

Language Arts Connection

The Evolution of Play Behavior

The polar bear cubs in Figure 17 may look like they are fighting, but they are actually just playing. Play fighting, also known as *rough-and-tumble play*, carries the risk of injury and uses energy. Why risk so much to play?

Determining what play behavior is can be tricky, as there is sometimes a fine line between what is play and what is genuine fighting. According to researchers, play involves behaviors that are an adaptation of normal behaviors, such as fighting, fleeing, or feeding. It also involves communications, such as postures or facial expressions, to let other individuals know that this is play.

Although play is fun, it is hypothesized that this activity also builds skills among juveniles that will be beneficial to them as adults. Play is observed in many forms; however, researchers classify it into three categories—play as physical training, social training, and cognitive development. Cognition is the mental process of knowing through perception or reasoning.

Many young mammals engage in physical play as they wrestle and nip at each other with juvenile teeth. This physical play strengthens growing muscles and is thought to develop skills that may be needed later for hunting or protecting themselves or their own offspring as adults.

Social training involves learning from others. Think about behaviors that

FIGURE 17: Play is often a juvenile form of adult behavior such as hunting or fighting.



may be familiar in animals, such as interactions between wolves. Different postures signal different messages. One signal may be described as a “play bow,” which sends a message that the wolves want to play. As juveniles, play provides the opportunity to learn social signals that may be used for other purposes, such as gaining attention, courting, or showing aggression. Cognitive development occurs as playful peers learn from one another.

Scientists are still researching why animals play and how the behavior evolved. They do know that the benefits of play, like those of other animal behaviors, outweigh the associated risks.



Language Arts Connection

Write an explanatory blog post that supports the claim that play behavior has evolved because it benefits the individual by giving them practice for events later in life. What evidence is there that play has evolved for these reasons? As you write your argument, consider following these steps:

- Introduce your claim, or the point your argument makes.
- Develop your claim by providing strong, logical reasons and evidence.
- Link ideas to show how your reasons relate to your claim.
- End with a conclusion that wraps up your argument.

EXAMPLES OF
ANIMAL BEHAVIOR



USING AN
ETHOGRAM

CAREER: ANIMAL
BEHAVIORIST

Go online to choose one of
these other paths.