



Practice Field Trip

This activity is adapted from the Sister Shorebird Schools Arctic Nesting Curriculum.

Teacher

Description

By practicing a field trip with bird pictures, students learn how to identify birds, use field guides, and adjust binoculars.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Find common birds in a field guide
2. Use field glasses (binoculars) to locate birds
3. Learn how to look for common field markings
4. Practice identifying local birds

Time Required

Teacher Prep: 30 to 60 minutes

Activity: One 30 to 60-minute class period

Subject

Life science

Skills

Observing, Comparing, Interpreting and applying information, Team work

National Science Standards

K-4: Life Science

Characteristics of Organisms

Science and Technology

Understanding about science and technology

Unifying Concepts and Processes

Systems, Order, and Organization

5-8: Science and Technology

Understanding about science and technology

Unifying Concepts and Processes

Systems, order, and organizations

Materials

Collection of 10-20 bird pictures, including shorebirds and local birds you may see on a real field trip

Local or North American Bird field guides

Binoculars

“How to Use Binoculars” from the Winging Northward Web site (optional)

Preparation

1. If you don't have access to one field guide and binoculars per pair of students, you can still do this practice field trip activity with students taking turns. Contact a local environmental education office, like that of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the U.S. Forest Service, to ask about materials available for class borrowing.
2. Mount color pictures of the birds you will be identifying in the wild. Include a few “accidentals” (birds that are normally not found in your area) for a challenge. Number each picture on the front. They can be collected from old field guides, magazines, or calendars, and if possible should show the natural habitat of the birds. Keep pictures hidden until you are ready to go on your practice field trip. Make sure the birds all appear in the identification guide.
3. Prepare a list of birds that might be found on your real field trip.
4. Review or print “How to Use Binoculars” from the Winging Northward Web site.

Procedure

1. Depending upon how many binoculars you have, this can be a whole group practice field trip, or several teams at a time can enjoy the field trip while the rest of the class works on another quiet activity. Parents who will help with the real field trip enjoy the practice as well and can take part.
2. Explain the guidelines for the “practice” field trip. Like on a real field trip, students should keep their voices very quiet, so as not to scare the birds (and not to give their answers away). They need to take turns with the binoculars. The person with the binoculars identifies field marks such as color (“I see a black spot on the chest”) and size (“It has longer legs than the other birds”). The other person looks in the field guide finding potential birds, then sharing ideas with the partner. Students usually work out a suitable way to share the work. Make sure they take turns with the glasses.

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Procedure (continued)

3. Provide students with the list of birds. Using sticky notes or other means, have the students find and highlight the birds in the field guides. Read the information about each bird and discuss the field marks. Identify what makes each bird unique, distinguishing it from other birds.
4. Demonstrate how to use binoculars carefully and safely. Reference "How to Use Binoculars" from the Winging Northward Web site if you printed it. Students should be shown and told to always use neck strap when they have the binoculars. The students should be appropriately awed by their value. Demonstrate how to focus the various glasses and how to adjust for eye width and focus differences. Explain the magnification of each type.
5. Place the pictures you have kept hidden around a large room such as a gym, or outside on a school wall. Be creative. Perhaps your class has had time to decorate the wall of the gym in a way that represents the habitat of the real field trip. Place the pictures approximately where you would expect to find the birds.
6. Identify a safe place for the participants to stand where they will not get stuck in the mud, eaten by bears, or run over by cars. This space should be far enough away from the birds that the students must use the field glasses to see the birds adequately.
7. The students will work in teams of two. The goal is for each team to correctly identify all of the birds. You can give a time limit if necessary.

