sure the pigs would be safe in a strong wind! Maybe, as John Scieszka suggests in *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, the wolf was actually after a cup of sugar – but the pigs misunderstood him – and he was sneezing, not blowing, because he had a terrible cold!



ACTIVITY 2

If only I could give you my point of view...

Purpose

- To consider children's perceived ideas about bears and wolves and to present alternative viewpoints, perhaps from the carnivore's point of view.

Procedure

Examine the cover illustration for *Wolf* by Gillian Cross (Resource 1). This is a powerful story in which the author deconstructs the mythical image of the wolf as portrayed in the cover picture. Alongside this read the description of wolves from *The Brothers Lionheart* by Astrid Lindgren (Resource 2). Contrast these with the image of the wolf given in the poem by Bayard Taylor, *A Night With a Wolf* (Resource 3) and with a picture of the wolf mother and her daughters in *Walk with a Wolf* by Janni Howker (Resource 4).

Taylor is obviously doing something to enhance the wolf's image but can children take it further? Can they write a poem in the form of a complaint? Such a poem may well begin:

*You don't know what it's like
to be the subject of such bad press.
You don't know what it's like
to be hated as we are,
to be feared and ...*

Further complaints could include being hunted and losing habitats, problems with finding a place for a den and raising young in areas that are now encroached upon by humans. The repetition of the line, 'You don't know what it's like' at certain points in the poem will serve to give the poem a rhythm without the writer worrying about rhyme. Such a complaint might also be written as a letter.

Some children might like to rap their message as in this extract from James Carter's *Cool or Cruel*:

*My name is Wol, I'm a hip young wolf
– son of the famous Big Bad Wolf.
My Dad's real big, and it makes me sad
When people say that I'm just like him
'Cos I don't scare folks – it's not my thing
Wherever I go, as you will see
Folks they shoot or shout at me:
Hey wolfie! Get out of town
We don't want guys like you around.
You gobble up grans, you puff little pigs
We've all had enough of your lies and tricks*

Remind children that when they perform their raps the words should be clear and that any instruments that are used to underpin the rhythm should not be played at a level which obscures the words.

Younger children may wish to focus on the book by John Burningham, *Oi! Get Off Our Train*. A small boy and his dog ride a dream train through the night. On the way they meet with various animals that beg to be taken on board because they are being hunted, their habitat is disappearing or for other environmental reasons. Children could produce their own train for European carnivores, drawing pictures of the carriages and the creatures that might be on board. Speech bubbles could tell the reasons why they wish to join the train and the whole would look most effective as a class frieze.

ACTIVITY 3

I am what I am...

From poems that complain to ones that celebrate...

Purpose

- To explore various types of poems that will allow the writer to empathise with a European carnivore and to celebrate its power and beauty.

A *haiku* is a strictly controlled three line poem of 17 syllables, five in the first line, seven in the second and five in the third. It is a word snapshot, something that can say a lot in a small number of words, as in this haiku *Wolf* by Judith Nicholls:

*Still on his lone rock
Stares at the uncaged star and
Cries into the night.*

Initially children will feel that, in having to write only three lines, they are being given an easy task but for a haiku to be effective it needs a lot of thought. Ask the children to say what they feel about Judith's haiku. Do they like it? Does it give a glimpse of the creature? What do they understand by 'uncaged stars'? Suggest that they try to compose a similar piece about a bear, a lynx, an otter or a polecat. Some initial research into these creatures may be useful.

Another word snapshot may be created by asking a question and then answering it using several combinations of descriptive words linked by hyphens, as in this piece by DH Lawrence:

*Did you ever see an otter?
Silvery-sided, fish-fanged, fierce-faced,
whiskered, mottled.*



In his poem *The Small Brown Bear*, Michael Baldwin again captures a moment in time and from his words on the page we can picture this bear as in a photograph:

*The small brown bear
fishes
with stony paws
eating ice salmon
all waterfall slippery
till his teeth ache.*

For a longer descriptive piece look at the poem *Otter* by Ceri Witham, age 11 (Resource 5). A number of questions can be asked about this once the children have had time to read it through and to talk about it in groups:

What time of year do you think it is?
How can we tell?

Find an example of a simile
(*he vanishes, like a magician's assistant*)

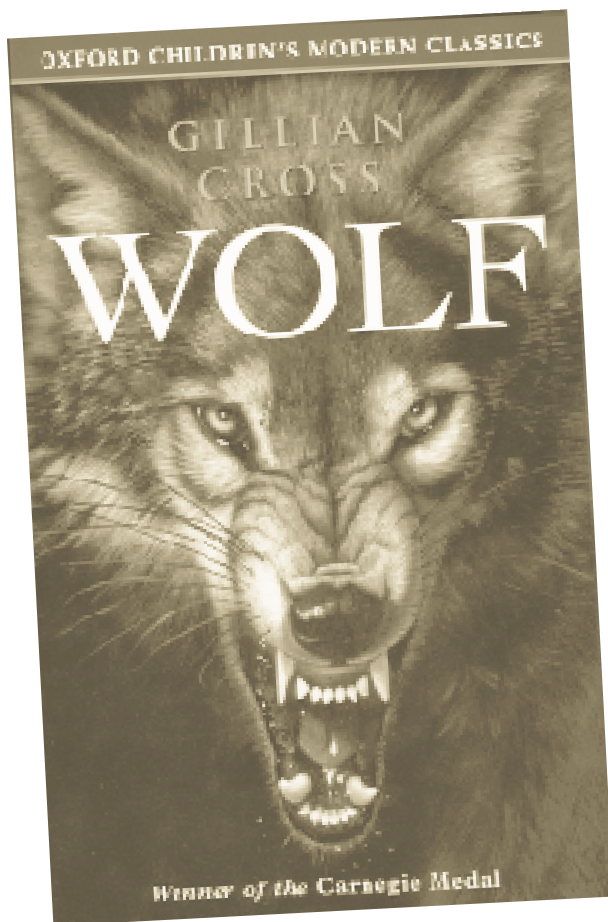
Find an example of a metaphor
(*the frosted bank is a village of voles*)

Are there other metaphors?

Have the children got a favourite line
in the poem? Why?

Is the poem an effective description of an
otter and its actions?

RESOURCES



1

Front cover from the book *Wolf* by Gillian Cross
(Oxford Children's Modern Classics Edition, 1998).
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2

An attack by wolves

*... horrible grey shapes which came
streaking out into the moonlight,
howling with hunger...*

*... I saw his open jaws and his
terrible teeth that were longing
to get at my throat.*

From *The Brothers Lionheart* by Astrid Lindgren,
(Hodder and Stoughton, 1973)

3 A Night With a Wolf

*High up on the lonely mountains,
Where the wild men watched and waited;
Wolves in the forest, and bears in the bush,
And I on my path belated.*

*The rain and the night together
Came down, and the wind came after,
Bending the props of the pine-tree roof,
And snapping many a rafter.*

*I crept along in the darkness,
Stunned, and bruised, and blinded;
Crept to a fir with thick-set boughs,
And a sheltering rock behind it.*

*There, from the blowing and raining,
Crouching, I sought to hide me.
Something rustled: two green eyes shone;
And a wolf lay down beside me!*

*His wet fur pressed against me;
Each of us warmed the other;
Each of us felt in the stormy dark,
That beast and man were brother.*

*And when the falling forest
No longer crashed in warning
Each of us went from our hiding place
Forth in the wild, wet morning.*

4

*A mother wolf reunited with
her cubs from the spring,
three sons and a daughter.*



Illustration © 1997
Sarah Fox Davies from
Walk With A Wolf
written by Janni Hawker.
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Walker Books Ltd., London

5

Otter

*His whiskers comb the moonlight
Where the frosted bank
Is a village of voles?
His skin is an oily plush.*
A living bolt in the water,
He vanishes
Like a magician's assistant,*

*A reflection of mystic wonder,
Curving, curling,
A snake in the stream,
His slippery catch
Is still in a moment.*

* 'plush' – a fabric with an even pile
longer and less dense than that of velvet.



Ceri Williams. From *Cadbury's Eighth Book of Childrens' Poetry*, 1990. Reprinted by kind permission of Cadbury Ltd. Illustration from *Animal Lives: The Otter* by Sandy Ransford, illustrated by Bert Kitchen (Kingfisher 1999). Reprinted by kind permission of the illustrator and publisher.