

Wolves and Humans: Sharing the Earth

Video: *Winter Wolf*

Teacher Notes

Grade: 5 and up

Subject: Social Studies

Group Size: Whole class

Duration: 50-minute period or longer depending on choice of activities

Skills: Acquisition of “wolf knowledge,” history of wolf/human conflict in America, identifying the significance of the wolf in Native American culture, conflict resolution skills

Vocabulary: alpha female, alpha male, dominance hierarchy, pack, territory, scent marking, howl, predator, prey, livestock...and more!

OBJECTIVES:

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

- Discuss how people formulate their views on wolves and how these views affect wolf conservation
- Understand the concept of “stakeholders” and how and why their views differ

READING ASSIGNMENT:

1. A Brief History of the Wolf in the United States

MATERIALS:

- Video: *Winter Wolf* (in trunk)

BACKGROUND:

Winter Wolf is a springboard for a number of stimulating activities for students and teachers. Kelly, the protagonist, though only about 11-years-old, is an inspiring character. The wildlife biologist in the ranching community where Kelly lives tells Kelly all about wolves and how they

live, hunt and communicate. Kelly is eager to learn more, but the adults in her community do not want to hear anything that contradicts their own person perceptions of wolves. The story that unfolds in *Winter Wolf* demonstrates how conflicts can be resolved if people are willing to listen to one another’s concerns and focus on facts and concrete evidence rather than emotion and hearsay. The film’s conflict resolution message draws important parallels to the structure of the wolf pack and how it works to foster cooperation, harmony and mutual gain rather than competition, conflict, and individualism. *Winter Wolf* also reinforces the Native American view of responsibility and cooperation among the members of a group.

PROCEDURES:

- **Before viewing the video,** review with your students the history of wolf extermination in the lower 48 states. Read the assigned background reading

aloud in class if you wish.

- Do **Social Studies** lesson, “Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf: Cultural Perspectives on the Wolf” with your class to give students some background on the wolf in Native American culture and mythology.
- Ask your students to write about and/or discuss the following questions:

1. Have you ever been excluded from a group that once included you?
2. Have you ever been given a responsibility by your parents or another adult that made you feel grown up and capable of being in charge?
3. Have you had an experience with a wild animal that was somehow special?
4. Do you think it is possible for humans to communicate with animals on a level beyond obedience training?
5. Recall a story an older relative has told you about an ancestor.
6. Have you ever disagreed with a group opinion? Did you voice your objections, or did you “go along” with what the others thought or wanted to do? When is going along a good thing? When is it not?

- **While viewing the video** have your students note the difference between the way we in contemporary society view animals and the way Native Americans perceive them.
- **After viewing the video**, discuss the following with the class:

1. After the livestock depredation occurs one rancher says to Kelly’s father, “whose side are you on anyway?” Kelly’s mother replies, “the side that has its facts straight.” What does she mean?

2. Another rancher mentions being compensated for the loss of any livestock to wolves. This seems to be something the ranchers can live with. Defenders of Wildlife maintains a compensation fund for livestock owners who lose cattle or sheep to wolves. What is the advantage of such a fund? Is it likely to change the attitudes of ranchers toward the presence of wolves in the area?

3. Read this excerpt from Barry Lopez’s book Of Wolves and Men aloud. Pose the question to the class: How does the traditional Native American view of animals differ from our own?

“We do not think of ourselves as part of the animal kingdom. Indians did. They thought of themselves as The People (that is the translation from the native tongue of most tribal names) and of animals as The Wolves, The Bears, The Mice and so forth...the lines between Indians and wolves may fade, not because Indians did not perceive the difference, but because they were preoccupied with the similarities. They were inclined to compare and contrast their way of living with, say, the weasel’s way or the eagle’s way. “We are like wolves in that we...”