

When Dogs Were Wolves

Suggested Grade Level: 4-6

Relative Subject(s): Science

Objective:

To learn the difference between a "companion" animal and a "wild" animal by studying about how domesticated dogs evolved from wild wolves.

Materials:

- Book: *First Dog*, by Jan Brett
- Poster boards (give each child half of one)
- Brown paper bags
- Tissue paper
- A variety of colored yarns
- A variety of paints
- Loose-leaf rings
- Pencils

Activity:

Preliminary Discussion

- Define "companion" animal. Ask for specific examples (cats, dogs, hamsters, certain birds, guinea pigs, rabbits). Explain that companion animals are "domesticated" and depend on people to take care of their needs. Ask for examples of what some of these needs might be.
- Define "wild" animal. Ask for examples of wild animals that live near the students' homes and school. Who takes care of wild animals? How is a "wild" animal different from a "companion" animal?

Procedure

Read the book *First Dog*. Discuss how the wolf in the story became the boy's companion (explain that it's not safe to interact with wild animals and that this is a fictional account of how wolves evolved into dogs). What did the wolf in the story do to help the boy? How did the wolf benefit from staying close to the boy?

Approximately 14,000 years ago, wolves were domesticated as hunting and watchdogs. They provided protection and helped ancient people hunt and, in turn, people provided companionship, food and shelter for them. These wolves evolved into the companion animals we now call dogs.

Though they are no longer wild, dogs still have the instinctive need to live in packs, like wolves. A dog's pack is its human family and the other pets that live in the household. Have the students create a "big book" that shows the difference between wild wolves and domesticated dogs. Examples: the needs of a wolf versus the needs of a dog; who takes care of a wolf versus who takes care of a dog; the similarities between wolves and dogs. Give each student half a piece of poster board and ask them to design a page that covers their chosen topic. Encourage them to be creative by utilizing various mediums (paint, colored pencils, collage of pictures, paper bags, and yarn).

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Once the students have finished their pages, have them write captions underneath the pictures, to describe them. Combine all of the pages into a "big book" with loose-leaf rings and keep it in your classroom library.

Post-Discussion

- Have each student show their page to the class and read what they wrote about it.
- If a dog is let loose to live in the forest, could it become "wild" again? Discuss how once an animal is domesticated, it can never be wild again. It would not be able to survive in the forest because it depends on people for all of its needs.
- What other animals have been domesticated? Why were they domesticated?
- Should you bring a wild animal into your home and try to make it a pet? Discuss how a wild animal can never be a pet, simply because it is wild. It takes thousands of years to domesticate an animal. Also, it is not safe to interact with wild animals. It is also important to leave them alone because they need to be able to take care of themselves and not depend on people for food or other things.

Extension Activity:

Have the class share their "big book" with another class or display it in the school library.