

Eleven *Wolf Camp* Writing Activities

Writers learn how to write by writing. There is no substitute for doing. A basketball player learns how to shoot free throws by shooting free throws. A pre-toddler learns how to walk by lifting a foot and pushing it forward. Likewise, a pre-writer learns how to write by lifting a pencil and pushing it forward. Teachers need to strike the spark that lights the fire that powers the pencil. WOLF CAMP is a fine flint and here are eleven suggestions on how to use it.

1. Finish the story. Just as the coach positions the arms and hands of the fledgling free throw shooter and the parent steadies the toddling toddler, a writing teacher can grease rusty, dusty pencils by providing a blueprint. WOLF CAMP is that blueprint. WOLF CAMP is an unfinished story. At story's end, Maddie is going back to camp, but with a difference, since she's going to Bear Camp. Have your students continue the story, telling what happens when Maddie returns from Bear Camp. It will help your students to explore some of the behaviors of bears. They can do this through prior knowledge *and* research.
2. Shift the story. Writing about Bear Camp is fun and it's a well-scaffolded start, but more advanced readers might want to veer into different animals. You could begin by brainstorming some animals that it would fun or interesting to have as summer counselors. For example, it might be fun to be under the tutelage of spider monkeys. Or cheetahs. Or tigers. Or dolphins. Or maybe even T-Rexes. As with the bears, you might want to list some of the qualities that Maddie would acquire under each animal. This way, students aren't just furthering their writing, but learning about animals in an intimate way, for to write about Maddie as a cheetah, they'll have to imagine themselves as cheetahs.

3. Extend the story. Instead of following the template of the story, have your students write about how Maddie might find herself in a situation where her newly acquired wolf skills are put to good use. Have your students brainstorm some typical problems on the board. Avoid hyperbole. For example, they might list a lost item or some playground bullies. An alien attack isn't a good choice because it's not likely. Now have them pick one of those problems and have Maddie solve it with her wolf skills. For example, she might sniff to find a lost item. Or she might bare her teeth and growl to scare some bullies. This activity lends itself to funny endings, such as all the kids begging to go to Wolf Camp after seeing Maddie solve situations and none of the parents getting any sleep because of the howling.
4. Twist the story. Rather than Maddie going to a camp run by animals, have the parents go. Brainstorm ways to open this story, such as they went because they were curious or they went because they didn't believe the stories that Maddie told them or they went because they were jealous. Then have the story be about the mayhem that occurs when they return home. This will be fun for the kids because they get to write about parents being wild.
5. Use the story to infer. Have your students rewrite the story, but instead of writing about the mishaps upon Maddie's return, have them focus on Maddie's time at Wolf Camp. What exactly happened there? Have them consider how Maddie might have felt upon realizing that Wolf Camp was run by wolves. Use the cover here, both the front and the back. The front gives clues about the universal of experience of being both anxious and excited about summer camp. The back, with Maddie's letters home, gives additional clues about Maddie's shifts in attitude.

6. Use it to differentiate first person and third person narratives. WOLF CAMP is written in the third person. Have them rewrite it in the first person. Your students can pretend that they're in Maddie's shoes. They can write about begging to attend a summer camp named Wolf Camp, but not understanding that it's run by wolves. They can focus on their feelings, on their initial excitement, replaced by confusion when the wolves appear and possibly fear. They can replace that fear with further excitement as they realize how fun it is to live a wolf's life. They can write about the activities at Wolf Camp OR they can write about the problems they encounter upon returning home, after learning wolf skills.
7. Reverse the story. Continue the story after Maddie has reverted to being a typical kid, except she remembers all that the wolf counselors taught her and she wants to return the favor, to teach them what she knows as they taught her what they know. So, Maddie opens Kid Camp and invites the wolves to attend. What would they learn at Kid Camp? What problems might the wolves having learning kid things given that they don't have fingers and walk on all fours?
8. Reverse the story with a twist. Have your students finish this story: Maddie went back to being the girl that she was, but she didn't forget Wolf Camp. She remained grateful to the wolves for letting her live the wild life, if only for a while. So, she decided to return the favor. The summer after Wolf Camp, she put together a camp called Kid Camp. There, she would teach the wolves how to live like kids. She stocked it with kid things, like book bags, computer games, sugary cereals, and candy and more candy. She even got some beds that looked like race cars. And she would also teach the wolves some kid tricks, like how to hide your mushy vegetables under your napkin so it will look like you ate them all. She sent an invitation to Wolf Camp, but the wolves didn't come. That's because wolves don't read.

But Maddie's mom and dad found one of those invitations and they decided to attend Maddie's Kid Camp because she'd put so much work into it. And here's what happened:

9. Research the story. You can use this activity to teach them bulleting and an early form of footnoting. It's also an exercise in rapid research, which is enabled by educated perusing where your students tender more attention to bold print, photos, italicized print, numbers, and topic sentences. Encourage them to select uncommon animals. They could also select an animal that they really like. They will submit a piece of paper with this heading: "If I went to Xxxx Camp, I would..." Beneath that lead, there will be the numbers 1 through 10. Through their research, they'll find 10 things that would do if they attended the camp run by the animal of their choice. Make sure they focus on behavior rather than physical qualities. For example, if they selected the African Elephant, they could not state that they would weigh 15,000 pounds because that's impossible. However, they could state that they'd grab the tail of the elephant counselor and follow it that way, since elephants do that. They need to use parentheses to credit the source. For example, if they found their information on page 8, that would put (The Name of Their Book, p. 8) after their assertion to prepare them for the footnoting that will come later in their academic careers.
10. Have your students write letters to the characters. They could write to Maddie about their responses to her mishaps at home. For example, they might write that they found it funny when she howled at the fire truck, but thought it was a little gross when she did a tug of war with her mouth. Or they might ask, "Did it hurt when you pulled with your teeth?" Or they might volunteer, "I once did a tug of war with my dog and I used my mouth, but he won." They could also write to the wolves of Wolf Camp and explain why they'd make good campers at Wolf Camp. Or they could write letters to Maddie's parents.

These letters could go in various directions. For example, they might write to the parents explaining what happened at Wolf Camp. Or they might write a letter to the parents suggesting a camp that would work out well for them, such as Beaver Camp, where Maddie would learn how to trim the trees and work all day and even build a dam, so that the neighborhood could have a swimming hole instead of a crummy creek.

11. Expand the letters. On the back of WOLF CAMP, you'll find some letters that Maddie wrote home. Have your students expand those letters. For example, instead of simply saying that "They taught us how to fish today," have your students fully explain that. Have them crawl inside Maddie, so that they feel how slippery the rocks in the river were and how loud the rushing water was and how scary it was to stand in the rapids with fish leaping in the air. Likewise, rather than simply say, "We ate honey all day," have your students have fun with that, writing about how they got honey in their noses and hair and even their toes and how the bear counselors cleaned them by licking them with their big bear tongues. They could even write about the perils of eating honey, how the bees chased them and how they had to hop into the river to escape them.