



Jacquelyn Fallon

SECTION 3 Social Systems

Subjects:

*reading skills,
sociology,
biology*



Approximate lesson time:

2 hours



Materials:

*copies of several
wolf folktales*

Folktale Focus

Students categorize folktales and research cultural connections.

OBJECTIVES:

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Analyze how wolves are portrayed in world folktales.
2. Assess how folktale presentations of wolves might affect people's opinions of wolves.

VOCABULARY:

folktale • myth • cultural values
legend • culture • attitudes

TEACHER BACKGROUND:

The stories that people tell often reflect their opinions about things in the natural world. This activity is designed to allow students to evaluate versions of wolf folktales (stories that arose orally in a culture) and determine what values a society holds based on how they portray wolves in their stories. Since folktales are an indicator and a transmitter of cultural values (likes and dislikes), this activity uses stories to understand how people from different countries historically felt about wolves, and why they might have felt that way.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Ask students to list wolf stories they have heard. Discuss how the wolf is portrayed in these stories.
2. Divide the students into small groups. Assign each group to read one of the stories on pages 22-27. Suggest the students read the story several times.
3. While they are reading, students should use the Folktale Evaluation Worksheet to note how the wolf is portrayed in their story. Often, a wolf is portrayed as being mean (or dangerous), foolish, wise or helpful.
4. Ask students to categorize the wolf portrayal in their stories. Their final characterization could be a combination of several images.
5. Group students according to how the wolf is portrayed in their stories (mean, foolish, wise, helpful). Instruct students to look for similarities in the cultures that portray wolves in a certain way.
6. Draw generalizations about which kinds of cultures have more positive views of wolves, and which have more negative views.

- Representatives from each theme group will give a presentation to explain what their group learned about the portrayal of wolves in stories. This presentation could be oral, pictorial or videotaped.

DISCUSSION:

- How do people in 21st-century U.S. culture view wolves? How is this different from or similar to what you read in your stories?
- Which countries or cultures had wolf stories that portrayed wolves as mean or evil? Helpful or friendly? Why do you think this was the case?
- Has reading and hearing about different wolf stories affected how you think about wolves?
- Which would have a larger impact on your view of wolves: a folktale or a news story about wolves? Why?

ASSESSMENT:

- Group reports may serve as an assessment for this activity.
- Have students write an answer to the following question: Why do some people read scary stories and become fearful of wolves while other people read the same stories and are not fearful?

EXTENSIONS:

- Have students research the country of origin for their group's story. Answer the following questions:
 - How did the people who originally told these stories make their livings (typically from the 1600s and earlier)? *By raising livestock, grain farming, hunting and gathering, fishing*
 - How does the way people make a living play a role in their attitudes about wolves?
- Students could learn their wolf stories and present them to a class of younger students as a way to teach other students about wolf tales.
- Have students visit an elementary school library or a bookstore and survey all the books having to do with wolves. Compare how the wolf is presented and discuss how the stories might affect a youngster's view of wolves.
- Select any of the stories on pages 22-27 and have students write a new version of that story, changing its emphasis (for example, change a "wolf is foolish" story into a "wolf is wise" story).
- Instruct students to reflect in writing on a time when they were alone and something that was not normally a scary thing became threatening or they were fearful of being harmed. Why did they feel this way, and how did they handle it?



Daniel Cox, natureexposures.com

National Science Education Standards

Unifying Concepts and Processes

*Evidence, models,
and explanation*

*Change, constancy,
and measurement*

NAME: _____



FOLKTALE FOCUS

Folktale Evaluation Worksheet

Story What descriptive	phrases or words are used to describe the wolf? What specific actions does	the wolf take in the story? What do other characters in the story do to	the wolf? Wolf Portrayal (foolish, mean, helpful or wise)	

Folk Stories on the Wolf

Donkey in a Lion's Skin (Aesop's Fables)

One day, a donkey was walking down a road, when he saw a lion lying in a ditch. At first, the donkey was frightened, but then he noticed that the lion was not moving. He approached more closely and realized that the lion was dead.

"I've always wanted to have a lion fur coat," said the donkey, so he skinned the lion and put on its coat. When animals saw the donkey wearing the lion's skin, they thought that he was a giant lion coming to get them.

"Run away, run away, a lion is coming," called the animals. The donkey was so pleased by the effect he was having on the other animals, that he began to laugh. "Eh haw, eh haw," laughed the donkey.

Just then, he heard a rustle in the bushes behind him. It was a wolf. "Brother donkey, you almost had me fooled. I was just about to run away from you in that lion's skin, but then you opened your mouth and I realized it was a donkey and not a lion that I was seeing."

"The next time you want to appear like a lion," said the wolf, "be sure to keep your donkey's mouth shut."

(Retold by Storyteller Kevin Strauss, copyright 2006)

Wolf and Dog (Aesop's Fables)

One evening, driven by hunger, a wolf wandered close to a farmstead. At the edge of the fields, she met a creature that looked much like herself. "Who are you?" said wolf.

"I am a dog, and from your smell, you must be a wolf," said dog.

"Well then, we must be cousins. But tell me, cousin dog, how is it that while I am starving, you seem to be plump and healthy," said the wolf.

"There is plenty of food at my master's house for animals who work. I bark to frighten away robbers and wild animals. In exchange for guarding the house and barns, my master gives me scraps from his table," said dog.

"Do you think that I could work for your master as well?" said wolf.

"Sure, there is much work to be done. Just follow me," said dog.

As they approached the master's house, wolf noticed that dog had a ring around his neck where the fur was gone and the skin was worn red. "What happened to your neck, dog?"

"Oh that, it is nothing. Every night my master ties me up so I stay nearby to protect the house. The rope wears the fur off of my neck, but it is a small price to pay for food and lodging. You will get used to it soon enough, wolf."

The wolf stopped. "No, I don't think I can get used to that," said wolf.

And she ran back into the woods.

(Retold by Storyteller Kevin Strauss, copyright 2006)

The Hungry Wolf

(This is a version from Kazakhstan, but there are similar versions from Finland and Russia.)

One day, wolf was feeling hungry, so he sniffed the air and began looking for some dinner. “Ah, goat meat,” he said, sniffing the air. The wolf ran up to the goat and growled, “O.K. goat, its time for dinner and you’re the dinner.”

“If that’s my fate, then there’s nothing to be done about it. But as you can see, I am really quite old and thin. If you let me go home, I will get my daughter. She is quite young and plump,” said the goat.

“O.K., but be quick about it, I am hungry,” said the wolf.

The goat went back to the herd and got the goatherd. The wolf heard the sound of barking dogs, and the goatherd came running with his rifle. “Bang, bang,” the bullet whizzed over the wolf’s head as he ran into the woods. “Well, that’s the last time I will trust a goat to do what he says,” said the wolf as he rested in a cave.

The next day, in another field, wolf smelled a sheep. “Mmmm. Mutton, I love mutton,” said the wolf. The wolf ran up and grabbed the sheep. “O.K. sheep, its time for dinner, and you’re the dinner,” growled the wolf.

“Well if that’s my fate, I guess I can’t escape,” said the sheep, “but before you eat me, I have always wanted to dance my circle dance before I die. Since you are going to eat me anyway, could I dance before I die?”

“O.K., but you have to stay where I can see you,” said the wolf, and he lay down to rest before dinner. The sheep danced around wolf again and again, each time making a larger and larger circle. As she danced, she sang a song. The song put wolf to sleep, and the sheep ran off to find a shepherd. Once more, wolf had to run from dogs and men, and he was still hungry. “I should never let my prey leave my grasp,” said the wolf.

The next day, wolf traveled farther on the steppe, where he met an old horse. “O.K. horse, it’s time for dinner, and you’re the dinner,” growled the wolf.

“Fine, I am old and have lived far too long already. My master no longer feeds me grain, he just leaves me to graze in dry fields. But since you are going to eat me anyway, could you start with my tail, so I may keep on grazing?” said the horse.

“Very well, but you can’t move,” said the wolf. When the wolf went behind the horse, the horse kicked out with both of his hind hooves, sending the wolf flying across the steppe. And that was the end of that foolish wolf.

(Retold by Storyteller Kevin Strauss, copyright 2006)

(Note: A “steppe” is a prairielike grassland area in central Asia.)

The Wolf on the Prairie (Cheyenne)

(This is a Cheyenne story first published by George Bird Grinnell in By Cheyenne Campfires, in 1926. The following is my retelling of this historical tale. The Sand Creek Massacre happened on November 29, 1864, and ended with 200 Cheyenne and Arapaho, mostly women and children, dead and mutilated. The massacre started a war between the United States and Plains tribes that didn't end until 25 years later with the massacre at Wounded Knee. In 1902 when this story was recorded, one of the women involved was still alive.)

It had been a long journey to Fort Lyon, but the elders said we would be safe there. Our leaders were promised protection if we camped near the fort. But safety meant soldiers with guns. Our warriors tried to defend the camp, but there were too many soldiers. My husband was wounded. He told us to go. My sister and I and our two daughters crept off into the night. If we traveled quickly, we might reach another village of our people and be safe. We traveled on and on, six or seven days, and it was cold, so we took shelter in a small cave in the side of a cliff.

That was when he came. The children were asleep when I saw a large shape walk on all fours into the cave. It lay down beside us and went to sleep. In the morning, I saw that it was a large gray wolf. We were frightened at first, but the wolf seemed to act like one of our dogs. It walked next to us, stopping when we had to rest. We tried to walk quickly, but we had not eaten in days. Finally, my sister looked at the wolf and said, "O wolf, please do something for us. We and our children can barely walk with our hunger."

When she spoke, the wolf seemed to listen to her. Then it got up and ran over the hill. Soon, the wolf came running back, and it had blood on its muzzle. It led us over the hill, where we saw a dead buffalo, surrounded by gray wolves. The wolves were not eating. We ate quickly and carried some meat for later. When we were finished, our friend wolf and the other wolves ate the rest of the buffalo.

We kept traveling day after day. One night, we made a camp in a hollow with some willows. That night, we heard noises. Something was coming, and it was breaking sticks as it came. I told my sister and our daughters to get up. The wolf stood up and began howling. Its voice was answered by the voices of wolves all across the valley. The sounds came closer. The wolves came down and began fighting with the thing. We ran out of the valley as far as we could. The next morning, our wolf caught up with us. It lay down to rest when it found us.

We kept traveling, but with the new fallen snow on the ground, we couldn't find the trails of our people. Finally, my sister looked at the wolf and said, "Friend wolf, please help us find the trail of our people." The wolf seemed to listen and ran off. When it came back, it led us across the prairie to an old camp, where we found food that our relatives had left for us. From there, the wolf ran off again. We camped for a few days there. When the wolf returned, it led us to a high hill. When we looked down from the hill, we saw a huge village of our people. The wolf stayed on the hill as we ran down to our people. Our relatives were happy to see us. My sister took a bundle of buffalo meat up the hill to the wolf.

"Now that you have led us to our people, you can go back to your old ways. Thank you," she said.

The next day, she went up the hill again, but the wolf was nowhere to be seen. The meat was gone as well.

(Retold by Storyteller Kevin Strauss, copyright 2006)

Murphy and the Wolf (Ireland)

Long, long ago, a man named Murphy was walking from Dublin to a neighboring town. As the road passed through a dark forest, he heard a rustling in the bushes.

Being a sensible man, he drew his sword and stood very still. A moment later, a huge black wolf sprang from the forest to attack him. But old Murphy used to be a soldier, and each time the wolf lunged, he would fight it off with his shining sword. Finally, bruised and cut, the wolf stumbled back into the darkness of the woods to wait for easier prey.

As the road left the forest, Murphy could see a town in the distance. He also saw his friend walking toward him on the road. "You're not going through the woods, are you," said Murphy.

"I've got to get to Dublin, so I guess I am," said the friend.

"Well then, at least take my sword. There is a terrible wolf in the woods, and if you have a weapon, you can fight him off," said Murphy. The friend thanked Murphy and continued on his way.

The friend had just entered the woods when the wolf sprang from the bushes. The friend drew Murphy's sword. The wolf stopped. It recognized Murphy's sword and realized that Murphy was unarmed. The wolf ran down the road after Murphy.

Suddenly, Murphy heard the sound of a running wolf. He turned to see that black wolf right behind him. Murphy tried to run for the town gates, but the wolf was too fast. It caught Murphy and killed him right there on the road.

(Retold by Storyteller Kevin Strauss, copyright 2006)



Rolf Peterson

Wolf and the Honey Pots (Germany)

Long, long ago, wolf was starving in the forest. He hadn't eaten for weeks. It seemed as if all of the deer and rabbits had left the forests. So in desperation, he began hunting closer and closer to the houses of people.

One night, as he was entering a village, he met a fox. "Tell me, fox, how can I get something to eat? I am starving. You know this place. Tell me where I can find food," said the wolf, as his white teeth glistened in the moonlight.

Fox was worried that if he didn't find the wolf some food, the wolf would eat him.

"Shhhhhh, be quiet and I will show you where we shall get enough food for you. There is a farmer nearby who keeps bees. I have been watching him collect honey each day and carry jars of honey down to his basement. Now that it is dark, we can go there and eat our fill," said fox.

Wolf followed fox along the hedge to the house where the farmer lived. "Here is the cellar window. Push it open and we can go inside," said the fox, "Everyone's asleep. You need not be afraid."

"I'm not afraid," said wolf, "I'm just cautious. A careless wolf is a dead wolf. That's what my father used to say."

Finally, fox pushed open the basement window and crept inside. Wolf followed.

Once inside the cellar, fox and wolf saw four big pots full of honey. "The first pot is mine, since I have already eaten half of it. The rest of the pots are for you," said fox.

Wolf chose a pot and started lapping up the sweet honey. Fox lapped honey from his pot, then he climbed out through the window to be sure he could still fit. Then he would eat some more. Then he went back to the window again.

"Why are you going to the window all the time?" said wolf. "I just want to make sure that the road is still clear. Don't worry, you just go back to eating," said fox.

Wolf was very hungry, so he went back to eating. Once fox was done eating, he decided that it was time to play a trick on wolf. While wolf was busy with his head in a honey pot, fox sneaked out the window to tell the farmer that wolf was in the basement eating all of his honey.

The farmer grabbed a stick and rushed down to the cellar to beat the wolf. "How dare you steal my honey, your four-footed thief!" said the farmer as he beat the wolf with his stick. The wolf ran for the window, but after eating so much honey, he was too fat to get all the way through. He could only get his head and front legs out, not the rest of his body. The farmer gave the wolf such a beating that his howls echoed across the village. Finally, battered and bruised, the wolf pulled himself through the window.

Fox was waiting in the bushes at the edge of the forest when wolf found him. "Why didn't you tell me that the farmer was coming? I should tear you to pieces!" said the wolf.

"It's not my fault," said fox. "When I heard the farmer coming, I had to run myself and didn't have time to warn you."

"You are lying, and I am going to kill you," said the wolf.

"You'll have to outrun the farmer's dog first. Look, here he comes," said fox.

Wolf turned and leapt behind a bush, but when he looked for the dog, it wasn't there, and neither was the fox.

(Retold by Storyteller Kevin Strauss, copyright 2006)

The Mountain Wolf's Gift (Japan)

Long ago, near Kyoto, there lived a young merchant. One night, the merchant was forced to travel through a narrow mountain pass on business. The new moon hid her face from the sky, and the night was inky dark. The merchant held his paper lantern in front of him, and though he was shaking, walked into the forested pass. The trail was narrow but well marked. The trees seemed to be twisted together, blocking out even the faint starlight. There were places in that pass where the trees were so thick that it was frightening even in the daylight. People talked of monsters and ogres in these mountains, but the merchant tried not to think about that as he walked. Then he heard it, up ahead to the right. It was a strange, deep snoring sound.

"That must be the wind," he thought. But the wind doesn't snore. "Perhaps it is a badger or a squirrel," he thought. Finally, he couldn't take it any longer. He had to see what it was or run back to Kyoto in terror, so taking his paper lantern, he stepped off the path and into the forest.

Not far from the path, he found the source of the strange snoring noise. In a small clearing stood a huge black wolf. At first the merchant wanted to run, but he stood still. Then he noticed something strange about the wolf. Its mouth was open, and it kept stretching its neck in and out. But it didn't try to run away at all. Thinking this was very strange, the young merchant walked closer to the wolf.

The wolf, who had been standing, kneeled down on his front legs as if to bow. To the merchant, it looked as if the wolf were begging for help. The wolf opened its mouth wide, and the merchant could see something was caught in the wolf's throat.

"So that's the problem. Here, I'll take it out for you," said the merchant. Slipping one arm out of his kimono, the merchant put his hand down the wolf's throat and pulled out a thick piece of bone. "Next time, you are going to have to be more careful when you eat bones like this," said the merchant. The wolf whined softly in relief and disappeared into the mountain forest.

Several days went by. The young merchant was invited to a harvest celebration in the neighborhood. The guests were in the middle of the feast when everyone heard a deep growl at the door. The host looked out his window and turned ghostly pale. "Everyone, grab your swords. There is a huge black wolf at the door, a wolf at the door," cried the host.

Everyone turned pale and began shaking with fright. But the merchant walked up to the door. Through the window he saw the wolf that he had helped. "Don't worry, I'll take care of this," said the merchant as he walked through the door.

The guests ran to the windows to watch what would happen. They knew that the merchant was unarmed. When the wolf saw the young merchant, he suddenly became as quiet as a kitten. He padded up to the merchant's feet. When the merchant patted its head, it licked his hand in joy.

"You seem much happier without that bone in your throat," said the merchant. Then, as if remembering something, the wolf took something black that he had beside him and dropped it with a thud on the doorstep. As the merchant reached down to examine the gift, the wolf slipped silently away.

The merchant looked closely and saw that the wolf had brought him a huge pheasant. Perhaps it was the wolf's way of thanking the merchant for the favor it had received.

(Retold by Storyteller Kevin Strauss, copyright 2006)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

The stories in this collection have been adapted and retold by Storyteller Kevin Strauss. You may contact him for many more resources on wolf folklore at kevin@naturestory.com. For other written versions of these stories, consult the following sources.

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William Riceg, Kishenehn Wildlife Works