

Keeping Track of Wolves

Subject: Science

Theme: Wolf/Canid Recognition

Duration: 2-3 Class periods, 3-5 days out-of-class preparation

Location: Classroom

OBJECTIVE

Students demonstrate the ability to distinguish between wolves, coyotes and domestic dogs.

BACKGROUND

People are often very confused when they try to distinguish between wolves, coyotes and dogs. In Yellowstone, park rangers record many "wolf" sightings from park visitors each year. Many of these turn out to be sightings of coyotes. Wolves and coyotes are often blamed for the depredation of feral dogs that roam in packs and kill livestock. While most members of the dog family are similar in shape, there are differences in size, color, and behavior that make separating them a fairly easy task. . .with a little patience.

MATERIALS

Wolf, coyote and dog tracks in the form of silhouettes or plaster casts.

Field guide to mammals and animal tracks

A supply of construction paper

Drawing materials

PROCEDURE

Take a survey of your students to determine how many have dogs as pets and how many different breeds are represented. Have your students take measurements of their dogs' tracks. Ask them to try to get tracings or plaster casts of both front and hind feet of their dogs. Their tracks should include all the pads and claw marks. Have them measure the length and width of the tracks with a ruler and record this information on the side. While they should make note of the breed of the dog they measure, this information should not be recorded on the tracks themselves. Students who do not have dogs could either work with other students or measure a neighbor's dog (with permission, of course). They could also be in charge of researching track and size information on wolves and coyotes. Post all the tracks somewhere in the classroom as an exhibit and have the students compare the wolf and coyote tracks with those of the various domestic dogs.

EXTENSIONS

Have the students also measure the weight and stride length of their pet dogs and compare those with the same measurements for wolves and coyotes.

SOURCE

"Getting to Know the Wolf", A Teacher's Guide to the "Wolf Pack" Materials

<http://www.windowsintowonderland.org/wolves/teachers/trackofwolves.htm>