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LESSON 3 Student Sheet B

Watch Out! It's Polar Bear Season

This is what life is like for kids in Churchill, Manitoba, Canada, otherwise known as the “Polar Bear Capital of the World.” Sharing part of each year with the bears is a great thing, not a bad thing, but it means that the people of Churchill have to adapt their habits a little bit so that they and the bears can stay safe.



The tiny town of Churchill sits on the Hudson Bay, a large body of water in northern Canada. Every fall, during the months of September, October and November, about 300 wild polar bears gather on the shores of the bay, waiting for it to freeze over.

As soon as possible, they'll head out onto the ice and start hunting. They'll spend all winter on the ice hunting seals. They've spent all summer on land, eating very little, so by fall they are hungry!



If hungry bears wander too close to town looking for food, they can be dangerous. The people of Churchill have learned to avoid encounters with polar bears by locking up their garbage, feeding their pets inside and being careful at the town dump. If a polar bear wanders too near town, trained animal control officers either chase it away, catch and relocate it immediately, or house it temporarily until it can be taken out onto the sea ice.



PHOTO © BOB WILSON.

Imagine walking home from school one day and seeing an enormous, wild polar bear lounging on a nearby rock. Imagine dressing up in costume on Halloween night and having to remember what to do if a real, live polar bear crosses your path.





To get to Churchill, you have to fly or take a train. No roads lead there. Even so, many visitors come each year to see polar bears. They sign up for tours that will lead them safely to where the bears are. They can watch the bears, take lots of photographs and learn all about the wildlife and land of the Arctic.

Churchill's ecotourism business provides wonderful opportunities for local people to make a living and for visitors to see polar bears in the wild. It's important, though, that ecotourism be done in a way that protects and benefits people, polar bears and the environment. Everyone wants this, and lots of people are working to guarantee it.

