



Birds Pre-visit

Classroom Activity

Brief Synopsis

Through attentive listening, students will become familiar with the variable sounds birds make as well as other sounds in nature. A silent, observation session will help acquaint students with the skills and behaviors necessary for watching birds and give them an opportunity to examine the activity of nature while enjoying the out-of-doors.

Ages: Designed for 5th–8th grade

Activity Lengths: 15 minutes and 45 minutes

Materials:

Activity 1:

- One ID worksheet for each student
- Pencils

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- Clipboards (or other writing surface)
- Writing Utensils (colored pencils or fine-tip markers ideal)
- One Silent Map for each student

Vocabulary:

Bird, Call, Eyepiece, Identification Guide, Objective lens, Plumage, Range, Song

Outcomes:

1. Students will learn vocabulary necessary for successfully using an identification book.
2. Students demonstrate knowledge for using an identification book.
3. Students will use careful observations to identify differences between local bird species and other local sounds.

Minnesota Academic Standards:

Science: 7.IV.B.5

Math: 4.V.B.1

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Set-up

Bird watching is a popular American pastime. It requires very little equipment and can be enjoyed nearly anywhere. To create the most successful birding experience, the bird watchers need to be able to sit quietly and observe what is going on around them, and utilize identification materials efficiently. These things may be new to your students. The following activities are a good way to prepare your students for successful bird watching and identification.

Activity 1: Bird Books

Background: Bird identification guides are important tools used in birding. Bird guides commonly identify birds by their physical characteristics such as size, color, plumage and beak shape as well as calls, songs, range, diet and habitat. Most books also provide information about their habits and ecology. Use the *Bird Identification Book* worksheet as a way to help familiarize the students with the bird guide they will be using in the *Birds* class at Eagle Bluff.

Procedures:

1. Pass out the *Bird Identification Book* worksheets to be filled out in pairs or individually (when students come to Eagle Bluff, they will be using the identification booklets individually).
2. Allow them enough time to fill out the worksheet as well as time to check their work and answer questions, to make sure they are understanding the information on the worksheet.

Activity 2: Silent Sit

Background:

1. Discuss hearing as a sense that we must rely on to collect information. We use sight to perceive much of our world, but sound is very important as well.
2. Explain that each student will create a picture of the sounds they hear outside.
3. Hand out a blank Sound Map to each student. Make sure each student also has a writing utensil (a variety of colors allow for more creativity).
4. Head out to a pre-determined place in the schoolyard or nearby green space.
5. Set boundaries for the students. Within these boundaries, allow students to choose a place to call their own. This spot should be

- a place where they can sit comfortably while being about 20-30 feet from others.
6. Give an example that demonstrates the distance represented by 20 feet to help students determine their spot.
 7. They have one minute to select their sitting place and then must remain in that spot for 5-10 minutes.
 8. All students must sit silently. They may not communicate verbally or through noises/signals with anyone else during their “solo sit.” Remind students to be respectful of others’ choices and privacy by choosing a new spot if someone reaches it first. Remind students that distracting someone while they are trying to sit silently is not allowed.
 9. During the quiet time, students must create a diagram of all the sounds they hear. Using the Silent Map, tell students to assume that they are represented by the “X” in the center of the paper. Using their pencils or markers, they must draw a symbol for each sound they hear relative to their location. For instance, if they hear a bus, they could draw a bus. If they hear the wind, they could draw a cloud. Encourage them to listen for human noises as well as natural noises. Let students be creative in coming up with their own symbols. Direction and distance should also be considered when deciding where to place their symbols on the map.
 10. During your discussion of the activity, ask your students to...
 - Explain how being silent is important while trying to listen.
 - Describe why hearing is such an important sense. Did they see everything that they drew on their sound maps?
 - Did anyone hear a bird? List reasons why listening is an important skill when searching for birds.
 - Was patience necessary to be able to sit quietly for the entire time?
 - Why are silence, listening, and patience important for finding and watching birds...Why would we need to be silent? Why would we need to be good listeners? Why would we have to be patient?
 - On average, were more human-made sounds heard or more natural sounds? Why?
 - What would our world be like with less human made sounds?
 - What would our world be like with less natural sounds?

Teacher Tips

- Having more than one adult present to circulate during the solo sit time will help keep students focused.
- Assigning solo sit spots allows talkative friends to be separated and minimizes arguments over who gets a particular place. You may want to consider this option based on your class’ needs
- Allowing students to do this activity more than once often increases the number of sounds they hear. They are more apt to truly listen once the novelty of the activity, their spot and the alone time wears off.
- Holding up fingers of minutes remaining as you circulate through the group helps students with shorter attention spans stay focused by knowing how long they need to remain silent.



Additional Resources

<http://www.backyardnature.net/birds.htm>

A great web page with lots to explore including information about bird watching and identifying, bird characteristics and bird behaviors.

<http://www.birder.com/funngames/>

Is a website with family-friendly jokes about birds.

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/birds/Birdwatching.html>

A website for children to navigate and learn about bird watching.

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/programs/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/>

A thorough website, including identification, facts, maps, pictures, and sounds of nearly any North American bird species.



Worksheet: Bird Identification Book

Below is a sample page out of an identification book for three similar-looking birds you may see at Eagle Bluff. Test your observation abilities and learn to use this identification page by filling out this worksheet. Make sure you read the bird descriptions carefully.

1. Describe the range the chickadee lives in (where can you find chickadees living?)
2. Draw a line from each bird's picture to the place on the ruler that marks their largest size.
3. Circle the characteristics listed in each bird's description that are illustrated by the arrows in each picture.
4. Describe the Chickadee's song _____

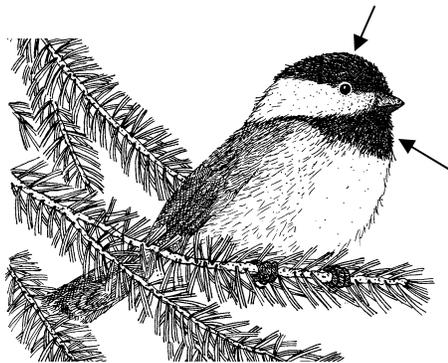
Describe the Chickadee's call _____

5. If you were to look up the **White-breasted Nuthatch** in the index at the back of the book, what letter would you look under and why?

Black-capped Chickadee

5 1/4"

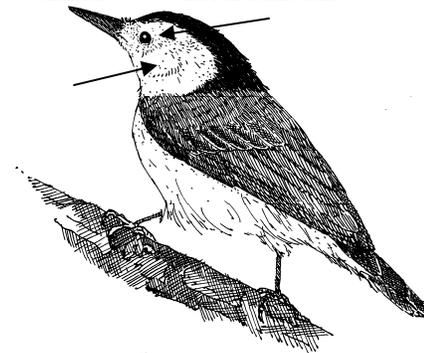
The Black-capped Chickadee is one of the most common species spotted at the feeder, especially enjoying sunflower seeds and suet. They are clearly recognized by its *black cap and throat*. Its call is a clear *chick-adeedeede*, while the song is a whistled *fee-bee*. Its range covers the southern half of Alaska and Canada and the northern half of the lower 48 states.



White-breasted Nuthatch

5 3/4"

The White-breasted Nuthatch is the more common of the nuthatches, often seen at feeders, especially suet feeders. It can be identified by its *black cap and dark black eyes on a white face*. Its song is a whistled *whi-whi-whi*, while its call is a nasal *yenk, yenk*. It ranges year-round in nearly all of the lower 48 states.



Red-breasted Nuthatch

4 1/2"

The Red-breasted Nuthatch is smaller than the White-breasted and has a *broad black line through the eye*. The song is rising *een, een, een*, while the call is a higher and more nasal *iik, iik, iik*, sounding like a tiny tin horn. They range from Canada and the evergreen-clan ranges of the U.S., migrating some years as far south as the Gulf of Mexico.

