



The Bear Suit

Rollo has had enough of human beings. They are greedy, selfish and destroying the planet. He dreams of running away to the mountains where he can live far from the “messed-up, man-made” world. There’s only one problem: Rollo’s hungry stomach. No matter how much food he carries in his backpack, it’s never enough to stay in the wilderness for long. The answer, which comes in the form of a rented bear costume, seems like a stroke of genius—until the bear suit begins to change Rollo’s life in ways he could never have imagined.

Read out loud!

The teacher can model by reading the first paragraph of a chapter. Then, students can read one at a time or in groups, a chapter at a time. This can take several classes or sessions.

You will encounter some **vocabulary*** that you can discuss ahead of time:

backpack, pack	dart	high/low altitude
bear canister	environment	John Muir
bear locker	flashlight	mankind
blackberries	foothills	park ranger
campground	forest service	petition
cardiologist	fossil fuels	raid
climate change	gizmo	Sierra Nevada mountains
contour lines	great bear	sleeping bag
demonstration	high (intoxicated)	worse for the wear

*Point out the glossary at the back of the book which includes some of these words along with their definitions.

Mountains and Bears!

Here are some websites that illustrate some of the places in the book and give information about bears. Use them to inspire discussion.

- **Information and images of the Sierra Nevada mountains:**

<https://www.sunset.com/travel/california/sierras#sierra-nevada-mcgee-creek>

<https://californiahighsierra.com/trips/10-sierra-nevada-mountain-facts/>

- **A video of a bear raiding a campsite:**

<https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/national-international/bear-campers-video-campsite-mammoth-sierra-nevada-mountains/2444999/>

- **Facts about American bears:**

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/facts/american-black-bear>

Class activities and discussion topics

Geography

Have students use maps or search the internet to find the Sierra Nevada mountains in California. Search for California national parks to find examples of places like the ones Rollo goes to.

Ask students to identify the closest mountains and wilderness areas near them.

Character

Rollo is at the center of the story and his character drives the action. Have students discuss the following:

1. What is Rollo like?
2. How does he feel about people?
3. What are his relationships with other people like?
4. What does he want to do?
5. What happens to Rollo by the end?

Nature and the environment

Different characters in the story have different attitudes toward nature and the wilderness. Discuss how Rollo, his mother, the boy Zack, the old lady Elaine and Ranger Quinn might see the mountains differently. Have students discuss their own feelings about wild places.

Rollo thinks that people are destroying the planet. Do the students agree? What should we do about it?

Transformation

Stories, legends and myths about people turning into animals are common and can be found in practically all cultures and parts of the world. Have students come up with more examples of human-animal transformation stories and discuss them. What happens in these stories? Why do people change into animals?

Does Rollo change by the end of the story? How does he change? How is he the same? Discuss.

Ask students or have them ask each other: If you could change into any animal, what would it be? Give reasons.

Hiking and camping

Do any of the students like to hike or camp? Where are their favorite places to go? When do they go and for how long? Who goes with them? What do they bring?

Have students plan a hike, camping trip or picnic. Have them choose a destination and tell who they'll invite to come along. Ask them to make a list of what they'll bring, including equipment and food.

Identify vocabulary about hiking and hiking equipment.