

# TEACHING TIPS

Getting to Know the Wolf  
provided by Joe Fontane

from the Wolves and Humans Box

CA Teacher's Guide to the "Wolf-Pac" Materials  
A School Outreach Project of The National Park Service

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## **ACTIVITY: IL-4**

**THEME GROUP:** Wolf Behavior

**ACTIVITY:** Group Grok

**MAIN SUBJECT:** Science/Biology/Sociology

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will define and discuss the concepts of social organization and group dynamics as applied to both wolf and human societies.

**METHOD:** Students will compare and contrast the make-up and social dynamics of groups within their school with that of a wolf population.

**BACKGROUND:** Within any given wilderness or ecosystem a wolf population is broken down into various packs of different sizes depending on such factors as an area's habitat, how habitat is arranged, the prey base available, suitable den sites, climate and inter- and intra-pack dynamics. Human populations are similarly divided but according to very different factors. Within a class or school there are any number of social groups or cliques formed for various reasons. These groups have different degrees of permanence. Your immediate family is a long-term social group while most school friendships last for a much shorter time. Within each human social group there is usually some structure akin to the dominance hierarchy present among wolves. These human pecking orders may function quite differently, but they provide some form of group organization.

**MATERIALS:** A class or school roster, flip charts or butcher paper for diagramming.

**PROCEDURE:** Students will work individually or in small randomly selected groups on this activity. Introduce the idea of pack structure and behavior to your students. Talk about how packs are organized within a large geographic area, how different packs establish and defend territories, and how new packs and territories are formed (see Mech, 1970). Ask students if they are aware of any divisions within their school or class. Discuss with them the reasons why these different groups exist, how they are organized, how new groups are formed, how members change their status within a group, or how they move from one group to another. Compare human social organization to that of a wolf society. Tell the students they are going to study "pack" structure and dynamics within their own society. Arrange with another school to have students from your class study group social dynamics among younger children. Tell them that without using names of individuals (they should invent a number scheme), they are to arrange the individual children they study into groups based on their friendships with other students.

They are to arrange each group according to its numbers, its hierarchy (if it can be determined), observable intra-group relationships, and relationships with other groups. If some people are members of more than one group, students

should note this and determine that person's status within each group. Loners who seem to belong to no group should also be noted. Stress to your students the importance of not using names as the identification of individuals could be very damaging to those people in certain circumstances. Allow students about a week or 10 days to work on this. Set aside 1-2 hours of class time some day to have the students present and discuss their results.

**EXTENSION:** Once this is done initially, students could keep track of their class structure over the entire school year. Two charts could then be compared to see what changes had taken place over time. This could then be compared to an actual study of wolves in an area like Isle Royale where pack histories have been documented over a number of years.

**EVALUATION:** Students could be graded on the completeness of their work and their understanding of the terms and concepts associated with wolf social behavior.

Grades: 9-12

Subjects: Biological Science/Sociology/Animal Behavior

Duration: 10-14 days preparation (homework), 1-2 hours class time

Group Size: any

Setting: classroom or homework assignment

Key Vocabulary: dominance hierarchy, ecosystem, habitat, prey base