

# **The Wolf Is a Dog Is a Wolf – Or Is It?**

## **The Wild Wolf and the Domestic Dog**

### **Teacher Notes**

**Grade:** 5 and up

**Subject:** Language Arts

**Duration:** Several days of observation of a family dog or that of friends. Much of this project will be done outside of class but allot class time for students to discuss the assignment, do library research and present results. (A shorter version of this lesson is included at the end of the Procedures section.)

**Skills:** Observation, identification, analogies, recording data, drawing conclusions, writing results, sharing information

**Vocabulary:** Sign, scat, litter, habitat, dewclaw, plantigrade, digitigrade, *Canis lupus familiaris*, *Canis lupus*, selective breeding, muzzle, scent rolling, grooming, vocalization, morphology, scent organ, field notes, compare, contrast

### **OBJECTIVES:**

Upon completion of this activity, students should be able to:

- Read for information to use as background material
- Compare and contrast observations
- Identify the similarities and the differences in the appearance and behavior of domestic dogs and wild wolves
- Record and organize data from direct observations
- Draw conclusions
- Write up results
- Present results to the class

### **READING ASSIGNMENT:**

- 2. Vital Statistics
- Evolution and Domestication of Wolves

### **MATERIALS:**

- **Dog Observation Instructions**
- **Data Collection Sheet**
- **Behavior Observations Worksheet**
- A family dog to observe (the student's own or that of a cooperative friend or relative)
- Full-body photograph of the dog to be observed (or photocopy of a picture from a book on dog breeds)
- Tape measure
- Wolf fur, paw print (in trunk)

- Small plastic bag to collect dog hair or fur
- Small scissors
- Modeling clay, plastic margarine tubs
- Plaster powder, water, trowel and brush.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The wolf is a direct ancestor of the dog. Dogs were domesticated by humans 12,000 to 15,000 years ago. Today, scores of dog breeds exist throughout the world. The common ancestral link between the wolf and the dog means they share many similarities in morphology and behavior. Selective breeding through the centuries has, however, fostered notable differences between wolves and dogs. NOTE: Before doing this lesson, in addition to the assigned reading students should have a basic introduction to wolf biology and behavior, such as exploring the hands-on items, reading the Vital Statistics selection in the Background Reading section or viewing *Through Wolf Eyes* or one of the other videos included in the trunk.

### **PROCEDURES:**

- Ask students to bring in pictures of dogs, wolves and other wild canids. Arrange these pictures on poster board or a bulletin board for a classroom display. Students will enjoy organizing the pictures into categories - wolves, dogs breeds, foxes, jackals, hyenas and coyotes.
- Spend some class time discussing dog breeds. Talk about the breeds that are similar in physical appearance to the wolf (German shepherds, malamutes, huskies) and dogs that are not (pugs, dachshunds, terriers). Have students talk about the dogs they own and why they chose a particular breed. Ask students who own “mutts” what breed or mixture of breeds their dogs most closely resemble.

### **Optional Writing Activity**

- Have students write, in prose or poetry, about why people own dogs and other pets. Ask them to address the following questions in their piece: What is special about the bonds we forge with other species? Why do we love our pets and lavish attention on them? Why is the death of a pet such a great loss to us? Display these works in the classroom along with the pictures of dogs collected by the students.

### **Dog Observation Project**

- Hand out the Dog Observation Instructions and the worksheets and discuss the project with your students.
- Give the class a few days to make arrangements to observe a dog. If there is a shortage of dogs, assign groups of three or four students, including one dog owner, to work together.
- Allow at least two weeks for students to complete their behavioral study.
- Grade students based on their written and oral reports of their results.

### **Short Version of This Lesson**

- Select a dog breed from a book of breeds, and fill out the Data Collection Sheet as a class based on the information sheet in the book.
- Discuss dog behaviors that students have observed in the past and complete the Behavior Observations based on their recollections.
- Review the specifics of the appearance and behaviors of wolves. Show one of the wolf videos (in trunk) and have the class take notes on wolf behavior.
- Review wolf vital statistics (background reading “Vital Statistics” in Reading section). Have the wolf fur and paw print (refer to Wolf Trunk) on display for comparison with dog paw prints and hair samples.
- Hand out the Venn Diagrams (to be created) and have the students complete them to use as aids in comparing and contrasting wolves and dogs. Enlist the help of the class in making two larger versions to display in the classroom.
- Discuss the diagrams and what they reveal about wolves and dogs. Have students write compare/contrast essays using the information in the diagrams.
- Dog Observation Instructions

Do the following and record the results on the Data Collection Sheet and Behavior Observations sheet. Exercise caution and common sense around the dog and work only under the supervision of an adult owner of the dog.

1. Measure the dog from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail and from the top of the shoulder blade to the bottom of the forepaw.
2. Carefully snip a very small tuft of the dog's hair close to the skin.
3. Take a full-body photograph of the dog, or find a photo in a magazine or book of dog breeds or, if you prefer, sketch the dog.
4. Make an imprint of the dog's forepaw. Press modeling clay into the bottom of a plastic margarine tub or other shallow container. Press the forepaw of the dog into the clay. Some dogs may not like this, so have the adult present reassure the animal and help make the imprint.
5. Mix the plaster powder with water as directed and pour the mixture on top of the clay. When the plaster is set, cut away the plastic.
6. Decide how you will set up the various situations described on the Behavior Observations sheet and devise a plan and a schedule for observing the dog in 15-minute intervals over a period of several days.

**Data Collection Sheet**

**THE DOMESTIC DOG**

**PHOTOGRAPH OR DRAWING OF DOG**

(If you are using a photo from a book, write the title and page number of the book.)

**VITAL STATISTICS**

**Name of Student Observer:**

**Name of Subject (dog's name):**

**Owner of Subject:**

**Breed of Subject (If the dog is a mixed breed, write "mixed breed" on the line and tell what breed the dog most resembles):**

**Length of Subject:**

**Height of Subject:**

**Color and Markings:**

**Description of fur or hair (long, short, silky, coarse, wiry, etc.):**

**Where the study is being conducted:**

**PHOTOGRAPH OR DRAWING OF DOG**

**Behavior Observations**

**Answer the questions in detail by observing and recording the behavior of the dog. Use additional sheets if needed.**

**1. How does the dog greet people it knows?**

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**2. How does the dog greet other dogs it knows?**

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**3. How does the dog react to the presence of strange dogs?**

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**4. If the dog is permitted to greet a strange dog, what behaviors does it exhibit?**

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**5. What physical signals does the dog give if it does not feel friendly toward a person or toward another dog? Record all behaviors including vocalizations.**

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**6. How does the dog express happiness and joy? Include vocalizations and facial expressions.**

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**7. What behaviors does the dog exhibit when it is lonely, anxious or unhappy?**

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**8. How does the dog exhibit submissive behavior when it is being reprimanded for doing something that displeases you?**

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**9. How does the dog get information about its environment?**

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**10. How does the dog express territoriality?**

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**11. How does the dog “beg” for food?**

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**12. How does a dog play “tug of war” with a rag? What behaviors does the dog exhibit?**

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**13. If you have an opportunity to observe a dog being possessive about a bone or other food, observe the dog’s posture and facial expressions closely.**

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Other Observations

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