Simon Jackson: Saving the Spirit Bear

Simon Jackson is one of the few people to have seen the white Kermode or spirit bear. There are fewer than 400 spirit bears in existence. All of them live in a coastal area of British Columbia. Most of these live in a temperate rainforest area about 500 kilometres north of Vancouver. Their habitat is being reduced by human activity. In 2000, when Simon was 17 years old, he was honoured in *Time* magazine as one of 60 “Heroes of the Planet” for his efforts to save this endangered bear.

When he was seven, the Vancouver student’s parents took him to Yellowstone National Park. Soon after, he set up a lemonade stand and raised $60 to protect grizzly bears. A few years later, Simon learned of the plight of the spirit bear in British Columbia. He contacted everyone he could think of who might have an insight into this issue. The more he learned, the more determined he was to save the wilderness that the spirit bear needs in order to survive.

During his Grade 9 year, he encouraged students and teachers to participate in a letter-writing campaign. As a result, the government of British Columbia received more than 700 letters on this issue.

As a university student, Jackson divided his time between school and his campaign—between going to class and meeting with government officials, community leaders and others involved in making decisions about the forests of British Columbia.

Later, Simon made it his mission to engage as many young people as possible. He started the Spirit Bear Youth Coalition, which is now the largest youth-led environmental network in the world. It has more than five million members in more than fifty countries. The coalition is dedicated to promoting awareness of the spirit bear and the issues threatening its survival.

Although about half of the spirit bear’s habitat has been protected thanks to the work of the coalition, more needs to be done. However, the coalition also recognizes that it is important to take into account the needs of forestry workers and the rights of the area’s First Nations.

Many people have asked Simon why he chose to campaign for the future of the spirit bear rather than another endangered animal, such as the panda or the elephant. Simon has explained that, as he sees it, the spirit bear is as important to the world as the panda bear. Because the spirit bear is unique to his home province, he feels that he has a personal obligation to do whatever he can to improve the bear’s chances of survival.

Simon believes that his work is important, not just for the future of the spirit bear, but also because it reminds the youth of the world that they have an important voice that must be listened to, and that they are the future caretakers of this planet. As Simon sees it, “By becoming active citizens in our world, we will open doors, broaden horizons and, indirectly, change lives. Youth can provide hope for our world in all of the challenges that lie ahead.”

Adapted from the Spirit Bear Youth Coalition and Kidz World Web sites.
Multiple-Choice (Record the best or most correct answer on the Student Answer Sheet.)

1. The first endangered animal that Simon worked to protect was the
   a. panda.
   b. elephant.
   c. grizzly bear.
   d. Kermode bear.

2. The list of 60 “Heroes of the Planet” (paragraph 1) was most likely designed to honour outstanding
   a. achievement of personal goals.
   b. efforts in promoting youth issues.
   c. success in educating youth about animal life.
   d. contributions to environmental protection.

3. “The more he learned . . . .” (paragraph 2) refers to what Simon Jackson discovered about
   a. the way to protect grizzly bears.
   b. the preservation of national parks.
   c. the destruction of wilderness habitat.
   d. the need for an insight into this issue.

4. Simon’s first response to hearing about the spirit bear suggests he thought that
   a. there was little time to waste on talking.
   b. the best course of action was to raise funds.
   c. he should first gather information from a variety of sources.
   d. he should go to observe the Kermode bears in their coastal habitat.

5. The effect of repeating the word “between” in paragraph 4 is to
   a. emphasize Simon’s decision.
   b. highlight the demands of Simon’s busy life.
   c. show that Simon was uncertain about what he should do.
   d. indicate that the work of saving the bear was sometimes repetitive.

6. What evidence shows that the work of the Spirit Bear Youth Coalition was effective?
   a. Simon joined the coalition while in high school.
   b. Almost half the habitat of the bears was protected.
   c. Decision-makers invited Simon to their meetings about forests.
   d. Over 700 letters of support were sent to the British Columbia government.

7. What word would best replace the word “caretakers” as used in paragraph 8?
   a. parents
   b. citizens
   c. cleaners
   d. guardians
**Multiple-Choice** (Record the best or most correct answer on the Student Answer Sheet.)

8 Simon chose to campaign for the spirit bear rather than another endangered animal because of
   a  the way it looks.
   b  where it is found.
   c  the support he received from the Youth Coalition.
   d  its importance as a symbol of youth around the world.

9 What is the purpose of the quotation at the end of this selection?
   a  to add more description to the paragraph
   b  to emphasize Simon Jackson’s viewpoint
   c  to provide an example of Simon Jackson’s work
   d  to show the importance of saving the spirit bear