



Teacher's Guide

Competition & Cooperation: Bears vs. Wolves

NATURE Science Education Series

Grade Levels:

7-12

Subject Areas:

Life Sciences

Biology

Synopsis:

This episode introduces the dominant predators in Yellowstone: grizzly bears and wolves. Several sequences show that wolf packs, because of their cooperative nature, are able to defend their carcasses against grizzly thieves. When the bear is large and powerful, however, they turn away. Wolf and grizzly mating rituals are compared as are the lives of grizzly bear cubs and wolf pups. Viewers observe several scenes of wolves on the hunt and a remarkable sequence of an elk mother distracting a wolf pack from her unprotected baby. High definition photography of Yellowstone in winter and spring highlights the environmental conditions that make the park an ideal habitat for both predators.

Learning Objectives: Students will:

- Compare and contrast the behavior of these dominant predators.
- Understand that favorable environmental conditions are necessary for predators to survive.
- Understand the significance of competition and cooperation in predator/prey interactions.

Vocabulary:

carcass, winterkill, dominant predators, alpha female, alpha pair, omnivore

Pre-Viewing Discussion:

Why do grizzly bears thrive in Yellowstone National Park? What environmental conditions support their survival?

What other animals thrive in Yellowstone?

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What animal was once ruthlessly hunted in Yellowstone? Why was this animal so threatened?

Is a wolf any match for a grizzly? What makes you think so?

Post-Viewing Discussion:

How do the behaviors of wolves and grizzlies differ? How does this affect their success as predators?

How has the re-introduction of wolves in Yellowstone affected grizzly behavior? How do wolves and grizzlies compete for the position of dominant predator?

When are wolves clearly the dominant predator in Yellowstone? Why are they so successful at this time of year?

How do the mating habits of grizzlies and wolves differ? How do the ways they rear their young differ? How are these aspects of their behavior related to their success as predators?

Further Activities:

Find the whole story of why wolves were hunted to the point of extinction, and then re-introduced into Yellowstone.

Further investigate the conflict that sometimes occurs between two grizzlies. Determine if these conflicts are always over food.

Research the size and strength of most grizzly bears. Compare these measurements to those of the largest grizzlies ever found. As part of your research, find out why grizzlies sometimes attack humans.

Determine how a wolf becomes the alpha male in a pack.

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