

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

There's an Owl in the Shower

by

Jean Craighead George

Book Information

Jean Craighead George, There's an Owl in the Shower

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Interest Level: MG

Because protecting spotted owls has cost Borden's father his job as a logger in the old growth forest of northern California, Borden intends to kill any spotted owl he sees until he and his father find themselves taking care of a young owlet.

Topics: Animals, Endangered; Animals, Owls; Community Life, Environmental Issues; Family Life, Fathers; Family Life, Job Loss; Family Life, Sons; People, Lumberjacks; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Just Connect: Relationships; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 4-6

Main Characters

Bardy a spotted owlet that Borden finds on the forest floor and brings home

Borden Watson the child of an unemployed logger in northern California, who finds a young owlet

Cindy Watson Borden's mother

Leon Watson Borden's father, an unemployed logger who hates the spotted owls

Paul James a local high school teacher and environmentalist who advises Sally and Borden about owls

Sally Watson Borden's sister, whose knowledge of owls helps Borden and Leon care for Bardy

Vocabulary

"sound vision" a process of using the sense hearing to locate objects in space

brood to warm, protect, or cover with the wings or body

extinction the act of removing a species from existence

pantaloons the feathers on the legs of a bird

Synopsis

Borden Watson's father has lost his job as a logger because a judge in Seattle, Washington, ordered all logging stopped until a solution could be found to the dwindling spotted owl population. Borden is angered by this and decides he will get his father back to work by killing all the spotted owls. When he goes to the forest to shoot owls, he instead finds an owlet on the forest floor. Believing the owlet is an abandoned barred owl, he brings it home to raise.

His father, Leon, sees the owlet as his chance to prove to a judge that he is a good man who does not deserve the ticket he received for fighting with Paul James, an environmentalist, at a gas station. Leon gradually becomes attached to the owlet and spends much of his time feeding it and taking care of it for Borden. He continues to say he will wring the owl's neck after his court date, but it becomes clear to everyone that he will not be able to carry out that threat.

Bardy eventually learns to fly, and the family realizes he is a spotted owl and must be returned to the forest. They hurry to return Bardy to the wild after reading a notice in the newspaper that states it is illegal to keep an endangered or threatened animal. After Borden, Sally, and Leon release Bardy, Leon surprises his children by showing them his knowledge and respect for the forest. He tells them he is taking a new job at a local fish hatchery. In the end, Leon comes to understand that by helping to save the owls, he will be saving people.

Open-Ended Questions

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

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Initial Understanding

Sally had worried that her father wouldn't be able to let Bardy go because Bardy had "imprinted" on him. What does this mean and why didn't that actually happen? What other animals "imprint"?

Imprinting is a biological process in animals that causes the new animal to believe the first living things it sees is its mother. The animal then depends on and follows that animal wherever it goes. Bardy had already imprinted on his mother and father in his nest so he couldn't really do the same with Leon. Other bird species, like ducks, imprint.

Literary Analysis

In this story, Paul James, a science teacher and environmentalist, said that the loggers were suffering because of decisions made by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. What did these organizations do that caused the problems around the Watson's town? Should they take the full blame for what was happening in the old-growth forests?

They failed to heed the warnings of the environmentalists, who had told them the spotted owls were in trouble. They allowed the loggers to continue to clear-cut, despite the things that the environmentalists pointed out. Logging companies could be partly responsible for not noticing what was happening in the forests. They were more interested in making money.

Inferential Comprehension

How does Leon change during the course of the story?

Leon Watson was unhappy after losing his job as a logger. He was very physically strong and used his strength to intimidate others. He seemed to his children to be unfeeling. As his relationship with Bardy develops, he begins to reveal the softer side of his personality, which no doubt was always there.

Constructing Meaning

Leon referred to clear-cutting as a game of dominoes; when one piece falls, it takes down another piece, etc. List the line of people and places that would fall or be hurt as a result of the clear-cutting. Illustrate the chain of effects.

Clear-cutting causes soil erosion, which causes muddy rivers, which causes fish death, which causes lack of work for canneries, which causes lack of work for can makers, etc.

Teachable Skills

Understanding the Author's Craft Throughout the story, the author revealed information about spotted owl habits, lifestyles, etc. Have students skim the story and take notes on all the information the author gave about spotted owls and issues affecting them. Provide the students with other resources that give information about the spotted owl. Students can then organize the information they have gathered and write a report on spotted owls.

Recognizing Cause and Effect The spotted owl problem presented in this story is not a unique environmental problem. There are many places on the earth where habitats are being destroyed by loggers, builders, etc. Students could research the destruction of habitats around the world. As a class, map out the places where humans are devastating the living environment of animals. Discuss solutions to the problems. Keep in mind that solutions that include compromises are the best. Hold a mini-debate over an environmental issue.

Understanding Sequence Leon Watson said clear-cutting was like a game of dominoes, but it is also an example of how the "web of life" works. When one predator or prey is removed from an environment, another is adversely affected. Students can choose one animal and create a web of life showing how other plants and animals are dependent upon it. Ask how removing that animal from the web would affect the environment.

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Responding to Literature In the beginning of the story, Borden notices Enrique using "sound vision." Sound vision involves using the sense of hearing to narrow down the location of an object based on how its noise bounces off objects and travels through the air. Many animals rely on this technique, especially bats and other animals that hunt at night. List other animals that use this technique. Play a game of "sound vision" by blindfolding one person and having that person try to locate children who are moving around him/her using only the sense of hearing. Once that person successfully locates another child, let the next child have a turn, etc.