

When The Wolves Returned to Yellowstone National Park Story Theatre + Narrative Mural

An Eco-Justice and Wellbeing Arts Education Project
Allycia Uccello (visual artist) + Marina Gwynne (actor)
All grades



Inspiration

With only 5% of our nation's wilderness left, people are recognizing the important roles complete ecosystems play in keeping all of us healthy. Understanding **trophic cascade** helps us to focus wilderness recovery efforts on a wider variety of ecosystems. Using **Yellowstone Park and the story of the Returning Wolves** as an example, we can teach the world about the wolf's positive and vital role in the wild. What else may be going on in the wilderness that sustains the life of our planet? We are truly all connected even though we may not realize it.

The Story

In 1995 wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone Park after having been culled decades earlier. Since then Yellowstone has become a premiere scientific laboratory for wilderness observation and ecosystem recovery. Scientists have come from around the world to watch the effect wild wolves have on the park. We have discovered that an ecological effect called the **trophic cascade** has taken over Yellowstone, with the wolves initiating a more natural ecosystem balance than has been seen in over 65 years. For the full understanding of how and why this happened, see the story synopsis here <http://www.missionwolf.org/page/trophic-cascade/>.



Actor Marina Gwynne and several students play the various roles of the humans and animals in Trophic Cascade and the disappearance and reappearance of Wolves at Yellowstone National Park

The Project

When the Wolves Returned is an interdisciplinary art project inspired by the true story of the evolution of Yellowstone Park's natural ecosystem balance as a result of humans taking notice of the important role of wolves and all animals on the sustainability of life.

Story Theatre

Actor **Marina Gwynne** takes us through the journey in spoken word and song, accompanied by students, of how, through mindful observance, the Wolves were returned to Yellowstone Park, and so the wildlife and thus the health and wellbeing of us all was rescued.

Rich Narrative Mural

Visual artist and project lead **Allycia Uccello**, along with her core group(s) of older student leaders, then takes students through a process of illustrating and mapping the rich narrative including its many characters and trials on the indoor walls of Morse St PS. The process involves lessons in illustration and research into the many indigenous animals and their habitat and even how the park changed over the century.



A student makes artistic decisions on where and when the wolves return



A remarkable narrative mural on the wolves journey

Request to teachers

1. Prepare students for entire program. Suggest children's age appropriate books from <http://www.endangered.org/stand-for-wolves-kids-book-list/> and the above short video <http://www.missionwolf.org/page/trophic-cascade/>.
2. Have fun exploring ideas and getting excited.
3. Each student is asked to illustrate ideas of 3 or more in coloured drawings prepared for when Allycia arrives.
4. See learning outcomes (recommended but not prescribed).

Learning Outcomes

Here we have a rich example of the critical importance of harmony and balance and how they co-exist. To be in harmony one needs to be in balance with nature. To understand the wolves and all other living creatures we need to learn empathy, that authentic understanding of what another is feeling and experiencing. In order to find strength in our own and others' struggles we need to be mindful and build our resilience. There is a great lesson in understanding that wellbeing of others means our own wellbeing. All these concepts are powerful steps in our own development and for our overall social intelligence.

Biodiversity is the variety of different types of life found on earth. An organism is a contiguous (things that are in contact or readily associated) living system.

Biodiversity it is not only good for our environment and the wellbeing of all living things but it is good for our industries, our economies and peace on the planet. All diversity and our appreciation for such can ensure our sustainability.

Students also experience a solo story theatre performance, how a story can be told with minimal costume in spoken word and song.

Finally, everyone has the experience of learning to research a rich narrative, illustrate and paint as a collaborative to immortalize a group interpretation of the story of the wolves.

We have a beautiful art piece to remind us daily of this creative art experience.

