The Little Big History Of Dogs

By Brittany Macaddino and Evan Simoff

Big History, 4A

16 May 2013

The Little Big History of Canines

Even before humans appeared on Earth, dogs were developing into the well-known species we have come to love today. Over time, dogs have become part of daily human life as pets and laborers. No one could have predicted that a once wild species with no ties to human beings would evolve into such a beneficial part of civilized society. Dogs are beneficial to the economy and to several different occupations. Even if all dogs do not have a specific role to fill or a special significance in any way, they are great companions to have and are an amazing friend to any owner. Dogs are loving, obedient, smart, and loyal animals, which is probably why dogs have become known as “man’s best-friend”. They have become a part of various forms of pop culture such as books, movies, recreational sports, and personal aids. Unfortunately we as humans have found a way to abuse the relationship we have with these animals, making them look violent and dangerous. However, without dogs, life today would be very different and humans would not have the luxury and/or the accommodations they currently have. Dogs have helped humans with a wide variety of problems and without them, and are well equipped for their existence as well.

The first known breed of dog to be spotted by humans was the wolf. This encounter probably happened about 50,000 years ago somewhere in the Middle East. Hunter-gatherer groups had to compete with them for food and also protect their tribe members from them. No one is really sure why or when early humans decided to domesticate the first dog, but there is “fossil evidence showing genetic alterations similar to the modern day dog dating back about 12,000 years ago*”* ***(1)*.** It is suggested that humans started capturing wolf pups and raising them as their own, training them to hunt for them and protect them from other animals. However, biologist Raymond Coppinger, a professor of biology and animal behavior at the Hampshire College in Massachusetts, states that “Nobody who has ever trained a wolf had any success if they started after 19 days.” He also explains that to make a wolf completely docile, it needs human contact and interaction twenty-four house a day. People of the particular era that domestication took place simply would not have had time to do this (**5).** It is still a mystery as to exactly how full domestication happened. Once the they did though, they needed a way to distinguish between the early domesticated dogs and the still wild wolves, so they only bred those who had the greatest differences from the wolves. This was the earliest form of genetic engineering in the breed and has led to the hundreds of breeds we have today. As shown by a graph in the article,(**2)** *“New Finding Puts Origins of Dogs in Middle East,” by Nicholas Wade, the different groups of modern dogs developed in this order: Wolves > Ancient and Spitz dogs >Sight hounds and herding dogs > small terriers, retrievers, and mastiff like dogs > scent hounds > spaniels and working dogs > toy dogs.*

There are some gray areas in this theory however, because dogs like the Chihuahua in the toy group have proven to be one of the oldest known breeds to this day. The Chihuahua is the only dog indigenous to the Western Hemisphere. They have been recorded by the Aztecs as being used in wars against other tribes, and Christopher Columbus wrote about them when he discovered the Americas. Their ancestors most likely crossed the land bridge and were taken South thousands of years ago, where they were developed into the breed they are today (***Beverley Hills Chihuahua,* 2008, Special features: *History of the Chihuahua*).** Over time, early humans recognized the potential dogs had to be beneficial to civilization and everyday life. Humans used selective breeding, which was a way to specifically create a dog that is genetically molded to do a specific job the most efficiently. Having these dogs as partners made jobs easier for humans, giving them more options on how to accomplish difficult tasks that might be hard for humans to get done without the help of dogs.

These new breeds of dogs became the Domestic Dog. The domestic dog, scientifically known as *Canis lupus familiaris*, is a subspecies of the gray wolf *(Canis lupus).* The term "domestic dog" is generally used for both domesticated and untamed varieties. The dog is the first animal to be domesticated by humans **(6)**, and has been the most widely kept working, hunting, and [companion] animal in human history **(Origin of the domestic dog).** “Domesticated dogs provided early humans with a guard animal, a source of food, and [as a source of warmth due to thick coats of] fur” (**Wikipedia/Origin of the domestic dog**). The earliest dogs, which were most closely related to wolves, resembled them greatly. They had large paws and powerful legs, which the wolves used for hunting. They also had large heads, relatively large jaws, and gray speckled fur like the wolves as well Modern dogs and wolves usually have what is called a double coat, which consists of a softer undercoat and a rougher topcoat **(7).** The Saluki, also known as The Royal dog of Egypt, is the oldest known domestic breed of dog. It was named after the Arabian city “Saluki” in the Middle East, which no longer exists today. The Saluki was specifically bred for hunting, but instead of having a keen sense of smell for finding prey, it was bred to have exceptional sight, putting it in the Sight-hound family. This is a domestic family created to hunt using sight rather than scent. Their bodies were often found mummified alongside the bodies of the Pharaohs themselves, and their pictures appear in ancient Egyptian tombs dating from 2100 BC. The Muslims considered them a sacred gift of Allah, and they were never sold but only offered as gifts of friendship or honor **(8).**

One of the major conflicts that have arisen since the domestication of dogs is dog fighting. According to the ASPCA website **(3)**, dog fights have been recorded as far back as the 1750s, with widespread activity emerging after the civil war. The animals in these fights were mainly brought from England and Ireland. The practice of dog fighting had become popular after bull-baiting and bear-baiting became illegal, which occurred in the 1830s. The ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animal) recognizes three different categories of dog fighting: Street fighters, hobbyists, and Professional Dog fighters. Street fighters engage in “fights that are informally held on street corners, in back alleys, and are known as ‘playground activities’.” Hobbyists tend to be more organized, with one or more dogs participating in several organized fights throughout their lifetime. They often use these fights as a “sideline for both entertainment and to attempt to supplement income.” People who own large numbers of animals and earn money from breeding, selling and fighting dogs at a central location and on the road have become known as “professional dog fighters.” They pay special attention to “promoting established winning bloodlines” and to “long-term conditioning” of their dogs. Unfortunately, studies suggest that the number of people involved in dog fighting in the US is in the tens of thousands. Though organized dog fighting seemed to decrease in the 1990s, law enforcement and animal control officials feel that it has been making a comeback in the last few years. Luckily there are people who work to stop and prevent dog fighting, such as those who work at the ASPCA.

As time has progressed, so have our interactions with the canine species. Our relationships have grown stronger and more dependent on them. They have been doing dangerous jobs for us and even jobs that are not humanly possible, such as sniffing out bombs and detecting when someone is about to have a seizure before it even happens **(9).** Early humans recognized the potential of this species long before they even became important in our daily lives. Not only have they worked their ways into our labor force, they have also found a comfortable place in the hearts of millions of people around the world. Today they serve as guardians, detectives, search and rescue crew members, and companions to people in all countries and belonging to all different cultures and religions. Even the ancient Egyptians recognized them as gods and worshiped them in the form of Anubis, God of the afterlife **(4).** They have also been appearing in forms of pop culture such as in classic books like Old Yeller, and in Movies like *101* *Dalmatians, Rin Tin Tin*, and *Lassie*. Without dogs, humans would have to put themselves in potentially dangerous situations, and we would be unable to perform many useful jobs that humans are incapable of doing.

1. "Dog." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 05 Nov. 2013. Web. 11 May 2013. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dog>.
2. www.nytimes.com/2010/03/18/science/18dogs.html?pagewanted=all‎
3. http://www.aspca.org/fightanimal-cruelty/dog-fighting/dog-fighting-faq.aspx
4. http://www.goldendawnpedia.com/LiteraturePages/Egyptian/Anubis.htm
5. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/dogs-that-changed-the-world/what->caused-the-domestication-of-wolves/1276/
6. <http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2009/03/mans_fi>rst\_friend.html
7. Burnie, David. "Dogs and Foxes." *The Kingfisher Illustrated Animal Encyclopedia*. New York: Kingfisher, 2000. N. pag. Print.
8. <http://www.dogbreedinfo.com/saluki.htm>
9. Keenan, Margaret. *Dogs*. Cobham, Surrey: TAJ, 2007. N. pag. Print.