

READ! IMAGINE! CREATE! STUDY GUIDE 2022 – 2023
***The Bear* by Andrew Krivak**

Genre – What kind of story is *The Bear*?

Andrew Krivak’s novel *The Bear* is described by critics, publishers, and readers as many different genres of literature: fable, fairy tale, magical realism, fantasy, and allegory. Let’s explore what each of these are, and find how the book falls into these many genres.

Fable

A fable is defined as a short story, typically with animals as characters, conveying a moral.

Would you call *The Bear* a fable? Why or why not?

Is there a ‘moral’ to *The Bear*?

If so, what is the moral? Cite two examples from the text that support your claim.

If not, explain your reasoning against calling this story a fable.

Can you think of any fables you may know? What similarities and differences do you find between *The Bear* and the fables you are familiar with?

Fairy Tale

Fairy Tales are described as children's stories about magical and imaginary beings and lands.

Would you call *The Bear* a fairy tale? Why or why not?

Modern pop-culture fairy tales usually begins with “Once upon a time” and end with “Happily ever after.” Do you think the beginning and ending of *The Bear* echoes these sentiments? Why or why not?

Do you believe this novel was written for children, for adults, or both? What about the book makes you think so?

How do you imagine the impact of the novel changes based on the age of the reader? Would the experience of reading this book be different for readers who are parents of young children than it would be for readers who are still pre-teens or teenagers? Why?

Magical Realism

Magical Realism is defined as a literary genre in which realistic narrative and naturalistic technique are combined with surreal elements of dream or fantasy.

How and where is Magical Realism used in *The Bear*?

What are the surreal or fantasy elements that are woven into the naturalistic narrative?

Find three moments of Magical Realism in the novel, and explain what is ‘magical’ and what is ‘real’ about them.

Fantasy

In general, we understand fantasy to be a genre of fiction that concentrates on or includes imaginary elements.

Would you call *The Bear* fantasy? Why or why not?

How do you understand the element of the talking animals? Does the Girl actually talk to the animals? Do they actually answer her back? Or is there another way you interpreted these moments in the novel?

Allegory

An allegory is a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one.

Would you call *The Bear* an allegory? Why or why not?

What might be the hidden meaning (or multiple meanings) in the story?

Do you see anything political in the novel? If so, what?

As an allegory can be a picture as well as a story, try creating a quick sketch that demonstrates what hidden meanings you may find in *The Bear*.

Now that you have examined these various genres, how would you describe *The Bear*? Which of the genres do you feel “fit” the best? Which do you feel is the least accurate? Write a paragraph that explains your reasoning.

Big-Picture Themes – What are the Essential Questions or Ideas examined in *The Bear*?

Let’s explore some of the broader topics and themes found in the novel.

Nature/ Nature Writing

Nature writing is nonfiction or fiction prose or poetry about the natural environment.

How does nature and the environment impact the characters of *The Bear*? Find a quote that describes the role of nature in their lives.

How does nature help the characters? Hurt the characters? Find quotes to support your answers.

How do the character feel about nature? Do these feelings change? Find quotes!

Do you understand Nature itself to be a “character” in the story? Why or why not?

Based on the context clues of the environment, do you have a sense of where the story is located? Make a list of the natural landmarks that are mentioned in the story and see if you can find some locations that might make sense, based on this evidence.

Sketch a moment, description, or story-point where Nature is the focus.

Coming of Age

The Girl faces many trials through the course of the novel, and is changed by these trials.

How do you see the Girl grow and change as the result of one or more of the challenges she faces? Cite a quote that demonstrates her perspective before a trial, and then a second quote demonstrating how that perspective has shifted or changed.

How do you perceive the Girl is growing up? Are there differences in her language? In her perspective? In her actions? What questions does she have that are answered? What questions does she never find answers to?

Think of your own experience. What is something you understand differently now than you did when you were younger? Why do you feel differently about it now? How do you feel about this shift in your perspective?

Acceptance of Mortality / Natural Cycles

The Bear is, in one sense, a story of extinction. It is also a story of continuing life.

What goes extinct in this story? How did this make you feel?

What continues to live on past the ending of the book? How did this make you feel?

Along with the extinction, what other non-tangible ideas, elements, forces, or processes are lost? Make a list of what could not exist past the ending of human-kind.

What do you imagine might benefit, gain success, or prosper as a result of the extinction that occurs?

How does the Man feel about his own mortality? Provide two quotes to support your interpretation of his perspective.

How does the Girl feel about her own mortality? Provide two quotes supporting this.

How is each character's understanding and feeling of their own mortality different? How are they similar?

Civilization

One broad definition of Civilization is the society, culture, and way of life of a particular area or group of people.

Is there evidence of civilization in *The Bear*? Provide examples.

Would you call the way the Man and the Girl live as civilization? Why or why not?

What artifacts remain of past civilizations in the book? What value is placed on these artifacts? How does the value of these items change over the course of the story?

If you had to choose only one item from your life or civilization now to carry with you into the future, what would it be? Why? What does this item represent to you individually? How does it represent your broader civilization?

Transference of Knowledge & Teaching

The Girl learns many types of lessons, in several different ways as the story unfolds.

How does the relationship between the Man and the Girl contribute to the Girl's growth? Find two examples in the text where the Man tries to explain, clarify, or teach the Girl something. Does he succeed? Does she understand or learn what he is trying to communicate?

Once the Man is gone, how does the Girl continue to learn, change, and grow? Did anything the Man teach her help her after she is on her own? What?

What role does written language play in the story? Ultimately, is the knowledge or experience gained from reading books useful, helpful, necessary? Why or why not?

Aside from listening to her father and from reading, how else does the Girl learn throughout her life? Cite three instances when she learns something in a way other than being told or from reading.

How do you learn best? Do you learn through listening, through reading, through hands-on experience, or through some other means? Perhaps a combination?

Bears

Bears appear in multiple forms at multiple points throughout the novel.

Make a list of the various ways that Bears appear in the story, and in what forms they appear. What is the “role” of each of these bears? How does the form of each of these bears symbolize their meaning? Why is the novel called *The Bear*? Which bear do you think the title is referring to? Why?

When you think of Bears, what do you think of? How would you characterize bears?

Bears are a recurring character through time, and across many cultures: Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Yogi Bear, The California State Flag are three examples of Bears specific to contemporary California culture. Make a list of all the Bears you can think of, from pop-culture, to colloquial idioms, to cultural symbols. Why do you imagine bears are so common?

What other big-picture themes did you find in the novel? How did you see these themes explored?

IDEAS & SUGGESTIONS FOR PROJECTS

Literary Project Suggestions

- Write an original story of your own, based on a moment when nature, the environment, or the climate or weather impacted the events you lived through.
- Write a poem about nature or the environment.
- Write a script or short story of a scene between the Man and the Girl that we do not see in the book. Perhaps a scene where the two of them disagree about something? Perhaps a scene where the loneliness of having no peers her own age affects the Girl? Perhaps a scene where the two characters work out how to divide labor between them to make daily life more manageable for both?

Performance Project Suggestions

- Memorize and recite a passage as a monologue.
- Use a passage or some of the imagery to inspire a piece of instrumental music, a song, a rap, or a piece of spoken word poetry.
- Use the images, subjects, and ideas of one of the chapters to create a movement or dance piece.

Perhaps a dance/movement piece that depicts the Man's experience burying his wife? Or a movement piece exploring how the Girl finds joy in her world?

Visual Art Project Suggestions

- Paint, draw, collage an image based on the images, themes, or ideas in the novel.
- Create a sculpture or diorama of one of the scenes in one of the chapters.
Perhaps a three dimensional landscape of the setting of the novel?
- Draw or create a map of the area, including the house and other notable landmarks.
- Decorate an item with personal meaning to you with images from the book, or with images from your own life that the book inspires.

Media Project Suggestions

- Create an animation (Computer Generated, Stop Motion, or Hand-Drawn) that incorporates the images, subjects, and themes of the book.
- Build a video game or puzzle game that incorporates the images, subjects, and themes of the book.
- Create a live action film with a passage recited as the background or "soundtrack," or use one or more of the chapters to create your own short film.

Experience-Based Projects (NEW THIS YEAR!!)

Document through pictures, short videos, and written diaries or logs your own hands-on, real-world experience inspired by or relating to the book! (See details under "Project Descriptions" on the main RIC page!)

- Decide on a "survival skill" such as gathering food, fishing, building a fire, creating a shelter, and document the steps you would take to complete this task.
- There are many hand-made items both characters use throughout the book: moccasins, pouches, tools, vessels to carry water and food in, gifts, etc. Craft a hand-made item that you might use in day-to-day life (even better if the materials are all found in nature!).
- Teach someone (a peer, friend, sibling, parent, etc) a skill or craft that you know that they do not.