Jacquelyn Fallon

SECTION 3
Social Systems

Subjects:
sociology, biology

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Approximate lesson time:
20–45 minutes

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Materials:
two sheets of paper per student

Needs vs. Wants

Students distinguish between needs and wants and draw a concept map.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES:

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

1 Distinguish between things they need and things they want.
2. Identify how societal values are reflected in their actions.
3. Synthesize social influences that create attitudes about wolves.

VOCABULARY:

needs • wants • attitude • value • belief • action

TEACHER BACKGROUND:

Attitudes about wolves are ingrained deeply in people. From where do we gain our attitudes and values? This activity will help students reflect on the origins of their attitudes and values as well as the impact of their own attitudes and values.

At the base of all social systems are common human beliefs. A belief is a concept or idea accepted as truth by one person or a group. Most social systems (such as economics, politics, religion etc.) result from core beliefs that groups of people share. For example, we have an economic system because a large group of individuals in our society believe we should have a method to measure the exchange of goods and services. We formed

our political system because a large group of individuals believe we should pass laws to maintain order in our society.

Social systems help define our values as a whole society. A value is a deeply held belief that guides a person's behavior or a group decision. Our economic system, laws and religions reflect our desire to guide individual behavior and group decisions about the way we should live. An attitude is a manner, disposition or feeling with regard to a person, topic or thing. Various groups attract individuals holding common beliefs, values and attitudes.

Attitudes About Wolves

Some of our impressions of wolves come from stories heard in childhood, such as *The Three Little Pigs*, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* and, of course, *Little Red Riding Hood*… the same stories our parents heard when they were children. Let's analyze the belief system that was in place while creating a story like *The Three Little Pigs*.

Two pigs, who made their houses of straw or wood, represented those who fail to plan for tomorrow and fail to provide against the misfortunes of the world. These pigs were destroyed by the wolf. The third pig, however, planned ahead, was careful to plan and build with the most advanced

materials, and foiled the wolf. The story is not truly about wolves but about the virtues of planning ahead. The wolf is used as a metaphor for a big, dangerous world that challenges poor planners.

Human Language and the Wolf

Human language reflects how we think about the wolf:

- "Wolfing down food" indicates eating quickly until one is engorged.
- Being a "wolf in sheep's clothing" indicates an untrustworthy person.
- A person is said to "cry wolf" if they raise an alarm when there is no danger.
- In the Middle Ages, farming peasants called any threat or famine "wolf."
- In World War II, German submarine attack convoys were referred to as "wolf packs," and Hitler's retreat was "the wolf's lair."

Using such references and idioms demonstrates our assumptions about the world—and about wolves.

History of Human Attitudes Toward the Wolf

Some of the attitudes people have toward wolves may have originated when our Anglo-American ancestors' culture changed from hunter-gatherers to herders. The wolf was no longer a fellow hunter but a predator that could kill a flock of sheep in one night, potentially destroying a family's livelihood: food, shelter and clothing.

Daniel Cox, naturalexposures.com

National Science Education Standards

Unifying Concepts and Processes

Systems, order, and organization

Evidence, models, and explanation

Change, constancy, and measurement

Science in Personal and Social Perspectives (5–8)

Risks and benefits

Science in Personal and Social Perspectives (9–12)

Natural Resources

Environmental Quality

By the time North America was first being colonized, much of Europe had already exterminated wolves. The last wolf was killed in Scotland by 1743, and in Ireland by 1776. When Europeans immigrated to North America, they brought their beliefs and attitudes about the wolf with them. Consequently, many of the colonists took the same action against wolves here as their ancestors had taken toward wolves in Europe.

Young statesman John Adams wrote, "when colonists arrived, the whole continent was one dismal wilderness, the haunt of wolves, and more so of savage men. Now, the forests are removed, lands covered with fields of corn, orchards bending with fruit and the magnificent home... of civilized people."

The Extermination of the Wolf

President Teddy Roosevelt encouraged the extermination of wolves. The main method of mass extermination was poisoning. Carcasses of meat were laced with the poison strychnine and left out to lure wolves. The wolves would eat the meat and soon die. Scavenging animals such as coyotes, weasels and birds of prey also fed on the poisoned meat and died. Other methods of eliminating wolves included digging wolf pups out of their dens and strangling them, dousing wolves with kerosene and setting them on fire, and wiring wolves' jaws shut so they starved to death. In Montana during a 35-year period, 80,000 wolves were killed.

In 1974, the Endangered Species Act made it illegal to shoot or harm wolves, but that did not stop all killing of wolves. Some people participated in the "Three S" method of eliminating wolves: Shoot, Shovel and Shut Up, meaning that the person would shoot a wolf, bury it and not tell anyone about it.

The wolf and associated imagery are clearly present in our culture. Whether we are aware of it or not, our beliefs and attitudes spur our actions. Students don't often realize how their belief systems are reflected in their actions. This activity (1) helps students to think about things they desire and value in life and (2) challenges them to diagram how their actions, directly or indirectly, affect wolves.

ACTIVITIES:

PART ONE:

1. Ask the students to get out a blank sheet of paper.
2. On one side of the paper, they should make a list that answers the question: "What do you have to have in order to live?" Encourage the students to make a lengthy list—at least 50 items. Instruct the students to discuss what they have written down.
3. On the other side of the paper, they should draw a line that divides the page in half. Label one column, "Needs." Label the other column, "Wants."
4. Discuss with students the following distinction:
   need: an urgent necessity
   want: a desire

5. Tell students to rewrite each word on their list on the other side of the page, placing it in the correct column. Encourage students to be really honest in distinguishing between the items they really need and the ones they really want.
   (If necessary, the teacher may require students to put half of their items on each list.)
6. When they are ready, discuss the following:
   • How did you decide where to put each item?
   • How do you know if you need or want a thing?
   • Why do we want things?
7. Next, tell the students to consider the items on their "needs" list. How many of these could they really do without? Ask them to cross off things they think they could do without. They must cross off at least half of the items on their list.
8. Discuss:
   • What did you cross off? Why?
   • Was it hard to choose which things to cross off? Why?
   • How would needs and wants lists differ for people living in another country?
   • Where does family fit on your list? Religion? Wildlife?
   • If someone who did not know us came and read all of our needs lists, what conclusions would they draw about the values of our society?

Optional: Ask students to choose the most important three items from their needs list. Which three things could they absolutely not do without? Have students share their top three aloud.

PART TWO:

1. Ask students if their parents or other family members would have listed the same needs and wants. If not, why not? What needs and wants do they have in common with their families? Who and what else affect the needs and wants that are important to you?

2. Ask students to give examples of how their values affect their actions (it may be helpful to review the definition of *value* here). Students may need prompting: Do they value their personal health and therefore get regular exercise? Do they value justice and therefore participate in a student judicial committee? Do they value popularity and therefore dress like the "in" crowd? Do they value trees and a pretty environment and therefore recycle? Discuss as many examples as possible.

3. Direct students to get out another sheet of paper. Instruct them to write the word *me* in the center of the page. In the upper left side of the page, write the word *society* and in the lower right of the page write the word *wolves.* Using words, illustrations, arrows, boxes, etc., have students create a concept map illustrating the ways that the world affects them and how they affect wolves.

4. Discuss what the students have drawn.

ASSESSMENT:

Teacher may collect the needs/wants page and the concept maps.

EXTENSIONS:

1. Distribute copies of some stakeholder position statements from Appendix III to the students. Have them identify statements or ideas that express wants that the group has and identify needs the group sees. What does this tell you about the values the group has?

2. Write these words on the board:

eagle	frog	rabbit
fish	bat	kitten
snake	deer	

   • Have each student write down the first word that pops into their mind for each of these words.

   • Collect answers aloud, and write responses next to words on the board.

   • Analyze responses. Positive versus negative, separate fact/fiction.
   –Which words written represent positive attributes of the animal?
   –Which are negative?

   • Go through the lists once more, this time asking the harder questions:
   –Where do these opinions come from?
   –Are these opinions based on fact or fiction?
   –Are any attributes given to the animals human-given attributes?

3. Students may research words and expressions that use animal terms and see if they can understand the origins and/or meanings.

4. Students may research the historical examples of attitudes toward the wolf by reading newspaper articles of the past.