

# *It's All About Birds!*

## Grade 8 Language Arts

### *I. Introduction to Birds*

Birds are warm-blooded, have distinctive beaks, and their young hatch from hard-shelled eggs. A characteristic unique to birds is the presence of feathers. Feathers provide insulation, enable flight, and are used in visual communication. Adaptations that enable flight include fused and lightweight bones, and a keeled sternum (for the support of flight muscles). Variations in birds (e.g., coloration, wing shape, beak type) give clues to their habitat, feeding tendencies, and behavior.

There are many distinct words associated only with birds or their study.

#### Grade 8

Standard 1:1 – Words in Context – Verify the meaning of a word in its context, even when its meaning is not directly stated, through the use of definitions, restatement, example, comparison, or contrast.

#### **Activity: Which Word Is It?**

Objective: Students determine which word fits best into a sentence by looking up definitions in a dictionary, and analyzing sentence context.

Materials: [Which Word Is It?](#) and [Answer Key](#)  
Dictionaries  
Pencils

#### Procedure:

- 1) Assemble students in small groups.
- 2) Distribute handouts and dictionaries.
- 3) Have students look up the words in the sentences and correctly identify which word fits best depending on the context of the sentence.

## *II. Birds and Humans*

Throughout history, birds have been an integral part of human lives. Birds can be found as subjects in art, symbolic roles in mythology and religion, aspects of superstitions, the focus of literary works and inspirations in music. Birds act as environmental health indicators, control pest populations, are sources of food, and bird watching is one of the most popular outdoor activities in the country.

### Grade 8

Standard 1: Vocabulary – The student will expand vocabulary through word study, literature, and class discussion.

3. Idioms and Comparisons – Analyze idioms and comparisons, such as analogies, metaphors, and similes, to infer the literal and figurative meanings of phrases.

### **Activity: Avian Poetry**

Objective: Students are introduced to various poems that feature birds and are encouraged to use idioms and comparisons in constructing their own works of art.

Materials: [Avian Poetry Titles](#)

### Procedure:

- 1) Read aloud or have students read samples of poetry that feature birds.
- 2) Define idiom, simile, metaphor, and analogy. For each poem, discuss the author's use of idioms and/or comparisons, and what meaning or emotion the author was trying to convey.
- 3) Ask students to choose a bird (perhaps one that was featured in the *It's All About Birds!* presentation) about which to write a poem. The poem should contain at least two comparisons or idioms.

For inspiration, encourage students to read reference materials (i.e., field guides, encyclopedias, scientific journals), look at pictures and videos, draw on memories, and observe their bird in nature.

Send us your poetry! We love everything there is to do with birds, and we really love hearing about how our program helped inspire a work of art from a student.

Poetry can be mailed to:

G. M. Sutton Avian Research Center  
P.O. Box 2007  
Bartlesville, OK  
74005  
Attn: Education

## Avian Poetry



Please review each piece thoroughly before presenting it to your class.

Some of these works may not be approved by your institution.

Sympathy by Paul Laurence Dunbar

A Bird Came Down by Emily Dickinson

The Raven by Edgar Allan Poe

Dust of Snow by Robert Frost

The Eagle by Alfred Tennyson

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Samuel Coleridge

Hurt Hawks by Robinson Jeffers

Vultures by Margaret Atwood

The Jack Daw by William Cowper

The Second Coming by William Butler Yeats

A Thrush in the Moonlight by Witter Bynner

The Conference of the Birds by Farid al-Din Attar



## Grade 8

Standard 5: Research and Information: The student will conduct research and organize information.

1. Accessing Information – Select the best source for a given purpose, location information relevant to research questioning.
  - a. Access information from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including electronic text, experts, and prime resources, to location information relevant to research questioning.
  - b. Use text organizers, including headings, graphic features (e.g., boldface, italic type), and tables of contents, to locate and organize information.
  
2. Interpreting Information – Analyze and evaluate information from a variety of sources.
  - b. Analyze and paraphrase or summarize information from a variety of sources into a research paper.
  - c. Identify and credit the sources used to gain information (e.g., bibliographies, footnotes, appendix).
  - a. Interpret and use graphic sources of information such as maps, graphs, timelines, or tables to address research questions.

### **Activity: Research Paper**

Objective: Students conduct research and gather information on controversial topics related to birds.

Materials: Research and Reference Materials  
[Topic List](#)

#### Procedure:

- 1) Assign students to work alone or in groups and have them choose a topic from the Topic List or create their own.
  
- 2) Discuss guidelines with students regarding length of paper and what key elements should be included in their final product.

Research papers should include organizers such as headings and a table of content. They should include descriptions, pictures, and natural history of all animals pertaining to the topic. Information should be gathered from a variety of sources such as encyclopedias, field guides, scientific journals, reputable websites such as government sites (USDA, USGS, Fish & Wildlife, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, etc.), or private educational institutions (Cornell Lab of Ornithology, The Raptor Center – University of Minnesota, Sutton Avian Research Center, Discovery Channel, National Geographic Society, etc.), and interviews with professionals. Maps, graphs, and timetables should be used when appropriate. Information should be credited to its source and cited correctly.

## Bird-related topics:

- ◆ Livestock Fences – Fences are important for keeping livestock in designated areas. However, these same fences are responsible for over half of Prairie Chicken mortalities.
- ◆ Pesticide Use (such as DDT) – Banning DDT in the United States has allowed native birds such as the Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, and Brown Pelican to recover, after having been threatened with extinction. Malaria, a mosquito borne illness continues to be a health concern to people throughout the world. Without the use of insecticides, mosquito populations can breed out of control, causing pandemic malaria outbreaks.
- ◆ Wind farms, oil development, mining, etc. – Oil, electricity, and fossil fuels are all important parts of our everyday life. But we can not ignore the impact that generation or mining of these materials makes on the environment.
- ◆ Parrots as pets (pet trade) – People tend to appreciate things that they understand and love. Having a parrot as a pet inclines a person to care more about wild parrot habitat and conservation. However, the tax on wild parrot populations is having an effect, reducing wild parrot populations and threatening their extinction.
- ◆ Abatement - Lethal control or scare tactics are often used to prevent crop damage by Blackbirds or to solve Canada goose problems in parks or on golf courses.
- ◆ Hunting (Pheasants, Quail, Ducks, etc) – Hunting game birds is not only a popular sport and hobby, but it is also considered a necessity by some. Due to human encroachment, predator populations are often low or absent, thus allowing prey species to survive and reproduce unchecked. Too dense prey populations are less healthy and more likely to cause problems for people.
- ◆ Logging – Paper products are an everyday item that we use, but do we use them irresponsibly, wasting much more than we should? For the costs of paper products to remain affordable to the average consumer, loggers must keep their production costs down. Logging companies have their eyes on old growth forests, but so do admirers of endangered species such as the Northern Spotted Owl and Marbled Murrelet.



*If you have an idea for a topic and would like to share or see it listed on our website, please send an email to: [cjackson AT ou DOT edu](mailto:cjackson@ou DOT edu).*

## Grade 8

Writing/Grammar Usage and Mechanics: The student will express ideas effectively in written modes for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Standard 2:9 – Write friendly letters and business letters and continue to produce other writing forms introduced in earlier grades.

The staff of the Sutton Center love to hear what you think of *It's All About Birds!*. Your feedback helps us to continually improve and add to the presentation.

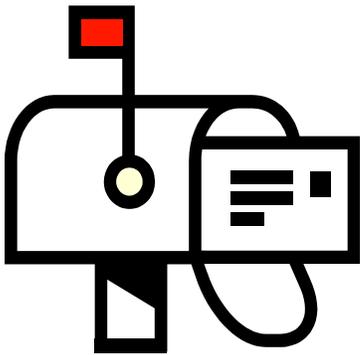
### **Activity: Letter**

Objective: Students write a letter to a business thanking them for a presentation and stating what they liked or didn't like about the presentation.

Materials: Paper  
Pen/Pencil

### Procedure:

- 1) Ask students to recall what they experienced during the *It's All About Birds!* presentation.
- 2) Have students compose a professional business or thank you letter to the Sutton Center or the presenters stating what they experienced and liked or didn't like.
- 3) Mail letters to:



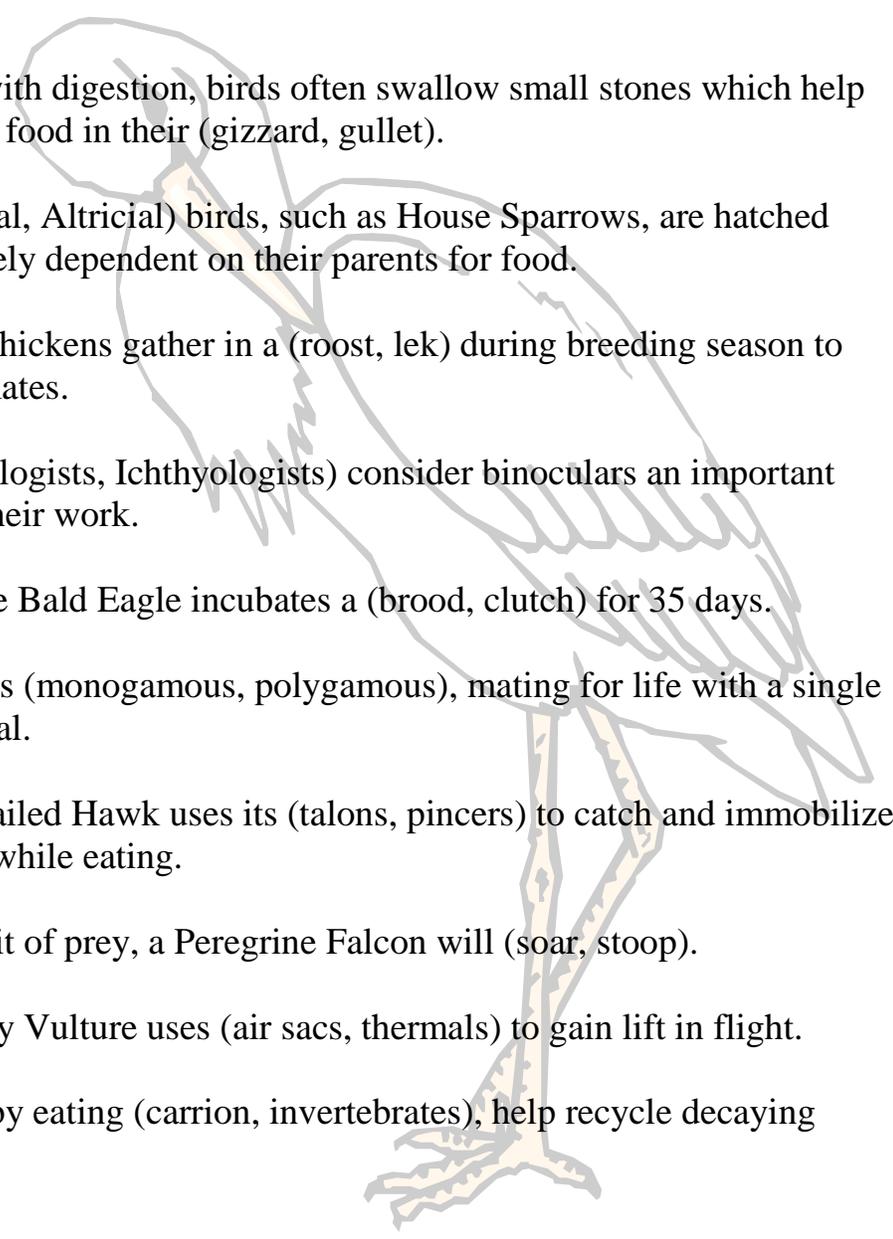
George M. Sutton Avian Research Center  
P.O. Box 2007  
Bartlesville, OK  
74005  
Attn: Education

## Which Word Is It?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Circle the word which best completes the sentence.

- 1) To aid with digestion, birds often swallow small stones which help grind up food in their (gizzard, gullet).
  - 2) (Precocial, Altricial) birds, such as House Sparrows, are hatched completely dependent on their parents for food.
  - 3) Prairie-chickens gather in a (roost, lek) during breeding season to attract mates.
  - 4) (Ornithologists, Ichthyologists) consider binoculars an important tool in their work.
  - 5) A female Bald Eagle incubates a (brood, clutch) for 35 days.
  - 6) A swan is (monogamous, polygamous), mating for life with a single individual.
  - 7) A Red-tailed Hawk uses its (talons, pincers) to catch and immobilize its prey while eating.
  - 8) In pursuit of prey, a Peregrine Falcon will (soar, stoop).
  - 9) A Turkey Vulture uses (air sacs, thermals) to gain lift in flight.
  - 10) Crows, by eating (carrion, invertebrates), help recycle decaying matter.
- 

## Which Word Is It?

### *(Answer Key)*

- 1) To aid with digestion, birds often swallow small stones which help grind up food in their (**gizzard**, gullet).
- 2) (Precocial, **Altricial**) birds, such as House Sparrows, are hatched completely dependent on their parents for food.
- 3) Prairie-chickens gather in a (roost, **lek**) during breeding season to attract mates.
- 4) (**Ornithologists**, Ichthyologists) consider binoculars an important tool in their work.
- 5) A female Bald Eagle incubates a (brood, **clutch**) for 35 days.
- 6) A swan is (**monogamous**, polygamous), mating for life with a single individual.
- 7) A Red-tailed Hawk uses its (**talons**, pincers) to catch and immobilize its prey while eating.
- 8) In pursuit of prey, a Peregrine Falcon will (soar, **stoop**).
- 9) A Turkey Vulture uses (air sacs, **thermals**) to gain lift in flight.
- 10) Crows, by eating (**carrion**, invertebrates), help recycle decaying matter.

#### Definitions:

**Altricial** - birds which hatch helpless, un-feathered, and with eyes closed

**Carrion** – flesh of a dead animal

**Clutch** - number of eggs laid by a single female incubated together

**Gizzard** - muscular portion of the stomach which grinds up food

**Lek** - communal area where males gather to attract mates

**Monogamous** - a mating system involving a simple pair bond formed between one male and one female

**Ornithologist** – person who studies birds

**Stoop** - the steep, fast dive of a falcon or other raptor often used to catch birds of prey

**Talon** - long, hooked claws on the feet of birds of prey

**Thermals** - rising currents of warm air (usually forming over ground rather than water); soaring birds make use of thermals for lift