

# ACTIVITY: Fact or Myth

Time: 30 minutes

Supplies (for entire class): white board, dry erase marker, Fact or Myth Statements.

## Introduction

A general class discussion is important to help students understand the facts about wolves as well as the sources behind their, and others', opinions on wolves. This activity is especially important to establish a baseline of understanding with your students at some point prior to starting the Diverse Perspectives portion of this module. Many of the myths about wolves have been passed down through stories and the media's portrayal of these animals. Some important sources or factors that influence opinions on wildlife include mythology, fairytales, books, movies, documentaries, family occupation, recreational interests, geographic location (i.e. ranching community vs. urban area and vicinity to present wolf populations).

Another important concept to cover in this activity is **anthropomorphism**, or attributing human characteristics to nonhumans. Anthropomorphism can lead to the assumption that nonhumans have a conscience and that there are human-like motivations behind behaviors rather than purely instinctual motives. While a list of facts and myths is included for this activity, it is also encouraged to discuss some of the ideas mentioned by students.

## Directions

1. Have three headings on a classroom white board titled "Positive", "Neutral", and "Negative." Begin by having students take turns saying words or phrases that come to mind when they think of wolves. Write these phrases under the appropriate headings.
2. Once the students have had a chance to respond, look at the board to determine the general perception students have been exposed to about wolves. It is not surprising for the lists of phrases to vary greatly depending on your state or community setting. Select a few of the words or phrases and discuss as a class what sources or factors might be responsible for giving us that particular mindset. Talk to the students about the concept of anthropomorphism.
3. Read the facts or myths statements out loud to the class to have them decide whether the statement is a fact or myth. Then read the explanation behind the statements.

## Discussion Ideas

Pick a few statements that students identified incorrectly. Can they think back to identify the source/s that misled them?

Can students give examples of anthropomorphism in everyday life?

Can students give examples of how the

media or their upbringing has affected their perceptions of other species besides wolves?

Now that the activity is complete, how do the students feel about their initial beliefs about wolves?

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## WOLF FACT AND MYTH STATEMENTS

1. Wolves prey on **ungulates** (hoofed mammals).
  - a. Fact. Wolves are carnivores and prey predominately on the ungulate species in their area, such as deer, elk, and moose. They will also eat birds and smaller mammals, **carrion** (dead animals), berries, and insects. (International Wolf Center <http://www.wolf.org/wolves/learn/basic/faqs/faq.asp#18>)
2. Wolves prey on livestock (cattle, sheep, etc.)
  - a. Fact. Wolves, as well as other wildlife species, will prey on livestock. In 2005 in the continental U.S., 5% percent of cattle losses were from predators. 0.11% of cattle losses were from wolf depredation. Vultures killed twice as many cattle as wolves, domestic dogs killed 5 times as many cattle as wolves, and coyotes kill 22 times as many cattle as wolves. Keep in mind, however, the current wolf ranges in the continental U.S. compared to the ranges of the other species mentioned. (Defenders of Wildlife: [http://www.defenders.org/programs\\_and\\_policy/wildlife\\_conservation/solutions/wolf\\_compensation\\_trust/wolf\\_predation\\_and\\_livestock\\_losses.php](http://www.defenders.org/programs_and_policy/wildlife_conservation/solutions/wolf_compensation_trust/wolf_predation_and_livestock_losses.php))
3. Wolves are a threat to my safety.
  - a. Myth. Wolves typically avoid humans. There have been 28 reports of wolf aggression towards people in North America in the past 110 years. There has only been one case in recorded history of a wolf attack resulting in the death of a human in North America. On the other hand, bites from domestic dogs account for 2 human deaths per year in the United States. Thought wolves should not be considered a threat to your safety, it is important to remember that wolves are wild animals and people need to keep a reasonable distance from all wild animal species. (International Wolf Center: <http://www.wolf.org/wolves/learn/basic/faqs/faq.asp#27> and Defenders of Wildlife:

[http://www.defenders.org/programs\\_and\\_policy/wildlife\\_conservation/imperiled\\_species/wolves/wolf\\_recovery\\_efforts/northeast\\_wolves/myths\\_facts.php](http://www.defenders.org/programs_and_policy/wildlife_conservation/imperiled_species/wolves/wolf_recovery_efforts/northeast_wolves/myths_facts.php))

4. If left unchecked, wolves will eliminate the ungulate populations in my area.
  - a. Myth. Compared to hunters, vehicles, and habitat removal, wolves have a relatively small impact on the sizes of ungulate herds. Wolves kill weak, sick, or injured animals in a herd. By reducing the number of weak individuals, some say that wolves make a herd stronger. A dwindling ungulate population means less food for wolves, so their population would also decrease, allowing the ungulate population to rebound if there were minimal human influences on the herd. (Trophic Links: Predation and Parasitism  
<http://www.globalchange.umich.edu/globalchange1/current/lectures/predation/predation.html>)
5. Because wolves are protected by either state or federal law, I can't do anything if a wolf attacks my cattle or pet.
  - a. Myth. Depending on whether or not wolves are protected under state or federal law, landowners do have options for controlling nuisance wolves. Agencies will also remove individual wolves or entire packs if there are ongoing depredation issues. Refer to your state's wolf management plan to find out specifics in your area.
6. Wolves are dangerous to my pet dog even though my pet dog is not a threat to wolves.
  - a. Myth. It is true that wolves see other canid species, like domestic dogs and coyotes, as competitors and might attack these species as a means of protecting their territory, food, or themselves. However, domestic dogs can transmit fatal diseases, such as parvovirus, to wolves through feces. (Disease, Domestic Dogs, and the Ethiopian Wolf. Chapter 4. Laurenson, K., F. Shiferaw, and C. Sillero-Zubiri.  
<http://www.canids.org/PUBLICAT/EWACTPLN/EWAP%20Chapter%204%20Disease%20and%20Domestic%20Dogs.PDF>)
7. Domestic dogs are descendants of wolves.
  - a. Fact. Over thousands of years, wolves were selectively bred to co-exist with humans, which resulted in domesticated dogs. This does not mean that a wolf would make a great family pet. Wolves are wild animals and behave differently than domestic animals. The traits selected to create dogs cannot be instilled into a wolf over the course of its life. (Origin of dogs traced. BBC News. 22 November, 2002. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/2498669.stm>)