

Fact and Opinion In Persuasive Writing: The Pros and Cons of Wolf Reintroduction

Teacher Notes

Grade: 6 to 8 and up

Subject: Language Arts

Group Size: Whole class, small groups

Duration: 50-minute period

Vocabulary: Fact, opinion, topic sentence, thesis statement, supporting statements

OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this lesson students should be able to:

- Differentiate between statements of fact and opinion
- Take notes and analyze a piece of writing
- Identify topic sentences, thesis statements and supporting statements
- Develop an outline and write a persuasive essay (grades 8 and up)

MATERIALS:

- “**Fact or Opinion**” worksheet
- “**Taking Notes**” worksheet
- “**Wolf Reintroduction: Pro, Con**” article from *Outdoor Life* magazine October 1997
- **Sample Outline of article**

BACKGROUND:

Students are expected to read not only for pleasure and entertainment, but to gather information for their own writing projects. Distinguishing between fact and opinion is a basic analytical reading skill, and the

magazine article on wolf reintroduction offers many examples of both. This lesson will also help sharpen students’ reading for information skills. It will also familiarize them with the difference between **informational writing** which focuses on a **topic sentence** and persuasive or **opinion writing** which focuses on a **thesis statement** (an opinion boiled down to one arguable sentence).

PROCEDURES:

- Have the students (individually or in groups) complete the “Fact or Opinion” worksheet.
- Discuss how we differentiate between fact and opinion statements with the class. Go over the worksheet. Ask how they decided whether a statement is fact or opinion. Can the statement be proved with concrete evidence? Is the statement arguable? Can it be supported but not proved?
- Have your students read the *Outdoor Life* article “**Wolf Introduction: Pro, Con,**” then discuss purpose in writing with them. What is the intent of each of

the authors? To inform? To persuade?
To change someone's mind? Who is
their audience? What is the tone of the
piece?

FURTHER EXPLORATION:

As students move from middle school to high school, they begin to acquire and refine expository and persuasive writing skills.

Discuss purpose, audience and how statements of fact and opinion are used in expository and persuasive writing.

Expository writing requires the student to gather information to support a topic sentence. Its purpose is to enlighten the reader, to give information, to "expose."

Persuasive writing requires the student to defend an arguable statement with evidence that supports his/her opinion. This evidence can include personal experience, the experiences of others, direct observation, statistics and observations and opinions from credible sources.

- Have students read the persuasive writing pieces on wolf reintroduction, find the thesis statement and pick out the facts and opinions used to back it up. (See Sample Outline).
- Discuss these elements of expository and persuasive writing with the class. You may even want to assign an independent exercise in expository or persuasive writing.

SAMPLE OUTLINE

Title of Article: Wolf Reintroduction: Con

Author: Jim Zumbo

Topic: Wolf Reintroduction

Thesis: Wolves should not be reintroduced on public lands in the United States. (This is an opinion, not a fact. Zumbo needs to support his argument by answering the question, “WHY should wolves not be reintroduced on public lands in the United States?”)

Supports: (Because....)

- I. Wolves are not in danger of extinction in Northern Rockies**
 - A. Eyewitness reports of wolves in Yellowstone
 - B. Not verified that wolves ever eliminated from Yellowstone
 - C. Wolves will disperse on their own from Canada

- II. Possibility wolves in U.S. Rockies are genetically distinct from Canadian wolves**
 - A. “Pure” American wolf might cease to exist

- III. Legal difficulties would occur with Endangered Species Act**
 - A. Controls would be necessary on introduced wolves
 - B. Introduced wolves would have to be designated “experimental” or “delisted”
 - C. Question of control – who is in charge of management?

- IV. Hunters would be negatively affected**
 - A. No one knows how fast wolves multiply
 - B. No one knows how much they eat
 1. 100 wolves = 9,000 big game animals per year
 2. Studies in Alaska and Canada show severe impact on wildlife
 - C. Hunters will never be allowed to hunt wolves

- V. Wolves would add to mortality of winter-distressed herds**
 - A. Herds need protection

- VI. Wolves documented killing more than they eat**
 - A. “Surplus” killing by wolves may further impact big game populations.
 1. Example: Alaska – parts of 20 Dall sheep eaten
 2. Yellowstone – residents claim five elk partially eaten

3. Banff National Park – partially eaten elk noted

VII. Reintroduction interferes with natural migration

NOTES TO TEACHERS

Students should examine Zumbo's supports for credibility. Some questions to consider:

- Were wolves ever verified to be extinct in Yellowstone? (yes) By whom? (Biologists, park officials) How? (no tracks, no kill sites, no den sites, large coyote and elk populations)
- Who were the eyewitnesses who reported sighting wolves in Yellowstone? Were these animals verified to be wolves? (Possibly hybrids, possibly lone dispersers)
- Does the existence of an occasional disperser mean there is a viable breeding population? (no)
- Is there such a thing as a “genetically pure” American wolf? (no)
- Legal difficulties with reintroduced wolves would occur. (They have. This prediction has come back to haunt the Yellowstone and Central Idaho reintroduction. The reintroduced wolves were designated “non-essential experimental” rather than “endangered.” This was so that reintroduced wolves could be killed if they depredated on livestock. It is illegal, however, to kill an animal that is designated “endangered.” A federal judge ruled in December of 1997 that the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone and to Central Idaho was illegal because there is no way an “endangered” wolf could be distinguished from an “experimental” wolf. An endangered wolf might, therefore, be killed. This court decision is being challenged by Defenders of Wildlife and others because if it is upheld, the Idaho and Yellowstone wolves will have to be destroyed since Canada cannot take them back and there are no zoos that can accommodate these wild wolves.)
- Do wolves multiply in excess of their natural prey? Do predators multiply so that their food source is eliminated? Or does nature provide checks and balances?
- Which animals in a herd do wolves usually kill? Why? What happens when there are excessive numbers of ungulates such as elk and no “summit” predator to control their numbers?
- Who benefits from “wolf leftovers” when there ARE leftovers?
- Does reintroduction hinder natural migration? What argument could be made to support this? Does this matter?

Lesson 14. Community in Crisis: An Exercise in Conflict Resolution is an excellent follow-up to this lesson.

TAKING NOTES

You are joining the pack on an information hunt. You are going to read the territory (two articles) and gather information to share with the rest of the pack members. No slacking off is permitted! You can't just go out there and wander among the trees (the words!) and not contribute to the hunt. You have to be alert, take notes and be able to summarize the situation. One way is by taking notes. Answer these questions as you read and you'll cover the territory.

1. What's the title of the article? Titles often contain clues to the topic of the article.

2. What's the topic of the article? _____

3. What does "pro" mean? _____

4. What does "con" mean? _____

5. What do you think? Is this going to be an information article listing facts about a topic, or is this going to be an opinion article?

Why? _____

6. Organize the “pro” and “con” arguments, listing the reasons for each author’s opinion and the explanation for each of the reasons.

PRO

CON

Topic:

Topic:

Thesis Opinion:

Thesis Opinion:

Reasons (supports):

Reason (supports):

1.

1.

Explanation:

Explanation:

2.

2.

Explanation:

Explanation:

3.

3.

Explanation:

Explanation:

4.

4.

Explanation:

Explanation:

5.

5.

FACT OR OPINION

DIRECTIONS: Read each statement. Look up words you don't know. Write "F" for Fact on the line if you can prove it or disprove it with concrete evidence. Write "O" for Opinion if the statement is a belief or a position. Remember: some statements are technically opinions, but are based on such widely accepted views few people argue the issue.

1. ____ Wolves are highly social animals with a pack structure based on dominance hierarchy.
2. ____ Wolves are an endangered or threatened species in the lower 48 states because of deliberate and systematic extermination by humans.
3. ____ Wolves and wolf hybrids are not wise choices as family pets.
4. ____ Many tourists have reacted positively to the experience of seeing wolves in Yellowstone National Park.
5. ____ Wolves should be reintroduced on all U.S. public lands that provide a large enough range to support a population.
6. ____ Captive breeding programs and Species Survival Plans are necessary to keep the red wolf (*Canis rufus*) and the Mexican wolf (a subspecies of *Canis lupis*) from becoming extinct.
7. ____ Wolves are often portrayed as villains and savage predators in stories, myths and legends.
8. ____ Stories, myths and legends that portray wolves in negative ways are harmful to children.
9. ____ Wolves sometimes kill livestock.
10. ____ Wolves prefer ungulates and other natural prey over sheep and cattle.
11. ____ Wolves will return to their former habitats in northeastern states on their own if they are protected.
12. ____ Wolves are carnivores.
13. ____ Television documentaries do a good job of portraying wolves and other wild animals in a realistic and honest way.
14. ____ Wolves are more beautiful than any other mammal.

15. ___ Hunting wolves for commercial purposes such as clothing should be legal.
16. ___ Wolves are legally hunted in many parts of the world.
17. ___ There are very few documented cases of wolves attacking humans.
18. ___ The old belief that wolves howl at the moon is a myth.
19. ___ Except in areas where they have not been persecuted or wiped out, wolves are extremely afraid of people and avoid human contact.
20. ___ The alpha male and female are usually the breeding pair; they have one litter of pups each year, and both are devoted parents.
21. ___ Anthropomorphizing wolves and other wildlife creates harmful stereotypes.

OWN YOUR OWN: Can you write three **fact** statements about wolves? If you were writing an **informational** paragraph, your fact statement would be the **topic sentence**.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Can you write three **opinion** statements about wolves? If you were writing a **persuasive paragraph**, your opinion statement would be your **thesis statement**. A thesis statement is an opinion boiled down to one arguable sentence.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

DIRECTIONS: Read each statement. Look up words you don't know. Write "F" for Fact on the line if you can prove it or disprove it with concrete evidence. Write "O" for Opinion if the statement is a belief or a position. Remember: some statements are technically opinions, but are based on such widely accepted views few people argue the issue.

1. F Wolves are highly social animals with a pack structure based on dominance hierarchy.
2. F Wolves are an endangered or threatened species in the lower 48 states because of deliberate and systematic extermination by humans.
3. O Wolves and wolf hybrids are not wise choices as family pets.
4. F Many tourists have reacted positively to the experience of seeing wolves in Yellowstone National Park.
5. O Wolves should be reintroduced on all U.S. public lands that provide a large enough range to support a population.
6. F Captive breeding programs and Species Survival Plans are necessary to keep the red wolf (*Canis rufus*) and the Mexican wolf (a subspecies of *Canis lupis*) from becoming extinct.
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SCORE: _____