

Figure 1

How Dog Joined the Family

[1] Fifteen thousand years ago, people left behind the life of wild creatures. They learned to plant, to cook, to sew, to talk, and even to write. They made medicines, sailed rafts, and made tools that could dig, cut, and kill. Most important, they lived together, though not yet as a village or even a tribe.

[2] One group of five families had lived close enough for long enough that they had come to accept a certain connection with each other. Fighting was rare. The water supply was large enough for all, and there were plentiful fruit trees and large, slow rodents. Several times, hunting parties formed to bring down larger prey. This was divided -- that is, torn apart -- by the families, who were equal enough in strength that no one ended up with much more than anyone else.

[3] The greatest danger was from the wild wolves that stalked the land. They stayed away from the homes of the families, but they competed with them for food, and had attacked people who had ventured too close to their den. Children were warned to stay far away from the wolves' den and to never meet their gaze.

[4] But one child, a girl of seven, the youngest in her family, the one whose parents called her Teesa, was bewitched by the wolves. She returned their howls. She acted out the part of a young wolf, climbing onto a rock and looking around, teeth bared, growling in her throat. It was known that several pups had been born recently, and she ached to see them. Her mother told her that if she got close enough to see one, her life would be over in less time than...

[5] Through no fault or plan of her own, however, the girl got her wish. The three pups that had been born were just as curious as she was. While their mother napped one night, they crept out of their den in the side of a hill. The other wolves were either asleep or out hunting. Attracted by the sight of the fire that the people had built and the delicious smell of the cooked meat, they approached. The mother wolf, sensing their absence, awoke, and sniffing the air, rushed to their side, growling at the startled humans.

[6] Teesa, who sat by the fire, turned to see the pups and their mother not twenty steps away. Her father, who held a spear on which he had hung meat to cook, dashed to her side and let fly his spear. The mother wolf was killed instantly, terrifying her young. Two of the pups raced back to the pack. Teesa, ran to the third, a tiny thing, and before she could be stopped, scooped it up into her arms. The pup's nails dug into her skin, but Teesa just held it more tightly and buried her face in its soft fur.

[7] The other people, seeing that there was no further threat, stared at this unlikely sight. Never before had they seen human and animal together this way. The girl's mother approached slowly, but Teesa would not loosen her hold on the creature, who seemed to be just as intent on staying where it was, wrapped in the girl's arms. She was ordered into the family's home, a low dwelling made of fallen trees and hardened mud. Her parents followed her in, and before long, Teesa's four brothers and two sisters joined them.

[8] They all stared at the small gray creature, a female with blue eyes, black marks on the tips of its ears, and a spot of white on its snout. It sniffed the air and wriggled out of Teesa's arms. The others readied to run or to club it, but the pup ignored them. It found a small pouch that contained berries, and its face disappeared into the bag's opening. When it reappeared, the berries had made a red blotch on the dog's white nose, and the family could not help but smile. The children giggled. Teesa beamed.

[9] It was decided that Teesa's family would keep the wolf, who grew but never attained the same size as her fellow creatures. She was a playmate, but much more, and her loyalty and bravery earned her the respect of Teesa's parents. Her growl kept away wild animals as well as people whose presence was unwanted. She could carry supplies, and could help find the scent of prey. At first, she would howl when she heard the others of her kind, but she did not venture far from the family or stay away long. It was clear that she regarded Teesa's parents as her leaders, though she liked to sleep curled up with the girl. She was one of them.

[10] Once though, she did stay away for several days. Teesa did not worry much, sure that she would return. Not long after she did rejoin the family, it became clear that she was readying to have her own pups. She gave birth to five lively youngsters, an event witnessed by the other families. The pups were healthy and lively, and they looked like their mother, with smaller features than the other wolves. The pups were divided among the village (for that is what they now were becoming) and they celebrated with a feast. Teesa, now ten, was allowed to keep one of the pups. She named it "Dog."

Wolves and Dogs

[1] Wolves and dogs are obviously close relatives. Both are members of the *canidae* family, a group of mammals that also includes foxes, jackals, and coyotes. Within that family, dogs are members of the species *canis lupis*, as are gray wolves.

[2] The most important difference between dogs and wolves is that for centuries dogs have lived with, or at least among, humans. Wolves, of course, live in the wild, though they are not the aggressive creatures that they are often made out to be in stories. They do not attack humans unless they feel threatened. The same, of course, can be said for most dogs. In fact, wolves can, under the right circumstances, live among humans if they are raised that way.

[3] There are differences, however, both in appearance and in behavior. Most of these differences, though, need to be qualified by the fact that there is such a diversity of dog breeds. (There are different "breeds" -- that is, subspecies -- of wolf, but they are nowhere near as varied as those of dogs.) A typical wolf is larger than an "average" dog, but no wolf is as tall as a Great Dane. Wolves are muscular creatures, but a Rottweiler, with its powerful bite, would prove a daunting opponent. Generally, a wolf can outrun a dog, though the Greyhound can reach a faster speed over a short distance.

[4] Some dogs do have a wolf "look." This is true of Siberian Huskies, German Shepherds, and Collies. This, however, does not indicate that animals of these types are somehow closer to wolves than are dogs with very different appearances, like poodles and terriers. No one can look at a dog and know whether it has a recent wolf ancestor.

[5] The table below shows some other differences between wolves and dogs.

Wolf	Dog
Larger head relative to size of body	Smaller head relative to size of body, especially in larger breeds
Larger teeth relative to size of head	Smaller teeth relative to size of head
Longer snout relative to size of head	Shorter snout relative to size of head
Smaller ears relative to size of head	Larger ears relative to size of head, but varies with breed
Eyes placed more laterally	Eyes placed more forward

Eyes usually amber or brown	Eyes amber, brown, or blue
Tail usually straight	Tail often curved or curled
Walks with legs almost in single file	Walks with right and left legs in separate lines.
Walks with tail down	Walks with tail up
Front feet larger than rear feet	Little difference in feet size
Leaner	More stout, especially among larger breeds

[6] Behavioral differences are less pronounced when comparing wolves to wild dogs, but the differences are still significant. It is true that both travel in packs and are led by an alpha pair. But only in a wolf pack does the alpha pair get to eat before the others. Also, wolves work as a team more than dogs do when, for example, finding food. (Wild dogs are more likely to scavenge than hunt anyway.) Another difference is that male dogs, unlike all other canines, rarely take part in raising their young. Wolves are also better able to learn from their surroundings than are dogs. Dogs and tame wolves can both be trained, though dogs are more responsive than are wolves to threats and punishments. Wolves respond better to rewards.

[7] People have bred wolves and dogs, creating hybrids, though doing so to produce some sort of cuddly guardian is almost always a mistake. No one can know in advance the nature of any mixed breed of this sort. Too often, the pups grow up to be an animal whose behavior is unpredictable, and thus unsafe. If you're looking for a best friend or someone to bark at intruders (wolves are much quieter animals), stick with a dog.

Refer to Figure 1 and answer the following Question:

Dogs are often referred to as "man's best friend." In a paragraph, explain how this is true for Teesa and her family, including *at least three* examples from "How Dog Joined the Family."