

Who's Afraid of the Big, Bad Wolf?

Lesson Overview

Few animals evoke as wide a range of emotions in people as the wolf. Wolves have played the villain in many childhood stories and have also been worshiped and revered as symbols of the spirit of nature. In this lesson, students will use their observation skills and primary sources to learn how wolves communicate. Students will also study the complexities of the wolf and write a story that will help dispel the idea that wolves are inherently “good” or “evil.”

Grade level: Grades 3 – 5

Subject areas: Science, Language Arts

Learning objectives: Students will be able to do the following:

- Compare and contrast wolves’ and humans’ behaviors
- Synthesize information from a variety of sources
- Write a story to inform readers about the nature of wolves.

Materials:

Computers with Internet access

The video of the episode “In the Valley of the Wolves” from Thirteen’s series NATURE

“Communicating without Words” journal

“Animal Report Graphic Organizer”

Bookmark the following sites

NOVA Online “Wild Wolves”

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/wolves/howl.html>

This website contains sound and wave clips of wolves’ vocalizations.

The International Wolf Center

<http://www.wolf.org/wolves/experience/meet/AmbassadorWolves.asp>

This website contains observation logs of four wolves.

Wolf Country

http://www.wolfcountry.net/information/myth_stories/red_riding.html

This website contains a version of the story Little Red Riding Hood.

Wolf Country

http://www.wolfcountry.net/information/myth_stories/wolfstrength.html

This webpage contains the theme "Strength of Wolves" from the movie Dances with Wolves.

Hinterland Who's Who

<http://www.hww.ca/hww2.asp?cid=8&id;=107>

This website contains information on wolves.

The International Wolf Center

<http://www.wolf.org/wolves/index.asp>

This website contains information on wolves.

Dragonfly

<http://www.units.muohio.edu/dragonfly/com/>

This website contains information on the ways wolves use scent to communicate.

The Timber Wolf Information Network

<http://www.timberwolfinformation.org/kidsonly/posture/postures.htm>

This website contains illustrations of how a wolf communicates using its tail and body position.

Procedures for Teachers

Introductory Activity

The purpose of this activity is to pique students' interest and to build background knowledge on wolves.

Time for completion: 20 minutes

1. Ask students to predict why wolves howl. Record their answers on the board. After students have finished giving their answers, read the following information from the PBS NOVA Online "Wild Wolves" website. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/wolves/howl.html>

"The center of a wolf's universe is its pack, and howling is the glue that keeps the pack together. Some have speculated that howling strengthens the social bonds between packmates; the pack that howls together, stays together. That may be so, but chorus howls can also end with nasty quarrels between packmates. Some members, usually the lowest-ranking, may actually be "punished" for joining in the chorus. Whether howling together actually strengthens social bonds, or just reaffirms them, is unknown.

We do know, however, that howling keeps packmates together, physically. Because wolves range over vast areas to find food, they are often separated from one another. Of all their calls, howling is the only one that works over great distances. Its low pitch and long duration are well suited for transmission in forest and across tundra, and unique features of each individual's howl allow wolves to identify each other. Howling is a long distance contact and reunion call; separate a wolf from its pack, and very soon it will begin howling, and howling, and howling"

2. Write the following three options on the board:

■ Confrontational howl

■ Pup howl

■ "Lonesome" howl

■ Chorus howl

Making certain that students can't see the webpage, click on and play the four different howls one at a time. Stop after each howl and ask students to predict which of the four howls it was.

3. After students have listened to the howls, provide time for them to listen to the howls a second time. This time have students “read” the sound spectrographs as they listen to the howls. Share with the students the explanation found on the site of how to read the spectrographs. After students have listened to all of the howls, discuss how wolves use howls to communicate.

Activity One

In this activity, students will learn how wolves use sound, scents and body language to communicate. After examining how wolves communicate, students will observe ways that humans communicate without using words.

Time for completion: Two 50-minute class periods and a three-day homework activity.

1. Begin by asking students how they communicate with other people. Students will most likely answer that they generally use oral or written language to communicate. Ask students how they think wolves communicate without the ability to talk or write. Write the answers on the board. The answers should touch on the fact that wolves use sound, scents, and body language to communicate with each other. Teacher Note: The websites listed below contain information on how wolves use scent, body language and howls to communicate.

1. The Dragonfly website contains information on how wolves use scent to communicate.

<http://www.units.muohio.edu/dragonfly/com/>

2. The Timber Wolf Information Network website contains illustrations of how a wolf communicates using its tail and body position.

<http://www.timberwolfinformation.org/kidsonly/posture/postures.htm>

3. The International Wolf Center contains an overview of basic wolf communication.

<http://www.wolf.org/wolves/learn/basic/biology/communication.asp>

2. Watch “In the Valley of the Wolves” from 11:33 to 13:21, and 19:29 to 22:48. Stop after each section and ask students to share what they observed about the ways wolves use sounds, scents, and body language to communicate with each other.

3. Pass out and discuss the “Communicating without Words” journal. Divide the class into four or more groups. Assign each group one of the wolves on the International Wolf Center website.

<http://www.wolf.org/wolves/experience/meet/AmbassadorWolves.asp> Ask each group to record at least five examples of ways its wolf communicates.

4. Explain to students that over the next few days they will be observing ways that humans communicate without speaking or reading. Ask students to observe how they, and the people they come in contact with, communicate without speaking or writing.
5. After students have completed their journals, have them share with the class what they observed. Record students' observations on the board.
6. Ask students to share examples of any similarities in the ways that wolves and humans communicate with each other. For example, a student may say that a younger brother jumps on him in greeting when he walks through the door after school.
7. Provide time for students to fill out the "What I Learned" section in the journal.

Activity Two

In this activity, students will examine how the wolf is often feared and hated or revered and worshiped. They will write a story that explores the unique nature of the wolf.

Time for completion: Three 50-minute class periods and additional time to work on stories outside of class

1. Read the story of Little Red Riding Hood aloud to the class. A copy of this story may be found at http://www.wolfcountry.net/information/myth_stories/red_riding.html. Next, read the theme "Strength of the Wolves" from the movie *Dances with Wolves*. This theme may be found at http://www.wolfcountry.net/information/myth_stories/wolfstrength.html. As a class, compare and contrast the different ways the wolf is portrayed in these two instances. Point out to students that in one instance the wolf is seen as "good," and in the other instance the wolf is portrayed as an evil or "bad" creature. Ask students to give additional examples of ways in which wolves are portrayed as evil or as revered symbols of nature. Solicit students' opinions as to why they believe people have such strong reactions, either positive or negative, to wolves. Ask students to share their personal views on wolves.
2. Watch "In the Valley of the Wolves" from 02:56 to 07:54. Ask students to give examples of "good" and "bad" behavior as exhibited by the wolves in the clip. Discuss how and why it is difficult to apply labels of "good" and "bad" to wolves.
3. Tell students that they are going to write a story that will give readers a whole sense of the wolf.

4. Explain to students that in order to create an accurate portrayal of the wolf, they will need to gather information about the wolf. Tell students that they will include this information in their story. Encourage students to use a variety of sources for this assignment, e.g., magazines, books, videos, the Internet, etc. The following websites provide a place for students to begin their Internet research:

<http://www.hww.ca/hww2.asp?cid=8&id=107>

Hinterland Who's Who

<http://www.wolf.org/wolves/index.asp>

The International Wolf Center

5. Pass out the "Wolf Research Organizer" to students. Review the handout together before students begin their research. Explain that the story does not have to include all of the research topics. Discuss how they may choose to focus on a limited number of topics when they write the story.

6. After students have completed their research, pass out and review "The Real Story" rubric. Remind students that their purpose in writing the story is to help people understand the unique nature of the wolf and to create a sense of appreciation and acceptance for the wolf even with the knowledge that wolves' lives in the wild can include brutal behavior.

Assessment Suggestions

The "Communicating without Words" handout may be used to assess Activity One.

Extension Activity

The International Wolf Center website contains a web cam and provides students with an opportunity to observe wolves. Leave the window containing the web cam open for several days. Have students check the web cam periodically throughout the day and record what they observe on a class chart.

<http://www.wolf.org/wolves/experience/webcam.asp>

About the Author

Laurel Blaine is founder of Digital Narratives LLC, a curriculum design company. In addition to content development, Digital Narratives also works with young people to enhance their literacy skills as they explore the power of digital storytelling. Over the past decade, Laurel has created educational materials for a diverse range of clients including The Kennedy Center, Oakland East Bay Symphony, Learning Matters/Listen Up! and Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt Museum.

