NEWS BREAK

Article: Coast Salish tribes carefully bred now extinct woolly dog, DNA confirms

Section: MAIN, A1

Sunday's News Break selects an article from Sunday, December 17, 2023, of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

You are encouraged to modify this lesson to fit the needs of your students. For example, some teachers might use this as a take-home assignment and others might read and answer the questions in a small group or larger, class discussion.

*Please be sure to preview all NIE content before using it in your classroom to ensure it is appropriate for your students.*

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Objectives:

Students will learn about the wooly dog and its history with the Coast Salish tribes. They will talk about the Native perspective of the dog’s fur being a gift, that it’s a relative that they cared about and protected. They’ll discuss the stories and traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation and share their own family stories. They’ll talk about the importance of returning cultural artifacts back to the Indigenous people and the importance of Indigenous people connecting and returning to ancestral traditions that were lost, due to colonization.
Pre-Reading Discussion:

• What do you think the article will be about, using these pictures?

• Are there any clues? What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using context clues? A context clue is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the identities and meanings of unknown words.

“Imagine being able to receive the gift of wool fiber, being able to learn to weave that into yarn, into an entity, or a blanket or robe that you could wrap yourself in the coldest of winter, and feel the warmth of those prayers.”
Comprehension Questions:

1. The pelt of a Coast Salish woolly dog named Mutton, who died in 1859, is housed in the Smithsonian collections. DNA analysis shows Mutton had only _____% ancestry from European dogs.
2. Ancient DNA from the pelt of a fluffy white dog named Mutton is revealing new details about the woolly dog, an extinct breed that was cared for and raised by the women of the __________ __________ tribal nations in the Pacific Northwest.
3. The small dogs — called “sqwemá:y,” “ske’-ha” and “sqwbaý” in some Coast Salish languages — were fed a special diet. What did they eat and what did they do with their fur?
4. For thousands of years, woolly dogs were cherished as family members and raised on islands or kept in pens. Why?
5. The last woolly dogs disappeared around the end of the 19th century, but they have been kept alive. How?
6. The new analysis of DNA from Mutton’s pelt, which is housed at the Smithsonian Institution, confirms the _______________ _______________ of Coast Salish people.
7. Woolly dogs split from other dogs in North America somewhere between _______ and _______ years ago, the data show.
8. Mutton had only 16% ancestry from European dogs — a tiny contribution that, to researchers who study ancient dog DNA, signifies what?
9. The DNA evidence, combined with the oral history from Coast Salish elders, also makes it clear that the prevailing explanation for the decline of dog-wool weaving fails to grapple with the dark role of _______________.
10. The commonly offered explanation is that machine-woven blankets were more convenient and replaced ones made by hand. But the study authors note that the people who cared for woolly dogs were decimated by ____________ brought by colonizers, and Coast Salish elders shared stories of active efforts to extinguish cultural identity and authority among the survivors.
11. The longhair pelt was rediscovered within the Smithsonian’s collection in the early 2000s. Audrey Lin, an evolutionary molecular biologist then at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History with a keen interest in ancient _______ ________, learned of it during the pandemic and hoped to study it.
12. Studies show that dogs arrived in the Americas alongside people, around __________ years ago. But they vanished.
13. Today, there are only the faintest genetic traces of these pre-colonial dogs in modern-day dogs, and Lin wanted to know why and how they went ____________.
14. Mutton’s pelt gave researchers what?
15. Epidemics are estimated to have killed more than _____% of Indigenous people in villages across British Columbia.
16. In 1858, more than ___________ miners arrived during the Fraser River gold rush, adding to the pressure.

Discussion Questions (small/large groups), Journal Prompts or Essay Questions:

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first, I thought ______________, but now I think _____________?
- What things did you already know from prior experience?

“It’s not just a dog — it’s a relative. It has enormous spiritual power, conveyed in its wool,” Pavel said. “Imagine being able to receive the gift of wool fiber, being able to learn to weave that into yarn, into an entity, or a blanket or robe that you could wrap yourself in the coldest of winter, and feel the warmth of those prayers. That’s how we look at it, and we can now enjoy a scientific view, as well.”

- What do you think about how they talk about the dog’s fur being a gift, that it’s a relative that they care about and protect?

Steven Point, a grand chief of the Stó:lō Nation, had long heard stories about the woolly dog. His mother, Point Bolton, remembers her grandmother telling stories of raising the woolly dogs to weave blankets. When he learned that there was a pelt of a woolly dog, he was astonished. “This was like a miracle, something from our past that was all of a sudden discovered,” Point said. “You sit by your grandparents’ side, and you hear these stories … To find someone, somehow has got one of these dogs — what a happy moment that was. It’s kind of like a confirmation that everything the elders told you was true.”

- What are stories that have been passed down in your family?
- Why was Point so happy when he heard about the woolly dog at the Smithsonian?

The Smithsonian researchers hope to bring Mutton to the Coast Salish region, where the people are now reclaiming many of those traditions. Debra Sparrow, a self-taught weaver of the Musqueam Nation, said that it was only when she began to learn weaving that her grandfather, who was born in 1898, told her about the woolly dog and described how wool would be made by combining dog hair, mountain goat wool and fibers from stinging nettle. “I said, ‘Why didn’t you tell me?’ and he said, ‘You didn’t ask,’” Sparrow said.

- Do you think it’s important for Native artifacts to be brought home to their tribes? Why or why not?
“The assimilation process had done its job well … They were told by the residential school: You’re not allowed to do anything that allows you to identify with your past.” In the new year, she is starting on her most ambitious project yet: She will weave a dog-wool blanket using all the old methods she learned from her grandfather. She’ll create dyes from lichens and mushrooms. She’ll have to use a different dog’s hair, possibly a husky, to substitute for the woolly dog. “For the first time in my entire life, I’m nervous,” Sparrow said. “I’m finally ready to challenge and connect to my ancestors, and say, ‘Let’s do this.’ ”

- Why is it important for Indigenous people to connect with ancestral traditions that were lost, due to colonization?

News Break is posted to the Web on Tuesday. Please share this NIE News Break program with other teachers. To sign-up for the print replica for your class, please register online or call 206/652-6290 or toll-free 1-888/775-2655.

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