

Whose Land is it anyway? Sharing Our World with Wildlife

Suggested Grade Level: Middle School

Relative Subject(s): Social Studies

Objective: To understand the importance of sharing our world with animals. To understand that as our communities continue to develop and encroach upon animals' natural habitats, we need to make decisions on how to live together in a mutually humane and peaceful environment.

Materials

- Poster Paper
- Markers
- Tape
- Sample situations copied for groups

Activity

Preliminary Discussion

- What types of wildlife have you seen in your neighborhood?
- Does your community feel that the wildlife has conflicted with the daily lives of the people who live there? In what way?
- Do you feel that the wildlife in your neighborhood has been damaged by the community that lives among them?
- Do we have a responsibility to ensure the welfare of wildlife?
- Why do some people consider wildlife a nuisance?
- When people see wildlife in their natural habitats, like the forest, swamps, desert, etc., they consider them to be beautiful and important to protect. However, when our development begins to take over their habitats and we choose to live together in the same community, it is common for people to consider these animals a nuisance. Inhumane treatment to "control" these animal populations is commonplace (i.e., painful traps, poisoning, shooting). The behavior these animals are exhibiting is their natural behavior (i.e. burrowing, chewing, making nests) and people consider it destructive because it inconveniences the way they have chosen to live. It is important to decide what the actual "problems" are and what are the most humane and beneficial resolutions.
- In order to protect the wildlife that live among us, we must make an effort to not interfere in their lives. This means that we must not feed them, or treat them as if they were domesticated animals. It is truly in the best interest of wildlife for them to be wary of humans. When we feed wild animals or invite them onto our property, we are creating a dependency on their part that could ultimately suppress their wild instincts.
- We must also protect ourselves and our pets from wildlife and be appropriately cautious around them.
- Whose land is it anyway? It is important to understand that we are equal partners with the wildlife living among us. It is dangerous to think we have power over them, but it is important to realize that we have the power to make a difference for them.

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Procedure

Divide the students into four groups. Present each group with a situation to brainstorm and resolve. Each group should come up with two positive "action steps" for their community to take and a proposal to educate the rest of the community about how to resolve the conflict peacefully and humanely. They will write their ideas on poster paper and vote on the best ones. Each group will present their situations and ideas to the rest of the class.

Post-Discussion

How did each group arrive at their conclusions?

What did you learn about the animals, as well as the people who live among them?

What can each student do in their own community to help with these types of conflicts?

There is always more than one way to look at a situation and resolve it. Just because we have been doing things the same way for a long time, does not mean that it is the most humane or beneficial way to solve a problem. We must constantly consider the consequences of our actions.

Extension Activity

Invite a speaker to your class who understands the complexities of living among wildlife. This could be someone who works for a company that finds humane solutions to common wildlife problems, or a community member who has dealt with a problem like the ones discussed and has come up with a successful resolution. Suggested reading: *All Wild Creatures Welcome, the Story of a Wildlife Rehabilitation Center*, by Patricia Curtis.

SAMPLE SITUATIONS

1. Whose Land Is It Anyway?

You live in a suburban community close to Denver. Your community has a lot of wide-open spaces with undeveloped grasslands. Many of your neighbors have large pieces of land where they keep horses and other animals. In the last six months, there have been many sightings of coyotes. Your neighbors are afraid that these wild animals might attack them. There have been reports of dogs being attacked, gardens being chewed up, and garbage cans being rummaged through. There is a growing group of citizens in your community that feel these animals are dangerous and must be killed. This group also feels that the coyotes should be captured by using painful steel-jaw leg-hold traps. Studies have shown that in areas where coyotes have been trapped and killed, they keep coming back if there is a good food source. What is the best way to resolve this problem?

2. Whose Land Is It Anyway?

You and your family live in the city of Denver. For the last two weeks, you have been woken up by a loud scratching sound coming from your walls. Because of all the squirrels that live around your house, you suspect it must be squirrels. After school, you are standing in front of your house and see two squirrels on your roof crawl through a pipe and into your attic. You tell your family, and your older brother says he would like to shoot them or club them with a bat because they're "just pests." Your father says he will have to think about how to take care of them. What ideas can you suggest to your family about the best way to resolve this situation?

3. Whose Land Is It Anyway?

You and your family live in a small town in the mountains. Your mother has spent a lot of time working on the garden during the summer, and the tomatoes, corn and peppers are growing large. One morning you wake up and the entire garden has been trampled and raided, and your mother is furious! This also happens to three of your neighbors in the coming weeks. Your garbage cans have also been toppled over and the garbage spread all over the road. Because of the large footprints in the garden, you suspect that a couple of bears are doing this. When you moved to the mountains, you knew that you would be living among wildlife. What are some ways that your family and your neighbors can resolve these problems?

4. Whose Land Is It Anyway?

You live in a small house in the city of Denver. One night you go to bed very late and hope to sleep in the next morning. Early in the morning, you are woken up by a very loud, metallic tapping sound. You think it is coming from the roof and you walk out into your yard and see a woodpecker pecking on the rain gutter. You are angry because he will not stop and you are very tired and want to go back to sleep. You think about throwing rocks at him, but that seems cruel and you really do not want to kill him. What can you do to resolve this problem?