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AUDUBON




Bird Silhouettes

Goal: To connect youth with their local environment by learning about native animals, encourage them to be more observant, and look at nature in a different way.

Science | Art | Writing

Adaptable for grades K-6

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This activity encourages the use of body shape, size, and proportions to identify birds rather than relying on color. It is an important lesson for new birders, and will get kids to view their world in a fresh way.

This activity includes an introduction for the class, and can then become an art project (create your own bird silhouette!), or a game (see below). Either activity can include a writing component.


This activity can be adapted to a variety of other classroom uses: breaking up into teams or finding partners for other activities, matching games.

Materials:

- Pictures of birds and their silhouettes (print ours or make your own!)
- Magazines with bird pictures in them
- Construction paper
- Glue
- Scissors
- Markers

Introduce the activity

1. Introduce the activity:
 - a. “When we were on our bird walk the other day/if we were on a nature walk, how did we find birds?” [sight and sound]
 - b. “And how did/would we try to identify the birds?” [color, field markings]
 - c. “Color is a great way to identify different bird species, but not the only way. What if I showed up tomorrow wearing a pink sweatshirt? Or if I dyed my hair green? Or painted my skin blue? Would you still know who I was? How would you know?” [height, weight, the way I walk, my voice, hair length, face shape, etc]
 - d. “Sometimes when we see birds, we can’t use the normal field markings—they might be in a shadow, or in front of the sun. They might even be molting or a juvenile bird, and not have the markings we’re used to seeing. We can use size, body shape, and proportions to identify birds, even if we can’t get a good look at their colors.”
2. Ask if anyone knows what a silhouette is [a dark shape or outline]. Emphasize that with a silhouette all we can see is the outline, like a shadow, with no color or other detail. Write the word on the board so they will know how it is spelled.

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3. Choose a bird that the kids will likely recognize by its silhouette- a goose or an owl. Ask them if they can identify it. If they correctly identify it, ask them how they knew what it was [shape, size, proportions].
 - a. Variation for younger children: show them the picture of a bird they'll recognize, ask them how they knew what it was [color, field markings, shape, proportions]. Then show them the silhouette of the same bird. Ask if they could still identify it, and if so, how [shape, size, proportions].
 4. Choose two birds that are similar, but have some distinguishing feature (ex- Canada Goose and Great Blue Heron, Northern Cardinal and Gray Catbird). Hold up one silhouette and ask the kids to describe it.
 - a. If they do not accurately describe the bird, hold up the similar one and ask how it is different (ex- if they say a goose has a long neck, but neglect the short legs, say "but this bird [the heron] also has a long neck. How can we describe it in a better way?").

Mystery Bird Game

1. Place bird pictures around the room, and have kids secretly select one bird (leave the birds where they are).
2. Have the kids write a few sentences about their bird, describing it without using the bird's name.
3. Ask for kids to volunteer to read their bird clues aloud, and have the class guess which bird they are describing.
4. Repeat the activity using only the silhouettes.
5. Discussion: ask the group how the activities were different: which types of words did you use when describing a picture vs. a silhouette? Which clues were easier to figure out?

Create your own bird silhouette

1. Show the kids the examples as you explain the project
2. Find a picture of a bird, and make sure it shows the whole body. A picture of a bird in profile will work best.
3. Cut out the bird (show a good and bad example)
4. Trace your bird onto a piece of paper. Choose one of two options:
 - a. Color in your silhouette using markers, then glue the picture of the bird next to your colored in silhouette.
 - b. Cut out your silhouette. Glue your silhouette and the picture of the bird next to each other on a piece of construction paper.
5. Write a few sentences beneath your art describing the bird you chose.

**We have found it helpful to only provide them materials for one step at a time. They must complete each step before moving on to the next one.