

THE WOMAN WHO MARRIED A BEAR

By Elizabeth James

While picking berries one day, a young woman steps in bear dung. Disgusted, she curses the bears. Two bears overhear her and decide to teach her a lesson, taking her to their village where she's forced to marry the Bear Chief's nephew. He is kind to her and the seasons pass swiftly. They even have two children. But things change when the young woman's brothers come looking for her. Rather than harm them, her husband allows himself to be killed. In return, he asks only that the young woman teach her people to respect the bears.



WITS Connection: Talk it out, Seek help

Questions and Activities



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

- This story is a West Coast First Nations legend. The Tlingit and Haida are indigenous nations from this area. Learn more about Haida and Tlingit language and culture at www.sealaskaheritage.org/programs/language_and_culture_curriculum.htm.
- Alliances between animals and humans are common in many tribes' myths. They appear to be most popular in North Pacific Coast tribes where a whale takes a human wife, and among the Plains Indians whose legends often feature a buffalo or bear. Learn more about bears and their importance to First Nations People using the following online resources: www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Pictures/bears_pg01.html and <http://idahoptv.org/dialogue4kids/season7/bears/links.cfm>.



PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. What is the woman wearing on the cover of the book?
2. Why would a woman marry a bear?
3. Have you ever fed a wild animal?
4. What are your favourite local animals?
5. What local animals do you dislike? Why?
6. Have you ever lost something and spent a long time looking for it? How long?



POST-READING QUESTIONS

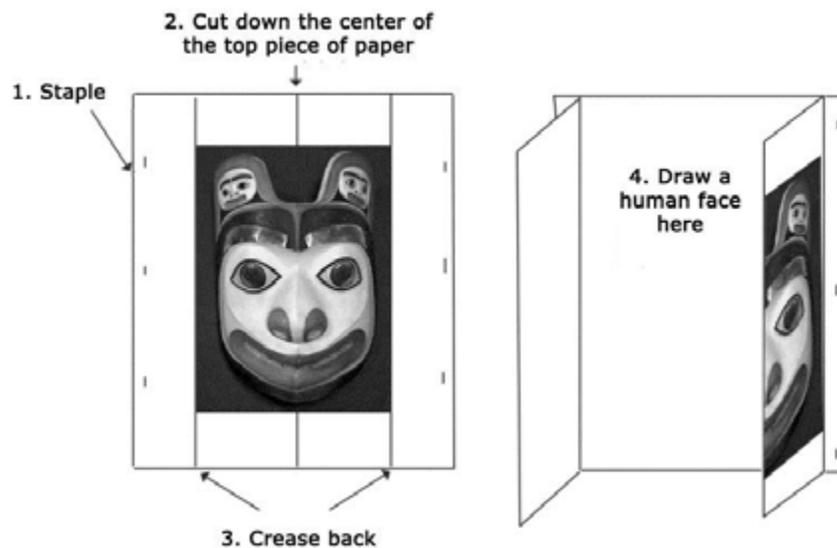
1. What did the girl think of bears at the beginning of the story? *She thought bears were filthy, ugly, dumb and greedy.*
2. Why did the girl think this way? *She had never met a bear and didn't know much about them.*
3. What did the girl think of bears near the end of the story? *She realized that they deserved great respect.*
4. Why did she change her mind? *Her bear husband let her brothers live and let her go back to her village.*

5. Have you ever thought one way about someone and changed your mind after you met him or her?
6. Why did you change your mind?
7. Who did the girl talk it out with when she was captured by the Bear People? *The Mouse Woman*.
8. When the girl returned to her village she felt out of place. Why? *She missed her bear husband. She and her children were different from the other villagers.*



POST-READING ACTIVITIES

- Complete a mask activity with your students. Find a picture of a West Coast First Nations bear mask and make a copy for each student. Place a piece of paper behind the photocopied mask and staple along the outside edges. Cut straight down the middle of the first page only and then crease back the page along the sides to reveal the second page. Have students draw a man's or woman's face on this blank paper to represent a character from the story. When the top page is opened, the transformation is revealed. See illustration below.



- Distribute the [Feelings handout](#) and have students complete the chart by describing and illustrating the girl's feelings at the beginning, middle and end of the story.

Notes:

The Woman Who Married a Bear: Feelings Handout

Name _____

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<p>At the beginning of the story, this is how the girl felt about bears. She felt _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>In the middle of the story, the girl's feelings started to change. She felt _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>By the end of the story, the girl's feelings changed. She felt _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>