5th Grade Informational: Animals and Their Surroundings

Task Prompt: Write an informational article about hibernation. Using more than one source, develop a main idea about hibernation. Choose the most important information from the sources to support your main idea.

Sleepy Winter

Hibernation is a tool that some lucky members of the animal kingdom use to avoid the long harsh months of winter. However, to hibernate successfully, animals need to eat vast amounts of food, and create large pockets of fat. This fat is then used and burned up, and when winter ends, the animal is thinner than at any other time of year. But, even with some lengthy requirements for a successful hibernation, hibernation is still a very useful tool for select animals.

One of the best examples of hibernation's usefulness is a grizzly bear. Food is tremendously scarce during winter, and can threaten starvation for countless animals, but a grizzly doesn't have to worry about that, for it'll be snoozing in a cozy cave. According to source 1 grizzlies are "… safe for winter, cozy and warm beneath the blanket of snow." Being under a blanket of snow, and usually in a tight, and impossible to find den, certainly rules out the danger of any predator looking to munch on the sleeping grizzly.

Now, hibernation doesn't come without a cost, animals need to load up on food, and will starve during the harsh winter if they don't. Source 3 tells us that "In the fall, a bear fattens up on acorns and other high-fat foods." So it becomes obvious a bear needs to consume nearly unfathomable amounts of foods. And, another quote from source 1 also defines how a grizzly will turn to eat at any moment, when preparing for hibernation, saying that "She" (in reference to a grizzly) "… caught a salmon with a swoop of her paw." All this eating (acorns, salmon, mice, etc.) is all done during spring, not during the cold and harsh winter. Since this seemingly unreachable amount of food, is done during fall and spring, where food is more plentiful, it is so much easier than in the winter, a time when some lucky animals, are hibernating. And this eating frenzy, isn't strictly for bears, other animals also eat to their hearts content during spring, and sleep for the winter where food is nearly unreachable.

Coming back to grizzlies, another utility of hibernation is revealed. Grizzlies, female grizzlies that is, "… Always have their cubs, usually two or three of them, in the middle of the winter," according to source 3. Being a cub is the most dangerous stage in a grizzlies life time, and a huge chunk of time taken out of the dangerous stage, certainly would help. Well, that is exactly what happens through hibernation, because many cubs are hidden away in a den with their mother, impossible to find. Hibernating also takes away the possibility of starvation during the winter months, for cubs. While their mother is tramping over the river and through the woods, looking for food, food, food, it can also kill two birds with one stone, and look for food for her young helpless cubs. Finding enough food for the cubs is far

easier then for the mother herself, and the mother can do it far, far quicker. According to source 1, a grizzly "… loped through the meadows in search of insects, berries, and small rodents…" So adding a few more mice to that list, for the cubs, wouldn't be too much harder when a grizzly is searching for food, nearly all day at a time, compared to catching two or three mice everyday for a cub. In fact, source 1 shows us just how effectively a mother grizzly can catch food, saying "She stopped to catch a mouse with one swat of her paw…" One swat of a grizzlies paw, could only take a few seconds, at most. So catching food in bulk at one time, is far easier on the mother and the cubs, instead of tramping through deep, cold snow in the winter in search of mice every single day.

While cubs have it very, very dangerous for them, adult bears aren't "out of the woods". Hunters kill countless bears, legally, and poachers are also a huge threat to bears and, they are often killed for their fur in waves by poachers. Hibernation during winter can often alleviate this danger, when bears are hidden for months in cozy dens. According to source 3 Dr. Vaughan, a man who has a great interest in bears, said a "… chance to work with these big animals was just too good to pass up…" This expresses how much interest some people have in bears, and while Vaughan has interest for bears in a safe and loving manner (he obviously loves bears), some people (like poachers) have an interest in bears that can be very dangerous for them. However, during hibernation, bears are usually safe from people, snuggled away in their dens. Source 3 also says that "Winter is the perfect time to find and study bears." This is because when bears get ready to hibernate, their body slows down, and they become less aware and alert of their surroundings. And imagine if a person with ill intentions for a bear (like poaching it) were to come across a naturally semi-sedated bear! The bear wouldn't have a chance. That's part of the reason why a well hidden den, is absolutely key for many bears and other animals.

It is now crystal clear that, while hibernation may be tedious (to say the least) to prepare for, it is certainly still a very useful instinctual ability for many animals. With the ability to hunker down, hidden away for months at a time, have a great way to protect animals and their young, stay hidden from hunters and poachers, and avoid the struggle to find food during a long, freezing winter, all at the same time, anyone could see that hibernation really helps select animals who may get in a pinch. Without a shadow of a doubt, hibernation is truly a very important aspect for some animals livelihoods.