

# *Dreaming the Bear* by Mimi Thebo

## A Guide for Reading Groups



Darcy wishes she was back home in London hanging out with her friends, but instead her dad's new job means she has to live in the snowy wilderness of Yellowstone National Park. Under doctor's orders to exercise in the fresh air as she recovers from pneumonia, Darcy climbs a cliff and takes shelter in a cave where she discovers a wounded grizzly bear. Can Darcy help to save the bear or is the bear helping to save Darcy?

### Main characters

- Darcy – recovering from pneumonia and suffering from dizzy spells, she forms a strange bond with the wounded bear she finds.
- Dad – Darcy's dad who has taken a job as a Ranger in Yellowstone National Park.
- Mum – Darcy's mum who sometimes works away from home.
- Jem – Darcy's older and caring brother.
- Tony – a boy Darcy likes who stays with them at the cabin when they are snowed in.
- The bear – a female grizzly bear who has been shot in the shoulder and had her cubs stolen from her.

### Key themes

- Family
- Friendship
- Environment
- Relationships
- Isolation
- Nature

### Questions for discussion

1. How does the bear act when Darcy first encounters it? Why do you think the bear behaves in this way? How do you think you would react in Darcy's situation?
2. What does Darcy miss about her previous life? Rank these in order of their importance to Darcy and give reasons for your choices.
3. Why does Darcy decide to go back to the cave? What impression do you get of Darcy from her second encounter with the bear?

4. What does Darcy do to try to help the bear? What reasons does Darcy give for looking after the bear? What do you think of the decisions she takes?

5. What impression do you get of the different relationships in Darcy's life? You may find it useful to think about:

- Darcy's feelings about her mum when she leaves her behind.
- The way Darcy's dad treats her and how she feels about this.
- Darcy's relationship with her brother, Jem.
- How Darcy and Tony act towards each other and what this suggests.
- Darcy's connection with the bear and the way this is shown.
- How Darcy's out-of-body experiences give her a different perspective on the relationships in her life.

6. 'The nearer I get to the park, the more ill I start to feel.' (page 100)

Why does Darcy feel ill the nearer she gets to the park? How do Darcy's feelings about living in the wilderness change during the book?

7. Why is Tony angry when he discovers what Darcy has done?

8. At the end of the book, Darcy has to face the consequences of her decision to feed the bear. What do you think of the action she has to take? What would you have done in her situation?

### Activity

1. *Dreaming the Bear* is a book about the natural world. Compare *Dreaming the Bear* with another book about the relationship between a person and an animal such as *War Horse* by Michael Morpurgo or your own choice of story. What similarities do these two stories share? What are the differences? Compare the views about humanity's relationship with other species presented in each book and discuss how these are shown.

2. Write a tourist brochure for the area of Yellowstone National Park described in the book. What type of people do you think would be interested in visiting this area and why? What activities might they be able to do? What warnings might you want to give to these tourists?

### Further reading

- Katherine Rundell's *Wolf Wilder* tells the story of Feo, a young girl who leads a pack of wolves across the snowy Russian wilderness on a mission to save her mother.

- In *Into That Forest* by Louis Nowra, two young girls lost in the outback are adopted by Tasmanian tigers and learn how they survive.

- For another book about the relationship between wild bears and humans, try *Moon Bear* by Gill Lewis.

### Find out more

Find out more about the grizzly bears in Yellowstone National Park. What interesting facts can you learn about their behaviour and habitat?