

Photo
MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

Educator Version

The Law for the Wolves

Poetry of Rights and Responsibilities

For the complete photos with media resources, visit:
<http://education.nationalgeographic.com/media/law-wolves/>

“The Law for the Wolves” (sometimes called “The Law of the Jungle”) appears in The Second Jungle Book, by Rudyard Kipling. The poem outlines the rights and responsibilities of wolves in the Seeonee wolf pack, which includes the orphaned boy Mowgli.

Now this is the Law of the [Jungle](#)—as old and as true as the sky;
And the Wolf that shall keep it may [prosper](#), but the Wolf that shall break it must die.

As the creeper that [girdles](#) the tree-trunk the Law runneth forward and back—
For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the [Pack](#).

Wash daily from nose-tip to tail-tip; drink deeply, but never too deep;
And remember the night is for [hunting](#), and forget not the day is for sleep.

The jackal may follow the Tiger, but, Cub, when thy whiskers are grown,
Remember the Wolf is a hunter—go forth and get food of [thine](#) own.

Keep peace with the Lords of the Jungle—the Tiger, the Panther, the Bear;
And trouble not Hathi the Silent, and [mock](#) not the Boar in his [lair](#).

When Pack meets with Pack in the Jungle, and neither will go from the trail,
Lie down till the leaders have spoken—it may be fair words shall [prevail](#).

When [ye](#) fight with a Wolf of the Pack, ye must fight him alone and afar,
Lest others take part in the [quarrel](#), and the Pack be [diminished](#) by [war](#).

The Lair of the Wolf is his [refuge](#), and where he has made him his home,
Not even the Head Wolf may enter, not even the [Council](#) may come.

The Lair of the Wolf is his refuge, but where he has digged it too plain,
The Council shall send him a message, and so he shall change it again.

If ye kill before midnight, be silent, and wake not the woods with your [bay](#),
[Lest](#) ye frighten the deer from the [crops](#), and the brothers go empty away.

Ye may kill for yourselves, and your mates, and your cubs as they need, and ye can;
But kill not for [pleasure](#) of killing, and seven times never kill Man.

If ye [plunder](#) his Kill from a weaker, [devour](#) not all in [thy pride](#);
Pack-Right is the right of the [meanest](#); so leave him the head and the [hide](#).

The Kill of the Pack is the **meat** of the Pack. Ye must eat where it lies;
And no one may carry away of that meat to his lair, or he dies.

The Kill of the Wolf is the meat of the Wolf. He may do what he will,
But, till he has given **permission**, the Pack may not eat of that Kill.

Cub-Right is the right of the Yearling. From all of his Pack he may **claim**
Full-**gorge** when the killer has eaten; and none may refuse him the same.

Lair-Right is the right of the Mother. From all of her year she may claim
One **haunch** of each kill for her **litter**, and none may **deny** her the same.

Cave-Right is the right of the Father—to hunt by himself for his own.
He is freed of all calls to the Pack; he is judged by the Council alone.

Because of his age and his **cunning**, because of his **gripe** and his **paw**,
In all that the **Law** leaveth open, the word of the Head Wolf is Law.

Now these are the Laws of the Jungle, and many and mighty are they;
But the head and the **hoof** of the Law and the haunch and the hump is—**Obey!**

Instructional Ideas

Consult Common Core ELA Literacy Standard 9-10.1: *Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.*

Consult Common Core ELA Literacy Standard 9-10.2: *Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.*

- Review the distinction between rights and responsibilities.
 - Rights are certain freedoms that are protected by a community or society.
 - Responsibilities are the duties that an individual has to a community or society.
- Discuss how Kipling presents the role of the individual in society in “The Law for the Wolves.”
 - Discussion questions about issues the poem raises about rights and responsibilities, and how the poem may allude to British colonialism, are presented in the Questions tab.

QUESTIONS

- “The Law for the Wolves” is about an individual’s rights and responsibilities in a community. What are some rights and responsibilities in the Seeonee wolf pack regarding food? Shelter? Interaction with wolves and other animals? Can you identify lines in the poem to support your answers?
Answers will vary! Some answers may include:
Food: Fairness seems to be a right regarding food in the Seeonee pack (“The Kill of the Wolf is the meat of the Wolf. He may do what he will”). Moderation (“drink deeply, but never too deep”) is a responsibility.
Shelter: Again, independence is a major individual right (“The Lair of the Wolf is his refuge”). Respect for the safety of the pack (“where he has digged it too plain/The Council shall send him a message, and so he shall change it again”) is a primary responsibility.
Interactions with Others: Individual wolves may determine their own relationship with other wolves (“When ye fight with a Wolf of the Pack, ye must fight him alone and afar”), but have a responsibility not to involve others (“Lest others take part in the quarrel, and the Pack be diminished by war”). Individuals have less independence in relationships with other members of the jungle community (“Keep peace with the Lords of the Jungle”) and groups of wolves (“Lie down till the leaders have spoken”).

- India was the “jewel in the crown” of the British Empire for nearly 100 years. Many readers interpret Kipling’s stories as metaphors for the British colonial presence in India. What ideas in “The Law for the Wolves” might be interpreted as colonial attitudes? Can you identify lines in the poem to support your answers?

Answers will vary! The poem presents an utter **trust in existing authority** (“Lie down till the leaders have spoken—it may be fair words shall prevail”), culminating in that final order: Obey!

Kipling also presents **stereotypical gender roles** (“Cave-Right is the right of the Father” and “Lair-Right is the right of the Mother”), where the males are providers and the females are caregivers.

These paternalistic attitudes could be interpreted to support the ideas in another, less-allegorical poem of Kipling’s: “The White Man’s Burden.”

FAST FACTS

The Second Jungle Book takes place in Seoni (which Kipling writes as “Seeonee”), Madhya Pradesh, India. Parts of Seoni are forested, and home to national parks and wildlife preserves. Kipling used many of Seoni’s native animals as characters in *The Second Jungle Book*. Some of these animals are now endangered, while others are as abundant as when Kipling was writing in the 19th century.

- Mowgli is a human child raised by the Seeonee wolf pack. (Humans are not an endangered species.)
- Akela is the “Head Wolf,” the leader of the Seeonee pack. Most wolves in the pack are defined by their relationship to Mowgli—Father Wolf, Brother Grey. Akela, as well as Mowgli’s adopted mother, Raksha, are exceptions. (Indian wolves are not endangered in Seoni, although they are elsewhere in India.)
- Baloo is a sloth bear and friend to Mowgli. (Sloth bears are a vulnerable species.)
- Bagheera is a black panther and friend to Mowgli. (Leopards—including black panthers—are not endangered in Seoni, although they are elsewhere in India.)
- Kaa is an Indian rock python and hesitant friend to Mowgli. (Indian rock pythons are not endangered.)
- Hathi is an Indian elephant and friend to Mowgli. (Indian elephants are an endangered subspecies of Asian elephant.)
- Shere Khan is a Bengal tiger, and the primary antagonist of *The Second Jungle Book*. (Bengal tigers are an endangered subspecies of tiger.)
- Tabaqui is a golden jackal and antagonist to Mowgli and his friends. (Golden jackals are not endangered.)
- The Bandar-log are gray langur monkeys who are uneasy allies and sometimes antagonists to Mowgli and his friends. (Gray langur monkeys are not endangered.)

VOCABULARY

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
abundant	<i>adjective</i>	in large amounts.
allegory	<i>noun</i>	story in which the characters and events are used to symbolize deeper or more profound meaning.
antagonist	<i>noun</i>	enemy or adversary.
bay	<i>noun</i>	deep, prolonged howl.
cave	<i>noun</i>	underground chamber that opens to the surface. Cave entrances can be on land or in water.
claim	<i>verb</i>	to demand as a right.
colonialism	<i>noun</i>	type of government where a geographic area is ruled by a foreign power.
council	<i>noun</i>	group of people selected to act in an advisory, administrative, or legislative capacity.
crop	<i>noun</i>	agricultural produce.
cunning	<i>noun</i>	skill, usually in manipulation or trickery.

deny	<i>verb</i>	to refuse or not allow
devour	<i>verb</i>	to consume.
diminish	<i>verb</i>	to become smaller or less important.
endangered species	<i>noun</i>	organism threatened with extinction.
girdle	<i>verb</i>	to enclose or encircle.
gorge	<i>verb</i>	to greedily stuff oneself with food.
gripe	<i>noun</i>	(poetic) grip or clutch.
haunch	<i>noun</i>	hindquarter (upper leg and loin) of an animal.
hide	<i>noun</i>	leather skin of an animal.
hoof	<i>noun</i>	thick, horny covering of the feet of animals such as horses and cattle.
hunt	<i>verb</i>	to pursue and kill an animal, usually for food.
jungle	<i>noun</i>	tropical ecosystem filled with trees and underbrush.
lair	<i>noun</i>	den or resting place of a wild animal.
law	<i>noun</i>	public rule.
lest	<i>noun</i>	(<i>conjunction</i>) for fear that.
litter	<i>noun</i>	group of offspring produced at one birth.
mean	<i>adjective</i>	low in rank or status.
meat	<i>noun</i>	animal flesh eaten as food.
metaphor	<i>noun</i>	word or phrase used to represent something else.
mock	<i>verb</i>	to ridicule or make fun of.
obey	<i>verb</i>	to follow rules, ideas, or instructions.
pack	<i>noun</i>	group of animals, usually arranged in a family-like structure.
paternalistic	<i>adjective</i>	having to do with the style of management where an authority behaves like a father governing his children, with little independence or respect.
paw	<i>noun</i>	foot of an animal with claws.
permission	<i>noun</i>	authorization to do something.
pleasure	<i>noun</i>	enjoyment or satisfaction.
plunder	<i>verb</i>	to rob or steal.
prevail	<i>verb</i>	to succeed or prove superior.
pride	<i>noun</i>	high opinion of oneself and one's abilities.
prosper	<i>verb</i>	to be successful.
quarrel	<i>verb</i>	to dispute or argue.
refuge	<i>noun</i>	shelter or protection from danger.
thine	<i>noun</i>	(<i>pronoun</i>) your (second-person singular, possessive).

thy	<i>noun</i>	(<i>pronoun</i>) your or thine (second person singular, possessive).
war	<i>noun</i>	large-scale armed conflict.
ye	<i>plural noun</i>	(<i>pronoun</i>) you (second person plural).

For Further Exploration

Articles & Profiles

- Poetry Foundation: Rudyard Kipling

Books

- Rudyard Kipling: The Second Jungle Book

Instructional Content

- PBS: The Story of India—British Attitudes Towards India

Websites

- Madhya Pradesh Tourism: Pench National Park



© 1996–2015 National Geographic Society. All rights reserved.