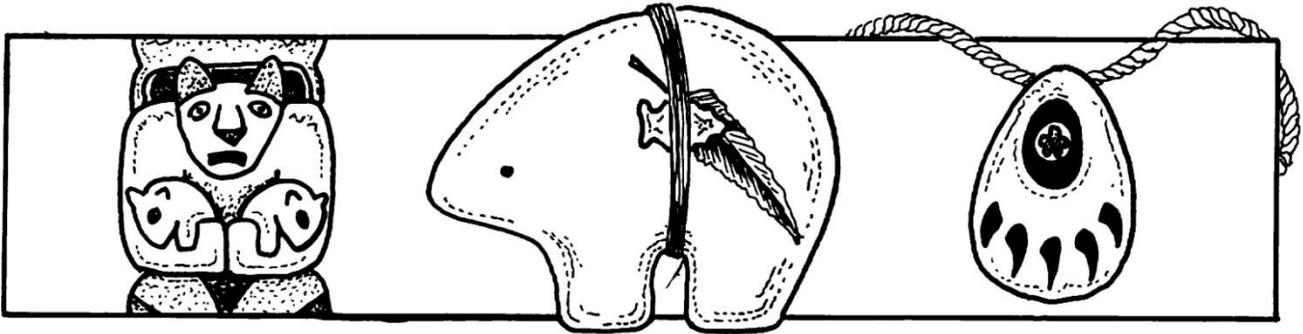


Lesson Three

Bear Dilemmas



Key question

How do different kinds of people view Florida black bears? What are the main ways people interact with Florida black bears?

Conceptual frameworks topics

- III.A. The role of bears in human cultures
- III.B. Human attitudes toward bears
- VI.B. Human-caused limiting factors

Subjects

Social Studies, Science

Time estimates

45-60 minutes per day for one to two days

Key vocabulary

Attitude (positive, negative and neutral)

Supplemental video clip

[Time 0:00-2:49 of 60-minute video](#)

Objectives

As part of this activity, students will:

1. Describe how different past and present human cultures view bears.
2. Describe the four major types of attitudes people can have toward wildlife.
3. Identify different attitudes people can have toward bears.
4. Explore and clarify their own attitudes toward the Florida black bear and current issues involving Florida black bears.
5. Explain how different actions can affect Florida black bear survival.

Materials

Essential:

Per class:

- One “Bear Dilemmas” [Sample Scenario](#)
- One “Bear Dilemmas” [Attitude Summary](#)

Per group of three to four students:

- One set of “Bear Dilemmas” [Scenario Cards](#)



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Supplemental:

- Recent local or state newspaper or magazine articles regarding Florida black bear issues. (Note: Extra credit could be provided to students who bring in relevant articles. Inform them of the extra credit opportunity a few weeks before this lesson is scheduled.)

Background

Cultural Views

Historically, bears have played a prominent role in many different cultures throughout the world. Many early religions worshipped bears like the sun bear or believed other bears, like the sloth bear, had magical powers because they appeared to be able to fall from great heights without being injured. Many cultures of the Far East believe different bear body parts, such as gall bladders, contain healing medicinal powers. In fact, the trade in bear parts for the Asian traditional medicine market is one of the greatest threats to the continued survival of many bear species. The early Greeks and Romans named the most recognizable groups of stars in the northern sky (the big dipper) Ursa Major or "the great bear."

Hundreds of years ago, before African lions were known to them, Europeans called the bear "the King of Beasts." Many cities and towns throughout Europe included the bear on their flags as a sign of power. In fact, the city of Bern, Switzerland means "bear." Throughout the world, many cultures have considered

killing a bear to be a hunter's greatest accomplishment.

Because they can stand on their hind legs, bears have often been viewed as human-like and their rounded bodies, faces, and stomachs give them a cute and cuddly appearance. The intelligence and learning abilities of bears has led to their use as animals for entertainment. As a result, many brown bear cubs in Europe and Asia were raised by humans and trained as dancing bears. In the U.S., similar to "Yogi Bear" in the Jellystone Park cartoon series, real bears were purposely lured to trash piles in National Parks so tourists could watch them eat. To this day, one of the most comforting stuffed animals most children often own is a "teddy bear." At the other end of the spectrum, many people think bears are dangerous man-eaters that seek out and kill innocent humans, especially children. Many European fairy tales portray bears as dangerous monsters. Still other groups of people view bears as nuisances that destroy beehives and raid crops. Bears should not be perceived as cute and cuddly or aggressive man-eaters. Unfortunately, these misconceptions can cause people to act in ways that harm themselves, and often, the bears.

In North America, bears have historically played a central role in many Native American cultures. For example, Pueblo Indians believed that the sun's power flowed through the raised paws of the bear. Many prairie tribes of the Midwest gave bear paw necklaces to their greatest



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warriors and leaders. Many Alaskan and Canadian tribes placed bears in high places of prominence on their totem poles and attributed abilities such as dance and fearlessness to the bear god.

Today, bears are still a large part of American culture. We use terms such as “bear” market when discussing the stock market and use the image of bears to sell everything from sofas to cola drinks to auto parts. Bears have been the subject of numerous movies such as “The Bear” and television shows such as “Grizzly Adams.” The Florida black bear was even the focus of television series “Gentle Ben” in the 1960s. Unfortunately, many movie and television portrayals of bears tend to be anthropomorphic (attributing human emotions to bears), and as a result, many people believe bears seek out, or even thrive on human companionship. In reality, bears are wild animals with their own needs who survive best with limited or no contact with humans. One of the best things humans can do for bears is to provide them with large tracts of natural habitat and allow them to live their lives without our intervention.

Attitudes Toward Bears

The ultimate goal of environmental education is to stimulate learners to display more environmentally responsible behaviors. Unfortunately, knowledge alone does not necessarily change behavior. To increase their effectiveness, environmental education programs must also help students explore and clarify their own personal attitudes

and values regarding environmental issues. To help conserve Florida’s black bears, we must not only teach students key facts and concepts about these animals, we must also make them aware of the different ways people can view Florida black bears and help them determine their own feelings about the Florida black bear. This activity is designed to allow students to explore and discuss their personal attitudes about Florida black bears in a non-threatening, small group setting. This activity is NOT designed to prescribe or dictate “right” or “wrong” attitudes or feelings. As a teacher and potentially influential role-model, it is very important NOT to impose your own personal biases or opinions on your students.

An **attitude** is generally defined as a positive or negative feeling about something. Attitudes can be **positive**, **neutral**, or **negative** and they can vary in strength. Attitudes toward wildlife can be acquired through direct experience or they can be acquired vicariously. Students can develop attitudes about bears as a result of observation or direct interaction with them in the wild or in parks, zoos, or nature centers. More often, children’s attitudes towards bears develop as a result of exposure to different cultural or social influences, such as reading fairy tales about bears, watching movies related to bears, or listening to parents or others talk about bears.



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Attitudes are important because the way we feel about an organism influences the way we behave toward that organism. Many researchers have documented a wide range of human attitudes toward wildlife. For this particular lesson, these extensive attitude scales have been modified and condensed into four main categories: **human-centered, feeling-centered, life-centered, and systems centered.**

- In a *human-centered* perspective, wildlife is only important when it benefits man, such as providing entertainment, food, products such as fur, or other economic benefits. The interests of people are what matter the most. If an animal is perceived as a competitor, threat, or nuisance to humans, it is acceptable to eliminate the animal.
- In a *feeling-centered* perspective, all creatures that can feel pleasure or pain or express emotions have rights to be considered. Less advanced animals, such as grasshoppers, worms, and snails usually do not fit into this category. The more "human-like" an animal is believed to be, the more the animal deserves to be protected.
- In a *life-centered* perspective, all living things, plants, animals, fungi, etc. have a right to life. Both more advanced and less advanced animals have worth and deserve our protection. Humans are seen as the caretakers of other living things.

- In a *systems-centered* perspective, the entire functioning system or community in nature is more important than individual organisms within that system. If one nuisance, sick, or weak animal must be sacrificed for the good of a larger population, that is considered acceptable. The emphasis is on protecting entire ecosystems rather than the welfare of one individual member of the system.

Attitudes toward bears and other species of wildlife can be based on accurate facts or on misconceptions. Often, the first step toward developing positive attitudes or changing students' negative attitudes toward particular species of wildlife involves identifying and altering misconceptions regarding that organism. In this lesson, scenarios based on real-world situations will be used to help students identify common misconceptions they may have about Florida black bears while exploring and clarifying their attitudes toward these bears. These ethical dilemmas do not always have one clear-cut answer, just as most real-life issues involving wildlife often do not have one correct solution. As a teacher, it is important to stay as objective and neutral as possible and let students try to resolve these difficult issues for themselves.

Advance preparation

1. Prepare sufficient copies of the "Bear Dilemmas" Scenario Cards. Cut out the



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Scenario Cards in advance for distribution to students.

2. Prepare to display the "Bear Dilemmas" Sample Scenario and Attitude Summary.

Procedure and discussion questions

1. Introduce the lesson by asking students to name some examples of familiar bears in stories, television shows, or movies. Make a whole-class list of student responses on the board. Next, ask students to share their ideas regarding how they feel about bears in general. Ask students how many of them have teddy bears or other bear toys.

2. Review pertinent background information and provide students with an overview of different past and present cultural views of bears. Introduce and define the term **attitude** and explain that during this lesson students will be working in small groups to learn more about their own personal attitudes and their classmates' attitudes toward bears.

3. Display the Attitude Summary and introduce and describe the four major categories of attitudes toward wildlife. Encourage students to write down the names of the four types of attitudes and write down any key ideas that might help them remember what each term means. Display the Sample Scenario and read the ethical dilemma out loud to the class. Ask students to describe how a human-centered, feeling-centered, life-centered, and systems-centered person might react to the situation. A human-centered

person would put the needs of people first by voting to clear land bears are living on to build the sports park. Feeling-centered and life-centered people would either vote against the sports park because they do not want individual bears to be harmed or killed or vote for the sports park because the community needs it while at the same time trying to find a way to move bears to another undeveloped area or "rescuing" them by putting them in a zoo or nature preserve. A systems-centered person would probably focus on the importance of preserving the entire ecosystem and leaving the bears living in it alone and undisturbed. This person would probably vote against the sports park.

4. Divide students into groups of three or four and give each a stack of "Bear Dilemmas" Scenario Cards. Instruct groups to form a small circle and place the stack of cards face down in the center of the group. Have them decide who is going first and have the first person draw the first card from the stack. Explain that during their turn, each player should read the dilemma card and action choices, and then decide what they would personally do in the situation. Remind students to be honest in their discussions and describe what they would really do, not what they think you as a teacher would want them to do. After each player has decided on an action for their dilemma, they should read the complete scenario and action choices to the rest of the group and explain which action they chose and why.



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5. After each player has presented their action choice and rationale, encourage other group members to share their opinions regarding that player's decision. It is important to explain that there are no right or wrong answers in the activity and all students should be free to express their views, even if they disagree with the rest of the group's view.

6. Continue the process, rotating through each group so that each group member draws and responds to at least one scenario card. Allow students about five minutes to discuss each dilemma.

7. Call the entire class together and ask student volunteers to share some of the dilemmas they faced and the decisions they made. If possible, share information from recent local or state newspapers or magazines regarding Florida black bear issues. Conclude the lesson by asking students to decide which of the four major points of view (human-centered, feeling-centered, life-centered, or systems-centered) they think best represents their own personal attitude toward bears. Ask students why it is important to consider all the different attitudes people can have toward bears or any other living things and emphasize the idea that our attitudes toward bears and other wildlife influence the actions we take. Some of the actions we take can be helpful to Florida black bears or other wildlife, while other actions can be

harmful to Florida black bears and other wildlife.

Modifications for younger or ESE/ESOL students

1. Eliminate the discussion of past and present cultural views of bears.
2. Heterogeneously mix groups so that each small group contains at least one good oral reader. Have the better readers read the scenarios aloud to other group members.

Assessment suggestions

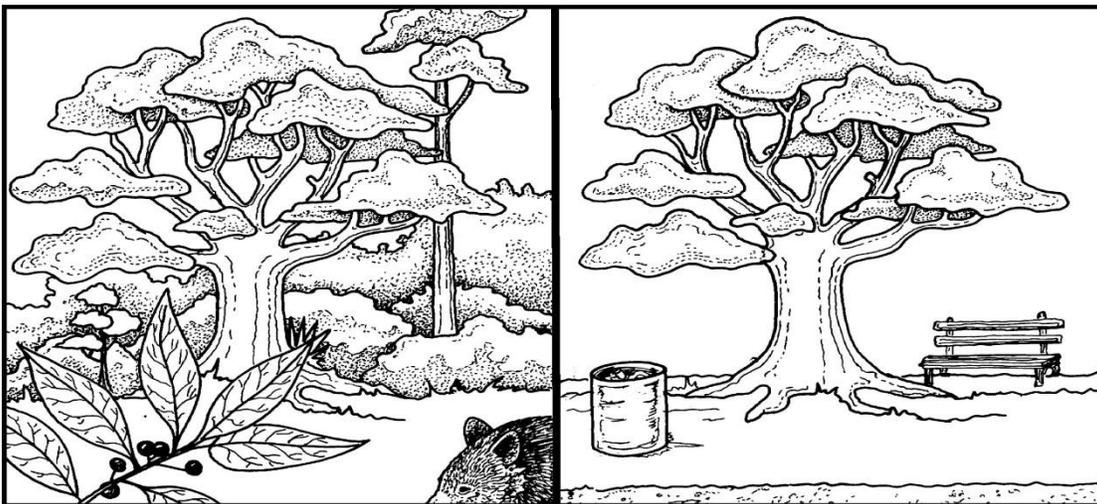
1. Ask students to name at least three ways different cultures view bears.
2. Ask students to describe the four categories of attitudes people can have toward bears and other wildlife.
3. Have students write a paragraph explaining their own personal attitude toward bears and have them include at least two reasons supporting their view.
4. Have students write their own scenarios and action choices for an issue involving Florida black bears.



Sample Scenario

You live in a new neighborhood near a large tract of wooded land. For years, people living in your town have reported seeing black bears in the woods near your home. Because so many families with kids have moved into the new neighborhoods in your town, a proposal has been presented to build a brand new, state-of-the-art sports park for the community. This park will contain new playing fields for baseball, football, and soccer as well as a playground for kids and a large pool with a waterslide. To build this new recreation area for the people in your community, the large tract of wooded land would have to be cleared. If this land is cleared, the population of black bears living in the area will lose its habitat.

- If you were old enough to vote on this issue, what would you do?
- How would a human-centered person vote on this issue?
- How would a feeling-centered person vote on this issue?
- How would a life-centered person vote on this issue?
- How would a systems-centered person vote on this issue?
- Is there a way to meet the needs of the people in your community and meet the needs of the bears in the area?



Categories of Attitudes Toward Wildlife

Human-centered

Animals are only important if they benefit people. Animals that entertain or help people or animals that provide products like food, fur, or medicine are important. Animals that harm people, are a nuisance to people, or destroy property are not important.

Feeling-centered

More advanced animals that can feel pleasure or pain or have emotions are more important. Animals that are not as advanced and do not have emotions or feelings are not as important.

Life-centered

All living things, even plants, fungi, worms, and insects, have a right to live and are important. Humans are responsible for taking care of and protecting all the world's animals, plants, and other life.

Systems-centered

Entire ecosystems or populations of animals are more important than individual animals. If a weak, sick, or nuisance animal must be killed for the good of the system that is alright. It is more important to protect entire ecosystems or populations of animals than to worry about saving one individual animal.



Lesson Three

“Roads Take Toll”



Scenario

It is dark and you and your family are driving home from a Sunday dinner at your grandmother's. Your mom is in a hurry and is driving 65 miles per hour even though the speed limit is 55 miles per hour. Suddenly, as she comes around a bend in the road, a large black shape runs out into the road. Your family's car hits the animal and when you turn around to look at what it is, you see it's a Florida black bear. The bear is now lying by the side of the road.

Do You?

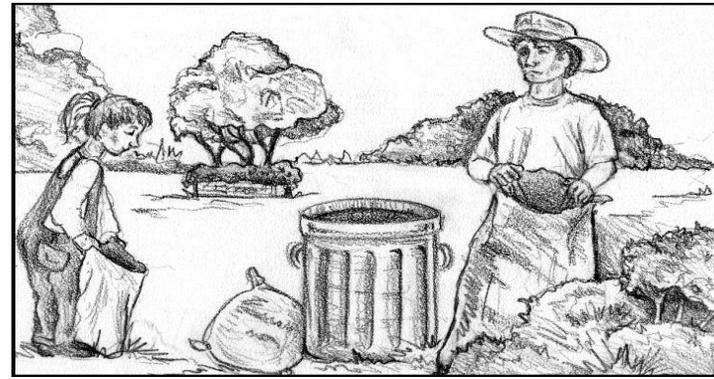
- Keep on going and hope no one saw your mom hit the bear.
- Ask your mom to stop and check to see if the bear is still alive.
- Call the police to report the accident and ask for help for the bear.
- Make an anonymous call to a wildlife officer letting them know where the bear is located.
- Other

Did You Know?

Each year, an average of 230 bears are struck and killed by vehicles in Florida. Most of these collisions occur during the fall when bears are looking for food to fatten up for the winter.

Bear Dilemmas

“Feeding Frenzy”



Scenario

Your family has lived in the same small town for several years. Many of your neighbors report sightings of bears in the woods around your town and decide to set up a bear feeding area so they can watch the bears feed at night. They decide to gather all their garbage and leave it out in an open area on the edge of the woods.

Do You?

- Come to watch the bears regularly and take pictures.
- Call a wildlife officer and ask them to try to talk your neighbors out of the idea of a bear feeding station because it is against Florida law to feed bears.
- Educate your neighbors about the dangers to both bears and people when bears begin to depend on people for food.
- Try to set up your own bear feeding station in your backyard.
- Other

Did You Know?

Garbage is not healthy for bears. If mother bears feed garbage to their cubs, the cubs grow up dependent on garbage and do not learn how to find appropriate food for themselves. They become dependent on people for food and lose their natural fear of humans and can result in a person being injured.



“The Hunt Is On”



Scenario

Your family recently moved to the Florida from Virginia. You really enjoy spending time with your dad and uncle. In Virginia, they have hunted bear, turkey, and deer ever since they were children. Your dad offers to take you to see your uncle in Virginia so the three of you can experience a black bear hunt.

Do You?

- Go hunting with your dad and uncle, but hunt for deer instead.
- Go hunting with your dad and uncle and try to shoot your own bear.
- Tell your dad that you personally don't want to shoot a bear, but you want to come along on the hunt.
- Ask your dad and uncle to take you target shooting instead.
- Other

Did You Know?

Of the 50 states, 41 of them have permanent black bear populations. Over 75% of the states with black bear populations hold black bear hunts.

“Backyard Bear”



Scenario

You and your family have just moved into a new neighborhood outside Orlando. Your backyard is surrounded by woods. One day when you and your friends are playing in your backyard, you hear a funny sound coming from a pine tree in your yard. You look up and see a black bear up in the tree.

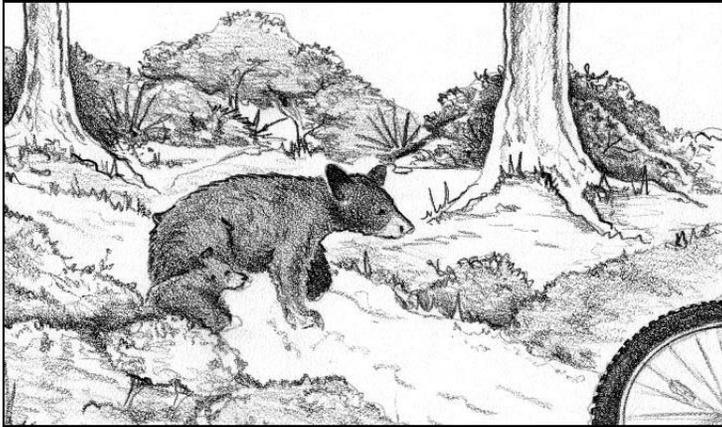
Do You?

- Throw rocks at the bear to try to get it to come down.
- Try to climb up into the tree to play with the bear.
- Call a television station and report the bear so you and your friends can be on the local news.
- Leave the bear alone and call a wildlife biologist to assist you.
- Other

Did You Know?

Florida black bears are shy and try to avoid people. However, when developments are built in or near bear habitats, bears can wander into neighborhoods. When bears are scared they often climb trees looking for safety, and if they are left alone, they usually leave the area on their own.

“Too Close For Comfort”



Scenario

It is a beautiful day and you, your mother, and your little sister decide to go to a nearby state park for a bike ride. As you are riding down the bike trail you hear a rustling in the bushes next to the trail. Suddenly, a mother black bear and her cub walk out of the bushes onto the bike path.

Do You?

- Try to pet the bear cub.
- Scream and try to ride your bike in the other direction.
- Stop and stand very still and let the mother bear and her cub cross the path.
- Try to keep on riding toward the bear and her cub.
- Other

Did You Know?

Mother black bears are protective of their cubs. If a black bear feels threatened by a human and feels it cannot escape, it will make low woofing and popping sounds and try to bluff its way out of a problem. If that does not work, the bear may swat at or charge a human to try to scare it away. The protective behavior can injure people.

“How Sweet It Is”



Scenario

You and your family live in the woods in a rural county in the Florida panhandle. Your dad is a beekeeper and sells honey for a living. Recently, an animal has been breaking into your dad’s beehives during the night, ripping them open and eating the honey. You and your dad suspect it is a black bear. You and your dad know it is illegal to kill black bears, but this bear is destroying your family’s livelihood. Selling honey is the only income your family has.

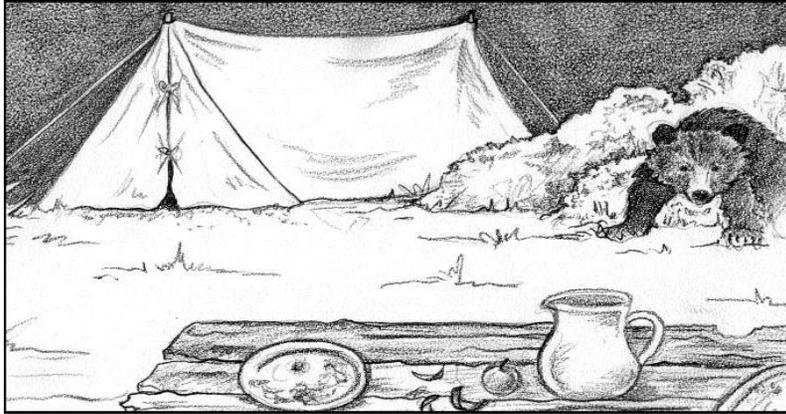
Do You?

- Help your dad kill the black bear and bury it so no one will know.
- Help your dad kill the black bear and even though it is illegal, sell the fur and claws for money.
- Call a wildlife biologist who is trained to handle human-bear conflicts and ask for help.
- Help your dad install an electric fence to keep the bear out of the beehives.
- Other

Did You Know?

Florida black bears have a great sense of smell and many have learned that where there are people, there is food. Properly installed electric fencing prevents most damage due to bears. A person intentionally killing a Florida black bear may be charged with a second-degree misdemeanor, which carries up to a \$500 fine and up to 60 days in jail.

“Uninvited Guest”



Scenario

During the summer, you and your family take a camping trip to the Osceola National Forest in Florida. There are signs posted in the campground warning campers black bears are in the area. Your dad grills hamburgers and you also have corn on the cob, and beans for dinner. After eating, you are all tired, and your family decides to leave the dinner dishes out on the table and clean them up in the morning.

Do You?

- Pick up the leftover food and any food trash and hang it from a tree far away from your campsite.
- Tell your family about the dangers of leaving food out in a campsite in bear country and offer to clean up the dishes yourself.
- Go to bed yourself because you are really tired too.
- Find a forest ranger and ask them to talk to your family about the importance of keeping a clean campsite in bear country.
- Other

Did You Know?

Bears are attracted to the smell of the food people have cooked. Bears that repeatedly raid camp sites become food-conditioned and often have to be killed by wildlife officials because they pose a risk to public safety.

“Barn Stormer”



Scenario

You and your family live on a five-acre tract of land on the edge of the Everglades in southwest Florida. Your family has a small barn with chickens, turkeys, goats, and rabbits behind your house. One night, you are awakened by the noise of something raiding the animal food bins in your backyard barn. You turn on the backyard light and see that a black bear is eating the grain and corn stored in your barn. This is the third night in a row the bear has gotten into your barn.

Do You?

- Call a wildlife biologist who is trained to handle human-bear conflicts and ask for help.
- Wake up your parents so they can shoot the bear.
- Try to make loud noises to scare the bear away.
- Set a trap to catch the bear alive and then get your dad to take it into the Everglades and release it.
- Other

Did You Know?

The Florida black bear was delisted from the state threatened species list in 2012, but it is still against the law to injure, kill, or trap black bears in Florida without a permit.

