Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for
Julie of the Wolves
by
Jean Craighead George

Book Information

Jean Craighead George, Julie of the Wolves
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Book Level: 5.8
Interest Level: MG

Common sense and courage enable a young Eskimo girl to survive when she becomes lost in the Arctic wild.

Award: NCTE Notable Children's Books in the
  Language Arts; Newbery Medal; SLJ Best
  Book
Topics: Adventure, Lost/Abandoned;
  Recommended Reading, California
  Recommended Lit., English, 6-8

Main Characters

Amaroq   a large black wolf that is leader of the
  pack
Amy   Miyax's pen pal who routinely invites Miyax to
  come to San Francisco
Daniel   the young, "dull" husband of Miyax
Jello   a submissive wolf whose trembling reminds
  Miyax of Jello
Kapu   a wolf pup that becomes leader of the pack
  when Amaroq dies
Kapugen   Miyax's father, who taught her lessons
  that helped her survive in the tundra
Martha   Miyax's aunt, with whom she lives from the
  time she attends school until her marriage to
  Daniel
Miyax (Julie)   the principal character, a
  thirteen-year-old girl who learns to appreciate the
  traditional Eskimo ways of life when she is lost in
  the Alaskan Tundra
Tornait   a migratory bird lost in the tundra, which
  Miyax nurses back to health and befriends

Vocabulary

cow   to frighten by threats or a show of force; to
make one feel inferior or unworthy

dominant   most powerful or important
gussak   Eskimo word for white-faced people
undulating   moving in a smooth wave-like motion

Synopsis

Julie of the Wolves is a story about a thirteen-year-old Eskimo girl's journey through the Alaskan tundra and the appreciation she gains of her Eskimo heritage. The story is divided into three parts.

In the first part, Miyax, whose English name is Julie, is lost in the barren Alaska tundra after running away from her marriage. Miyax remembers wolves once brought food to her father when he communicated to them that he was hungry. Seeing this as her only chance for survival, Miyax studies a pack of wolves, learns their ways of communication and becomes accepted into their pack. Miyax forms a special bond with Amaroq, the leader of the pack, and with Kapu, a confident pup. At first, Miyax depends on the wolves for food. Then, Miyax realizes she must depend on herself for survival. Remembering what her father taught her about patience, nature and traditional Eskimo ways, Miyax learns to survive.

The second part of the story is a flashback that describes Miyax's life from childhood until her escape into the tundra. After her mother dies, Miyax's father, Kapugen, takes her to live at seal camp where he teaches her about the Eskimo way of life. Later, Miyax is forced to attend school and live with her Aunt Martha. Kapugen is thought to have drowned. Because she dislikes living with Aunt Martha, Miyax agrees to honor a marriage promise that had been arranged when she was a child. After her new husband, Daniel, responds to his friends' taunts that he cannot "mate" his new wife, she runs away. Miyax plans to cross the tundra to Port Hope, where she will board a boat to the home of her pen pal in San Francisco.

The third part of the story returns to Miyax in the tundra. As Miyax approaches Port Hope, she comes to understand and value the Eskimo way of life. She is not sure she wants to join modern society. Miyax's

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hatred toward civilization builds when Amaroq is killed, and Kapu is injured, by a hunter in an airplane. When Miyax discovers Kapugen is alive, she hopes he will help her save the wolves. She is shocked to find that Kapugen has abandoned many Eskimo ways. Miyax leaves Kapugen's home intending to live like an Eskimo. When a lost migratory bird that she had befriended dies, Miyax realizes the day of the wolf and the Eskimo is over. She points her boots toward Kapugen.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding
Why did Miyax decide to stop depending on the wolves for food and begin depending on herself?

Miyax became fearful when she realized the wolves would soon become nomadic. She remembered her father's advice that fear is often a sign that you are doing something wrong. She realized her dependence caused her fear, and she must depend on herself to survive.

Literary Analysis
Give some examples of wolf behavior from the book and explain what each behavior indicates.

Possible answers may include any of the following: Biting on top of the nose and lifting the head and tail mean dominance. Pressing ears forward, showing teeth and arching the neck mean aggression. Rolling onto the back, keeping a low posture and the tail between the legs mean submission. Many other examples are described in the book.

Inferential Comprehension
At the end of the story we read, "Julie pointed her boots toward Kapugen." What did the author include in the book to help us understand she was returning to her father?

The author used the same sentence when Miyax first went to Kang to see Kapugen. The name Julie is used instead of Miyax. Miyax sang to the spirit of Amaroq in her best English. Earlier, Miyax had refused to speak English. She sang that the hour of the wolf and of the Eskimo was over. The decision to return occurred after Tornait died. Tornait was a lost migratory bird who could not survive away from its environment.

Constructing Meaning
We are told Amaroq could not help but accept Miyax when she patted him under the chin "for the roots of this signal lay deep in wolf history." Amaroq's reaction was instinctive. List other ways animals act instinctively.

Possible answers might include any of the following: Birds and monarch butterflies migrate without being shown where to go. Animals know how to care for their young without being taught. Different species have their own ways of communicating with one another.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization When Miyax remembered her father's advice that fear could cripple a person, making him/her unable to think or act, she was able to remain calm and use reason to solve her problems. Find examples of how Miyax remained calm in a scary situation, solved problems or used inventive techniques to survive. Students can share personal examples of how panicking made a problem hard to solve or how remaining calm helped them solve a problem. Ask students to find examples, in books or in real life, of children who solved difficult problems or survived difficult situations.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors This story describes the habits of a wolf pack living in

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Alaska. At one time, wolves were abundant throughout North America. Today, wolves are either endangered or threatened in all forty-eight contiguous states. Ask students to research the gray wolf. Have them describe the causes for their disappearance, the efforts to restore wolf populations, the misconceptions about wolves, and the reasons groups of people are for or against restoring wolf populations. Watch a movie about wolves, or invite an expert on wolves to speak to the class.

Describing Actions or Events This book describes many ways wolves communicate. Ask students to make lists of wolf behavior and tell what each behavior communicates. Find examples from this book or from other sources. Ask students to research ways that other animals communicate. Let them share how their own pets communicate with them or with other animals.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning In Part II of the story, Miyax remembered events from her childhood and compared them to colors. Review these memories, then discuss how colors help to illustrate a mood. Ask the students to write a poem based on one color or several colors and to explore the feelings or personal experiences the color(s) can represent. Or, they can create a picture using those colors. Students should include with the picture a description of what those colors represent.