

## AP Capstone Seminar: Summer Reading

### *Never Cry Wolf* by Farley Mowat

For your summer reading assignment, read the novel *Never Cry Wolf* by Farley Mowat.

*Never Cry Wolf* is autobiographic, and follows the author's experiences as a Canadian graduate student in biology who is sent alone into the Arctic Circle to study the Arctic Wolf, *canis lupus arctos*.

- the Canadian government gives him a mission with a stated purpose:  
Determine the cause of the declining Caribou population.
- Mowat discovers, however, that the Canadian government already decided the Arctic Wolf is to blame and merely wants proof to justify killing the wolves.
- as a biology student and scientist, he should remain objective.
- as a human being with passion and a conscience, he cannot remain objective.

Mowat's vivid descriptions and highly entertaining writing style ignited a movement of conservationism for many species, while some scientists scorn his writing as non-objective, and political figures condemn his findings as antagonistic to business.

#### **Summer Reading Assignment:**

##### I. "Farley Mowat on *Never Cry Wolf*" (attached to this page)

**Assignment:** *Annotate the article. Highlight and take notes on the page.*

- tone (author's attitude).
- the author's purpose
- identify some of the controversy surrounding the novel.

Ask questions: what are some questions before you begin reading the novel?

##### II. *Never Cry Wolf* by Farley Mowat

**Assignment:** As you read the novel, use the question below to guide you:

**Should *Never Cry Wolf* be regarded as science fact, literary fiction, or both?**

**Annotate your novel, take notes and ask questions:**

**Literary Fiction?** in what ways can the novel be considered literary fiction?

- look for loss of objectivity and artistic license in his vivid descriptions.
- does a subjective, artistic style strengthen or undermine his credibility?

**Scientific Observation?** Mowat claimed his observations can be proven by modern science.

- take note of Mowat's observations of Arctic Wolves.

**Historical Context:** How was science conducted when the novel was written?

What were some prevailing beliefs when the novel was written?

**What is Truth? What is Fact?** Are multiple points of view mutually exclusive?

**Political Ethics:** what role does government play in the research process?

**Purpose:** what is the author's purpose as a writer? Can his observations be applied to other species?

**Ask Questions!**

## Farley Mowat on *Never Cry Wolf*

When I began *Never Cry Wolf* 30 years ago, I intended to cast the wolf in a rather minor role. My original plan was to write a satire about quite a beast – the peculiar mutation of the human species known as the Bureaucrat, who has become the dictatorial arbiter of all our affairs. I also thought it might be fun to take the mickey out of the new high priests of our times, the Scientists, who now consider themselves the only legitimate interpreters of Truth.

With malice aforethought I deliberately set out to expose those new would-be rulers of our world or, rather, to let them expose themselves in the pages of a book. But somehow I found myself losing interest in their bureaucratic and scientific buffoonery and becoming increasingly engrossed with what had originally been my secondary character: the wolf.

*Never Cry Wolf* was not kindly received by some human animals. Because it is my own practice never to allow facts to interfere with the truth and because I believe that humor has a vital place in helping us understand our lives, many self-ordained experts derided the book. Some dedicated wolf haters, including the far-flung network of those who kill for sport, went so far as to claim it was an outright work of fiction. Others brushed it aside, claiming it was invalid because its author was not a *bona fide* scientist with at least a doctoral degree. For the most part I ignored this yapping at my heels, but perhaps now is a good time to turn, if briefly, upon the pursuing jackals – which is what a proper wolf would do.

*Never Cry Wolf* is based on two summers and a winter that I spent in the subarctic regions of southern Keewatin Territory and northern Manitoba as a biologist studying wolves and caribou. For most of that period I was employed by the federal government of Canada, and a report on the wolf studies I conducted has been on file with my employer since 1948. As to my qualifications: I possess six honorary doctoral degrees, which suggests that at least six universities consider me and my work worthy of academic recognition.

While it gives me pleasure to have earned the right, on the basis of these honors, to be called Dr. Sextus, it gives me even greater pleasure to note that almost every facet of wolf behavior described by me has since been rediscovered by the selfsame scientists who called my studies a work of the imagination. Some imagination!

Unfortunately, my major contention – that the wolf does not pose a threat to other species and is neither a danger nor a real competitor of man – remains largely unaccepted.

Until about 400 years ago the wolf was second only to man as the most successful and widespread mammal in North America. There is extensive evidence to show that, far from being at enmity, the wolf and hunting man worldwide enjoyed something approaching symbiosis, whereby the existence of each benefited the existence of the other. But after European and Asiatic men began divesting themselves of their hunting heritage in order to become farmers or herdsmen, they lost this ancient empathy with the wolf and became its inveterate enemy. So-called civilized man eventually succeeded in totally extirpating the real wolf from his collective mind and substituting for it a contrived image, replete with evil aspects that generated almost pathological fear and hatred. European man brought this mind-set to the Americans, where, spurred on by bounties and rewards and armed with poison, trap, snare, and gun (together with new weapons provided by an enlightened technology,

including helicopters and fragmentation grenades), we moderns have since waged a war to the death against the wolf.

Of the 24 wolf subspecies and races inhabiting North America at the beginning of the European invasion, seven are now extinct and most of the remainder are endangered. The wolf has been effectively exterminated in all of the south-central portions of Canada, in Mexico, and in almost all of the United States south of Alaska. However, until recently an estimated 20,000 still shared the forests and arctic tundra with multitudes of moose, deer, caribou, and elk. Now the use of aircraft, snowmobiles, and all-terrain vehicles has enabled such numbers of sport killers to penetrate this relatively inaccessible region that the stocks of 'big game' animals therein have been dangerously depleted. This has ignited a furious and duplicitous outcry from hunters, outfitters, guides, lodge owners, and other financially interested parties against the wolf: 'Wolves are destroying the game animals – *our* game animals! The wolves have got to go!'

Who listens to this accusation? Governments listen. Most, if not all, provincial and state departments of fish and game are little more than Trojan horses of the sport killer lobby. And that lobby is extremely well organized and funded. Its members bring almost irresistible influence to bear on governments to protect game animals from their natural predators so that sport killers can continue to find a sufficient number of live targets for their weapons.

The preponderance of expert, independent opinion (as distinct from that of hired-gun biologists employed by government game departments) agrees that the wolf serves a vital role in maintaining the long-term well-being of its prey species, is not a threat to human beings, is responsible for only minor losses of domestic stock, and for the most part will not even live in proximity to human settlements or agricultural enterprises. This is the truth of the matter.

We have doomed the wolf not for what it is but for what we deliberately and mistakenly perceive it to be: the mythologized epitome of a savage, ruthless killer – which is, in reality, not more than the reflected image of ourselves. We have made it the scapewolf for our own sins.

There is a considerable likelihood that the holy conspiracy of government 'game managers,' self-serving politicians, and self-styled conservation organizations devoted to 'enhancing' the supply of big-game targets will succeed.

Only the most resolute and implacable resistance to this cabal of death dealers can now prevent the commission of one more major atrocity against life on earth – the annihilation of the wolf.