

Wild Kids



Let's Play Categories

by Tamathy Stage, International Wolf Center Intern

Every year Mrs. Chapman's fourth-grade class looks forward to its visit to the local zoo. There, a naturalist teaches them about the different animals they see. Some of the students notice that the jackals and the foxes look a little bit like wolves, but the coyotes look a whole lot like them.

The naturalist tells them, "That's because all those animals are in the same family, the Canids, while wolves and coyotes are in the same genus." "What is a genus?" asks one of the students. "Genus is one of the words scientists use in taxonomy," the naturalist explains. "It helps us say how much alike different species are."

Taxonomy is the study of organizing living things into different categories. Describing and keeping track of species is easier if they are put into categories based on what they have in common. Taxonomy can be compared to your mailing address. Parts of your address are more general, like the state you live in. Another part is very specific, like your street and house number. Each plant or animal species has its own taxonomic "address." The different parts are kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus and species. Kingdoms are the largest category. Each kingdom can be divided into several phyla (plural for phylum),

and each phylum contains different classes, and so on down the line.

Here are all the groups that the gray wolf belongs to:

KINGDOM: Animal (all animals)

PHYLUM: Chordates (animals with a spinal chord)

CLASS: Mammals (animals that have hair and feed milk to their young)

ORDER: Carnivores (animals that eat meat)

FAMILY: Canids (doglike animals)

GENUS: *Canis* (wolves, coyotes, jackals and domestic dogs)

SPECIES: *lupus* (gray wolf)

Usually scientists refer to an animal by its genus and species. That way even if they speak different languages, they still know they are talking about the same species. Different languages may have different common names for a



Menthy Sloan/wolfphotography.com



Amy Kay Kerber

The wolf (left) and the coyote look a lot alike because they are in the same genus.





TAXONOMY WORD FIND

See if you can find the words listed below. Words may be vertical, horizontal, diagonal, forward or backward!

E	Z	Z	M	V	W	O	Y	V	E	S	A	D	P	Q
N	R	G	P	U	P	M	N	K	T	S	N	I	G	T
S	R	O	Q	S	O	V	A	Y	A	Z	I	N	V	A
G	P	F	V	N	K	I	N	G	D	O	M	A	Z	S
M	K	E	O	I	V	P	L	I	R	H	A	C	S	O
W	U	X	C	K	N	I	Y	N	O	J	L	A	A	P
O	A	L	N	I	F	R	J	C	H	J	L	K	M	S
T	R	Y	Y	A	E	U	A	J	C	C	F	H	M	F
H	J	D	M	H	Q	S	Z	C	L	A	M	M	A	M
M	Q	I	E	L	P	T	R	M	T	Q	D	I	B	L
L	L	F	Z	R	E	E	T	N	F	F	D	Z	H	Y
Y	L	Y	E	E	S	U	P	U	L	S	I	N	A	C
F	N	C	Q	H	X	B	P	A	C	Q	U	J	Y	U
J	O	L	G	R	C	C	V	K	N	X	F	Y	A	G
G	E	N	U	S	W	F	W	E	F	E	F	W	F	K

species. For example, the word for wolf in French is *loup*. In Finnish, the wolf is called *susi*; in Spanish, *lobo*; in Swedish, *varg*. The taxonomic names are in Latin and can be hard to remember, so common names are easier to use in everyday conversation.

Once you learn how the different categories fit together, you can have fun learning what animals belong together, and what makes them different. ■

Suggested Activity:

Think about the blocks that you probably played with as a child. How would you organize them—first by shape, by color or by size? Try more than one way of organizing them, and see which one you like.

ANIMAL
CANID
CANIS LUPUS

CARNIVORE
CHORDATE
CLASS
FAMILY

GENUS
KINGDOM
MAMMAL
ORDER

PHYLUM
SPECIES
TAXONOMY

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