

Wolf Reintroduction Lesson Plan
10-04-2002

Need:

Mexican wolves, once common in southern Arizona were hunted to local extinction one hundred years ago. Their reintroduction has been a source of controversy and debate. It is important for students to understand that often there is no correct answer to ecological questions. Instead, answers require a careful weighing of the available evidence and the use of personal judgment.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Describe the major issues surrounding wolf reintroduction in Arizona
- Generate an informed opinion about a rapidly evolving, local environmental issue through role-playing

Connections to Unit and other disciplines

This activity connects to what students have learned about food webs, habitat and predator-prey relationships. Connections to other skills involve public speaking, careful listening and critical thinking.

Prior Knowledge:

Students should have some understanding of a top predators' role in ecosystems, endangered species concerns and habitat requirements of large animals such as wolves.

Introduction:

Briefly review the class reading from the previous week related to wolves. Ask for questions. Ask the student's opinion of wolf reintroduction. What is the biggest challenge facing wolf reintroduction? Is there a best solution? Ask the students to record their opinion on a piece of paper and in one of two sentences, why they feel that way.

To illustrate the complexity of an ecological question such as wolf reintroduction, we are going to build on what we've learned so far about ecosystems and the reading about wolves to do a role-playing exercise. Explain to students that we will present them with a realistic set of circumstances related to wolves in Arizona. They will be playing the roles of concerned citizens at a community meeting. They need to remember to be respectful and to listen carefully to each others comments and concerns so that they can make an effect case either for or against wolf reintroduction.

Content and Procedures:

Divide the class into six groups. Pass out the scenario page to each. Ask someone to read the paragraph aloud to the class and show the overhead of the Catalina Mountains district of the Coronado National Forest. Ask for questions.

Pass out the character descriptions to each group. Ask them to quietly read about their characters and to reflect on what they might say in response to the wolf scenario. Also, ask the groups to make a sign to place on their desks that says their group affiliation (e.g. "U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologists"). Stress to the students that their characters are at this meeting because they have strong opinions about wolves.

Structure the debate so that each group introduces themselves to the other groups and states briefly their position on the issue.

Ask various questions of the groups about the plan:

Who has concerns? Who is for wolf reintroduction? Why? Are there comments on this position? How many wolves should be introduced? What are the advantages/disadvantages of the Catalina Mountains as wolf habitat? If given a choice to only preserve and protect endangered wolves or antelope, which one would they prefer? Why?

Summary/Conclusions/Closure

Collect the scenario papers etc. Ask the students to reconsider their original opinions about wolf reintroduction. Did anyone change his or her opinion? Why? Did having additional information about various citizens concerns make personal decision easier or harder? Ask them finally to suggest ways that each of the concerned groups might be satisfied by a compromise wolf reintroduction plan.

As an extension:

Students investigate this issue further using newspapers, scientific literature and the Internet to support their opinions. They would then compose letters to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or to the U.S. Congress to comment on current government efforts to reintroduce Mexican wolves to Arizona.