



## Grizzly Man Discussion Guide

Director: Werner Herzog

Year: 2005

Time: 103 min

### You might know this director from:

Encounters At the End of the World (2007)

Cave of Forgotten Dreams (2010)

My Best Fiend (1999)

Happy People: A Year in the Taiga (2010)

Fitcarraldo (1982)

Aguirre, the Wrath of God (1972)

## FILM SUMMARY

GRIZZLY MAN is the story of a bear enthusiast named Timothy Treadwell. With camera in hand, he spent 13 summers in Katmai National Park and Preserve among wild grizzly bears before he was killed in 2003 by one of the bears he had protected on several occasions. Amie Huguenard, his girlfriend, was with him at the time and was also killed. Treadwell had gained a lot of media attention, frequently appearing in schools and on TV shows like the Late Night Show with David Letterman.

After Treadwell's death, prolific film director Werner Herzog took interest in Treadwell's story and began to put the pieces together. Through Treadwell's own film footage and interviews with people who knew him best, we get to know a man who struggled with his past and claimed to find his calling amongst Alaska's wildest bears. As Treadwell immerses himself in their daily lives, the bears accepted his presence, followed him, slept near his tent and permitted him to enter their space. He gave them names and sang to them. Though Treadwell was known for being a brave, passionate man, Herzog found him to be a disturbed individual who had a skewed perspective of nature and carried a death wish till the end of his life. GRIZZLY MAN is a fascinating and tragic story with breathtaking footage of Alaska's primordial wilderness that presents a unique look into the nature of humans.

## FILM THEMES

Grizzly Man is one of Werner Herzog's most thought-provoking documentaries because we meet a man who was often misunderstood. While it's true that Timothy Treadwell was odd, and sometimes disturbing, he was alive in a way that most people aren't. His life evokes questions of all kinds. Use these themes to help guide your discussion.

### WILDLIFE PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION

This is what Treadwell lived and worked for—to protect the bears. Their natural habitats are being lost as human societies expand. They're often displaced or killed when perceived as a threat to human life. Coastal bears prefer fresh fish, but salmon populations are dropping. Inland bears might depend on the white bark pine tree, which is in danger because of climate change. Beetle infestations destroy the trees, and the situation is getting worse as winter temperatures increase.

### MAN VS. NATURE

Treadwell claimed to feel more at home in the wilderness than in human societies. What 'civilization' refused to give him, Treadwell sought in nature, as if bears and foxes could fulfill his human desires for love, friendship and understanding. But the reality is that Treadwell was not a bear. He wanted to cross a boundary that has been in place since the dawn of time, only to find that he could not break the bonds that tied him to his fate.

### ADDICTIONS AND OBSESSIONS

Treadwell wasn't able to shake his alcohol addiction until the day he devoted his life to protecting bears. He saw this transformation as a miracle and claimed to have found his calling in life. Wild, primordial nature – a landscape in turmoil – this is where Treadwell felt most at home, perhaps because it portrayed the state of his own soul and gave him a safe place in which to battle his demons. It's possible that he became obsessed with the adrenaline kicks he got from encountering bears, which became another kind of addiction.

### SEARCH FOR SELF

It's clear to anyone who listened to Treadwell's recorded tapes that he was physically escaping human society—a world that he idealized and perceived as perfect—a world in which he failed with women, swimming and acting. So he created a world for himself, in which he was the central character. The camera became his only companion, his mirror, where he scrutinized himself and re-invented his message over and over again. His exploration of wilderness and wild animals became an exploration of himself and of human nature.

**“What remains is his footage. And while we watch the animals in their joys of being, in their grace and ferociousness, a thought becomes more and more clear. That it is not so much a look at wild nature, as it is an insight into ourselves, our nature. And that, for me, beyond his mission, gives meaning to his life and to his death.”**

Werner Herzog



## FILM FACTS:

- GRIZZLY MAN premiered at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival, where it won the Alfred P. Sloan Prize and was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize. Since then, the film has won countless other awards for Best Documentary. In 2005, Werner Herzog won the Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Documentary award from the Director's Guild of America.
- To make GRIZZLY MAN, Herzog used material from the 100 hours of footage that Treadwell shot during the last five years of his life.
- The bears that Treadwell lived amongst are commonly known as brown bears. The term, 'grizzly bear' was a regional name for the bears living more than 100 miles inland in North America. The Alaskan brown bear and the Grizzly bear are now considered to be one species.
- Treadwell was criticized for befriending bears because it could lead them to approach human habitation in search of food, which would then lead to innocent deaths.
- The National Park Service at Katmai denied Treadwell a permit to do research on bears. The reason: Treadwell only had a high school education, and he had never published a professional scientific paper.
- Treadwell was not allowed to carry a gun with him in Katmai because it is against National Park regulations.
- In the 85-year history of Katmai National Park, what happened to Treadwell and Huguenard is the first known incident of humans being killed by a bear.
- Werner Herzog stumbled across Treadwell's story while visiting a producer's office. Herzog was looking for his car keys when the producer shoved an article in his direction. It was an article about Timothy Treadwell. Before leaving that day, Herzog vowed to direct the film.
- Herzog decided NOT to use the last 6 minutes on Treadwell's camera - the minutes in which he and Amie Huguenard were eaten by the bear. His reason was out of moral responsibility. "You would violate the right and dignity of the deaths of these two individuals. You just don't do it."
- Treadwell met Amie Huguenard, a doctor's assistant in Colorado, after she read his book and contacted him. They spent parts of two summers together in Alaska and, in January 2003, she left her job and moved to Malibu to be with Treadwell. She was 37 years old when she died with Treadwell in Alaska.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share the film. Give others an opportunity to learn about Timothy Treadwell's story.
2. Support [Grizzly People](#) and other organizations that work for animal rights like Alaskan grizzlies.
3. Join conservation efforts to protect the wilderness from modern threats such as loss of habitation, food scarcity, displacement, pollution and ecological breakdown.
4. Lighten your carbon footprint by, for example, driving less and eating locally produced food.
5. Strive to be emphatic, even towards people you don't understand. People were quick to criticize Timothy Treadwell's passionate efforts without knowing anything about his internal battle. As Plato said, "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle."

## We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

**Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.**