

A Curriculum Guide to

Old Wolf

By Avi

Illustrated by Brian Floca

About the Book

Hunting—the predator, and its prey—is at the heart of this riveting and suspenseful novel from Newbery Medalist Avi, with illustrations by Caldecott Medalist Brian Floca.

In the computer game world of Bow Hunter—Casey’s world—there are no deaths, just kills. In the wolf world—Nashoba’s world—there have been no kills. For this is March, the Starving Time in the Iron Mountain region of Colorado, when wolves and ravens alike are desperate for food.

With the help of a raven, the miraculous Merla, Nashoba must lead his pack of eight to a next meal. The wolf hates being dependent on a mere bird, but Merla is a bird wise beyond her years. And when thirteen-year-old Casey crosses their path, two very different approaches to hunting collide.

Discussion Questions

The following questions may be utilized throughout the novel study as reflective writing prompts, or, alternatively, they can be used as targeted questions for discussion and reflection.

These discussion questions align with the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3) (RL.5.1, 2, 4) (RL.6.1, 2, 3)

1. As *Old Wolf* begins, readers are introduced to Nashoba and Casey. What is it about this dual narrative that captures the perspective of the old wolf and a young man so well? Does this format make this story exciting and unique to you?
2. The novel opens with Nashoba sharing that “It was the starving time.” What about that statement feels particularly grim? What can readers infer about him and his needs from the opening scenes of this book?
3. What do the concerns for his pups indicate about Nashoba’s sense of responsibility? What else do you learn about his role as a father? Though he is a wolf, what can we conclude about the similarity between families in the human world and in the animal kingdom?
4. After watching Nashoba with his pups, Garby tells Nashoba, “Nashoba! It’s time *I* was pack leader. You just sit here playing with your pups. You should be leading us to hunt.” Predict ways that Garby’s challenge of leadership will be problematic for the pack.

5. When the two of them fight after this challenge, Nashoba chooses to let Garby go after the wolf whines “in pleading submission.” Do you think his decision is the right one?

6. After his altercation with Garby and his consideration to leave the pack to go find a food source for them, Nashoba thinks, “The life of the Iron Mountain pack depends on me. I am not too old to hunt or kill.” Though he obviously shows signs of aging, how does this sentiment prove that he takes his responsibility as leader very seriously? Do you think he should allow Garby to step in as leader of the pack?

7. On the morning of his birthday, Casey thinks, “I’m so much older! No longer a kid! A teenager! An adult . . . almost.” How does turning thirteen make Casey feel different? Do you think his reaction to this rite of passage is typical?

8. How does living in an area where “wilderness took up half the country” impact Casey? In what ways is his desire to be a hunter tied to the setting of the story?

9. What do Casey’s parents hope to accomplish by giving him books and lessons on archery?

10. The narrator tells readers, “As the wolf was aware, ravens had a well-deserved reputation for two things: playing tricks and warning of death.” Why is this statement so important? How will this information influence the story?

11. Consider Nashoba’s first interaction with Merla: What presumptions does Nashoba have about the raven? Do you agree with him? Does Nashoba have a right to feel the way that he does?

12. While encountering the raven for the first time, Nashoba had many thoughts run through his head.

“Garby’s taunt *You are useless!* seeped into his thoughts. Simultaneously, the raven’s call—Caw! Caw!—rang out like the tolling of a bell, its message—its possible message—that food was to be found was too tempting.”

Do you believe he is right to follow Merla? What does he stand to lose by this decision? What might be gained by doing so?

13. Explain the significance of the title, *Old Wolf*. In your opinion, does it accurately describe the events and relationships portrayed in the novel?

14. Describe the relationship between Nashoba and Merla: How does it evolve over the course of their time together in the novel? Why is this important to their relationship? How are these two animals similar? How are they different?

15. What role does Merla serve for Nashoba? In what ways is she more than a source of food?

16. How does the loss of the raven Merla at the hand of Casey impact Nashoba? In what ways do you believe he and Casey are changed by this death?

17. During Casey's success at playing his computer bow-hunting game, he thinks, "I'm good at this. I can kill anything." What is problematic about Casey's outlook? After watching Merla die due to his actions, Casey's world and his choices about hunting and firing weapons may never be the same. In your opinion, what are the best and worst consequences of his actions? Do you think it ultimately inspires him to try to help Nashoba?

18. At the conclusion of the story, Avi leaves readers to decide what happens to Nashoba and Casey from that point forward. There seems to be some ambiguity about the fate of Merla, and whether Nashoba sees Merla in the sky flying overhead. What do you believe happens to these two characters?

Activities and Research

These activities align with the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3, 5, 6) (RL.5.1, 2, 4, 5, 6) (RL.6.1, 2, 5, 6) (W.4–6.4)

1. Much of the story of *Old Wolf* focuses on Nashoba's attempts to provide safety and security for his pack. Do you believe this to be similar behavior to that of other pack animals? Lead your class in a discuss of what other animals live in packs, and begin by having them speculate how those animals are similar and different from wolf packs. Guide them in using a variety of reference sources to research wolves to build on the knowledge and understanding they learned from reading *Old Wolf*. Next, have them select an animal of choice and consider the following:

- In what ways are these animals similar to wolves?
- What do their packs look like?
- How many animals are typically in a pack?
- How is leadership selected?
- Where do these packs live?
- What is the role of the leader in regard to hunting, migration, dwelling, etc.?
- What additional facts did you find interesting?

After gathering their findings, have students use what they discovered about wolves as a class and compare/contrast the two animals. Finally, have them create a digital presentation of their findings and share them with the class.

2. Throughout *Old Wolf*, readers see that Casey's computer-gaming world of bow hunting leads him to believe he understands the responsibilities and consequences of hunting in the real world, until his actions change him and the animals he encounters forever. Do you believe teens should be allowed to hunt independently before they are legal adults? Discuss with your learners the difference in online gaming and real world experiences.

Then, ask your learners to research and examine hunting laws in at least four different areas of the United States and consider the following:

- What's the legal age that an individual can hunt alone?
- When and where is hunting permitting?
- What animals can be hunted? Are there any that are off-limits?
- Why is it so important for there to be adult guidance in such an activity?

3. Throughout the course of the novel, readers are offered insight about Nashoba and Casey based on the events of *Old Wolf*. Assume the role of one of the secondary characters from *Old Wolf* and draft a diary entry detailing what you experienced and witnessed. To prepare, create an outline using the five Ws (who, what, when, where, and why). Remember to write in first person and give special attention to sensory imagery (what you saw, smelled, heard, etc.)

4. In *Old Wolf*, the narrator provides significant perspective about both Nashoba and Casey. Using what they've learned through the text of the novel, have students use strategy to demonstrate knowledge of a character in *Old Wolf* by following written prompts to complete a poem about the character. Students can be given the below on a worksheet or alternatively, students may create an original slideshow using PowerPoint or another presentation tool.

"I AM" POEM

FIRST STANZA:

I am (name the character)

I wonder (something the character is actually curious about)

I hear (an imaginary sound the character might hear)

I see (an imaginary sight the character might see)

I want (something the character truly desires)

SECOND STANZA:

I pretend (something the character actually pretends to do)

I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)

I touch (an imaginary touch)

I worry (something that really bothers the character)

I cry (something that makes the character very sad)

I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

THIRD STANZA:

I understand (something the character knows is true)

I say (something that the character believes in)

I dream (something the character might actually dream about)

I try (something the character really makes an effort about)

I hope (something the character actually hopes for)

I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

BIPOEM:

Line 1: First name

Line 2: Three traits that describe the character

Line 3: Relative of _____

Line 4: Lover of _____ (three things)
Line 5: Who feels _____ (three things)
Line 6: Who needs _____ (three things)
Line 7: Who fears _____ (three things)
Line 8: Who gives _____ (three things)
Line 9: Who would like to see _____ (three things)
Line 10: Resident of _____
Line 11: Last name _____

5. The language that an author uses in his work is essential to getting across the intended meaning. Select four quotes from *Old Wolf* that seem to signify key ideas. These might be quotes spoken by characters or might be from the narration, and page numbers should be included with the quotes. Have students develop a chart with the following four columns:

- Quote
- Page Number
- Relevance to the Novel
- Intended Meaning for Readers: The intended meaning should have relevance not only to the characters in the text, but to the lives of anyone who reads the book.

This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock, a professor at Sam Houston State University. Dr. Brock holds a Ph.D. in Library Science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.

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