

Would I Really Do That?

Learning to differentiate between real wildlife behavior and anthropomorphic wildlife behavior in literature helps students begin to think critically about the nature of wildlife, consider the differences between wildlife and domestic animals, and foster an innate curiosity about urban wildlife from backyard to schoolyard and beyond. Observing wildlife in the community, in the animal's natural habitat, empowers students to see themselves as part of the larger world, inspires students to learn about local wildlife, and encourages environmental stewardship. As students work in groups to make an authentic scene (diorama), students will gain new perspectives about themselves and their peers, their relationship with the world around them, and the importance of wildlife in their lives.

GRADES: 2rd

INTENDED OUTCOMES: Head, Heart, Feet, Hands

SUGGESTED SUPPLIES:

- "Mother Bruce" by Ryan T. Higgins
- 4-5 (depending on the number of groups you want) shoeboxes filled with things such as sticks, plant material, rocks, native animal figurines, litter, fishing line, non-native animal figurines, and etc.

VOCABULARY:

- Wildlife
- Pets
- Behavior
- Make-believe/pretend
- Bear
- Sparrow
- Salmon
- Goslings
- Imprinting
- Migration

SUGGESTED STEPS:

- Before reading the story, get students ready with questions- what does it mean when your mom tells you to behave (goal is to get students to understand behavior is the way we act)? Do you have any pets? What kinds of things do your pets do? Can they play with you? What kinds of games can they play? Can your pet speak to you using words? Can your pet use the internet? Do wild animals cook their food?
- Set an intention with students before reading, for example, as we read today, try to notice the things our characters do that real wildlife cannot do or as we read today, think about the things your pets do that wild animals do not do.
- Read “Mother Bruce” with students and model your thinking as you go. For instance, when Bruce uses the internet to find an egg recipe, you might say, “ This is kind of funny. I’ve never seen a bear use a computer. That seems like it might be pretend.” As students start to get it, allow them to tell you what on the page seems pretend.
- During the story, when the eggs hatch on the stove and start following Bruce, talk about imprinting in birds (Imprinting is a form of learning. Birds do not know what they are when they hatch and they visually imprint on their parents during a critical period of early development. Imprinting for wild birds is crucial to their immediate and long term survival). The reason the birds think Bruce is their mother is because they visually saw him during the critical development window. This happens with birds in the wild and is one of the common human/wildlife problems Greenwood encounters. Birds will imprint on people!
- After sharing the story, divide students into groups and distribute shoe boxes of supplies. Ask students to work in groups to create an authentic habitat for the native animals in each box. Remind them that not everything in their shoebox needs to be in the habitat they are creating. Give students about 15 minutes to complete their shoebox scenes.
- Regroup class and share out each group’s shoebox scene. Ask each group to talk about the things they included in their scene and what they excluded. Ask them to give reasons for each inclusion or exclusion.
- Close the lesson: Today we shared a cool story about a bear taking care of some goslings. We learned that in stories animals, like Bruce the Bear, can behave in pretend ways, or ways which are not real or natural. I would challenge you to notice when animals in the stories and books you read do something and begin to ask yourself, “If I were that animal, would I really do that?”

TIPS AND TRICKS

- If the weather is nice, take students outside and let them act out some of the parts of the story.
- Keep the contents of the shoebox unique for each group so everyone’s is different. Try modeling your boxes on different Colorado Biomes.

Thanks to [Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center](#) for providing this activity.