



Preschoolers'
special
interests
add
SPARKLE
to
early literacy!

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When young children's interests are engaged, learning comes naturally. Researchers who study early learning have found that an asset-based, interest-based approach is a highly beneficial way to provide literacy-rich learning opportunities for preschoolers.

Birds is one of a series of literacy-focused **LEARNING PROJECTS** developed by preschool teachers, just like you, who participated in **Project Sparkle**. The teachers learned to identify special interests of the children in their classes. Then they devised wonderful ways to transform their classrooms and school days with exciting resources and activities to help preschoolers freely explore the topic that had captured their imaginations. The teachers were challenged to make the most of creative and fun ways to build important language, pre-reading, and pre-writing skill development into each learning project resource and activity.

You're invited to use this idea-packed guide as a starting point for discovering and planning your own ways to let young children's fascination with winged creatures become the context for a delightful world of literacy-learning experiences. The convenient workbook format is your tool for organizing every aspect of the learning project—from interest identification through active investigation and learning, then on to project completion and evaluation. You'll create opportunities for your young students to build competence and confidence in **SIX EARLY LITERACY SKILL AREAS:**

- **Written Language**—Ability to represent ideas or words in a printed or written format. Examples: Field sketches, drawing, writing, drawing familiar print and logos.
- **Text Comprehension**—Ability to understand and process the meaning of ideas represented in text. Examples: Students are asked questions about stories read and asked to draw or state the answer.
- **Phonological Awareness**—Ability to hear and discriminate the sounds of language. Refers to activities that require sensitivity to, manipulation of, and use of sounds in words. Examples: Rhyming games and songs.
- **Print Awareness**—Ability to recognize and “read” words and text accurately and quickly. Examples: Label and read tools, recipes, menus.
- **Oral Language**—Ability to use words to communicate ideas and thoughts and to use language as a tool for deeper understanding. Examples: Telling and retelling stories, dictating to adults questions and answers, and making webs and lists.
- **Alphabetic Awareness**—Ability to recognize the letters of the alphabet in the context of word recognition and word use. Example: Learn important letters related to project, identify key words.

Before we begin: Is a “Birds Learning Project” right for this class?

How have the children expressed this interest?

- Conversations Drawings Observations Parent report Asset-Based Assessments Other _____

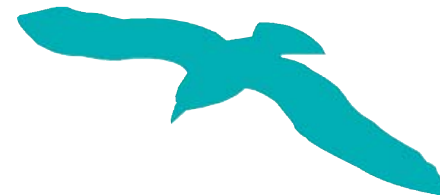
How practical would this project be for young children?

- The interest is more concrete than abstract.
- The project lends itself to an abundance of first-hand, direct experiences and real objects that young investigators can manipulate.
- The topic can be related easily to the children’s prior experiences.
- Plenty of interest-related sites and resources for field trips and guests are close by.
- Young children can explore/research the interest with minimal adult assistance.
- Children can represent what they know and learn by using age-appropriate skills and techniques.
- The interest topic is culturally relevant to the children and their families.



What are the children’s questions about birds?

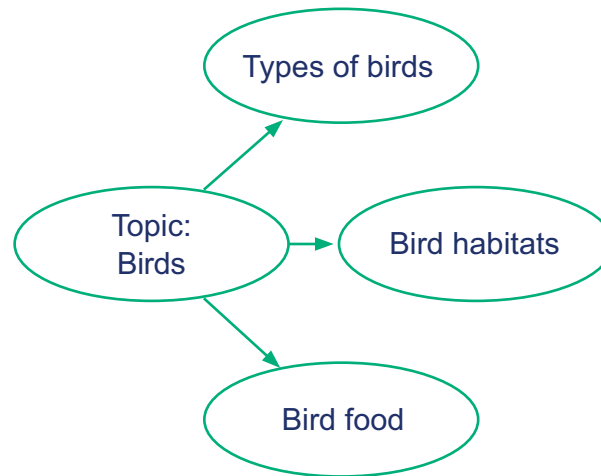
- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Where do birds go in winter? | 6. How many kinds of birds are there? |
| 2. How do birds “know when it is time to fly and come back?” | 7. _____ |
| 3. How do birds fly? | 8. _____ |
| 4. Do birds sleep at night? | 9. _____ |
| 5. How do birds stay warm in winter and cool in summer? | 10. _____ |



Our Project-Planning Web

Topic: Birds

The learning project planning web might start in the way shown below. What other ideas do you have to help the project grow?



Bright Ideas for “Birds” Learning Project Activities

Children’s questions:

1. Where do birds go in winter?
2. How do birds “know” when it’s time to fly and come back?
3. How do birds fly?
4. Do birds sleep at night?

5. How do birds stay warm in winter and cool in summer?
6. How many kinds of birds are there?
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Activity	Materials*	Children’s Questions	Early Literacy Areas	Curricular Areas
<p>Brainstorming—Sound a bird call and read <i>Bird Calls</i> by Frank Gallo and Lori Lohstoeter. Ask children to name all the birds they can remember from the book. List their responses on large paper. Ask children what they know about the birds listed. Ask what they want to know about birds. Record responses and post for reference.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Bird Calls</i> by Frank Gallo and Lori Lohstoeter • Birder’s bird call whistle • Large paper or board • Marker 		Text comprehension Written language Oral language Alphabetic awareness	Literacy Science
<p>Bird Feed—What do birds eat? List children’s ideas on large paper. Review list and circle the items that are correct. Add to the list: seeds, suet, berries, bugs, nectar, etc. Discuss the beginning <i>Ss</i> and <i>Bb</i> sounds/letters of these words. Show children examples of bird food items and ask children where they think birds find them. Birds forage for food in the wild but can also find these foods in bird feeders. Children can create bird-bread and-food chains for birds to eat. To make bird bread, ask children poke stale bread (bagels, biscuits, etc.) with a straw to create a hole. Children can lace yarn through the hole. Use clean paint brushes to brush egg whites on bread; then, sprinkle on birdseed. Allow to dry. Children can use large plastic needles and double thread to string cranberries, raisins, popcorn, and marshmallows (encourage repeating patterns). Hang these outside classroom window. Post images of different types of birds next to window along with a tally sheet. Review the sheet daily, letting children count how many types of birds were seen that day.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large paper or board • Marker • Stale bread • Egg whites • Birdseed • Plastic needles • Straws • Yarn • Images of birds • Cranberries, raisins, popcorn, marshmallows 		Phonological awareness Print awareness Written language Oral language Alphabetic awareness	Literacy Science Math Motor
<p>Bird Migration—Read <i>How Do Birds Find Their Way?</i> by Roma Gans. Write <i>migration</i> on large paper, and ask children what this word means. <i>Why do birds migrate? How do they know when/where to fly?</i> Record their answers on large paper. Explain that birds know when it is time to fly away for winter by the temperature and the amount of sunshine (length of the day). Ask children to help create a story about a bird flying south for the winter. Begin the story with something like, “Little Bird was making his first trip south for the winter.” Ask each child to provide a sentence or idea to complete the story. Asking questions like, <i>How did Little Bird know it was time to fly south? or Where did he stop to eat/rest?</i> to prompt children. Record the story on large paper as children dictate. Provide space below story for children to illustrate the events. Each child can “sign” their name as author and illustrator of the story.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How Do Birds Find Their Way?</i> by Roma Gans • Large paper or board • Marker • Colored pencils 	1, 2	Written language Text comprehension Print awareness Oral language Alphabetic awareness	Literacy Science Motor

Bright Ideas for “Birds”

Learning Project Activities, continued

Children’s questions:

1. Where do birds go in winter?
2. How do birds “know” when it’s time to fly and come back?
3. How do birds fly?
4. Do birds sleep at night?

5. How do birds stay warm in winter and cool in summer?

6. How many kinds of birds are there?

7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Activity	Materials*	Children’s Questions	Early Literacy Areas	Curricular Areas
<p>Feather Fluff—Read <i>Feathers for Lunch</i> by Lois Ehlert. Discuss the events of the story with children. Ask, “How do birds stay warm in the winter?” Place down feathers in two clear containers. Press the feathers down in one of the containers and fluff the feathers in the other. Birds fluff their feathers to trap air between the feathers to keep themselves warm. This makes the birds look larger, too. Demonstrate fluffing the feathers; allow children to fluff feathers as well. Write <i>fluff feathers</i> on large paper, pointing out the <i>Ff</i> sound/letter. Birds also use man-made birdhouses to stay warm and dry. Provide children with a coloring sheet of a bird. Let children glue craft feathers on bird as well as color it. Children can fill in the blanks to the sentence: “Birds feel ___ in the winter when they ___ their feathers.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Feathers for Lunch</i> by Lois Ehlert • Down feathers • 2 clear containers • Bird coloring sheets • Crayons • Craft feathers, multicolored • Glue • Pencils 	5	Text comprehension Phonological awareness Print awareness Oral language Alphabetic awareness Written language	Literacy Science Art
<p>Fancy Flight—Begin a discussion about flight by asking why birds have wings. Discuss how feathers and birds’ light bones help them fly. Tell children that birds can fly in different ways; write the following words on large paper: <i>hover, dive, flap, and soar</i>. Discuss each word meaning, beginning letter/sound, and demonstrate the action. Different wing shapes cause birds to fly differently. Show children pictures of the following birds in action: hummingbirds hover (beat wings quickly), loons dive into water to find food (narrow wings), pigeons and ducks continuously flap their wings, and eagles soar on air (broad wings). Do all birds fly? No, penguins use their wings to swim! Hold up each picture and ask children to use their “wings” to mimic how the bird flies. Children can make their own birds following instructions found at: http://www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/newyear/dove/. Use various colors of paper to make different types of birds. Hang from the classroom ceiling.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large paper or board • Marker • Images of eagle, loon, duck, penguin, and hummingbird • Pre-cut cardboard bird bodies • Colored tissue paper • Glue • Hole punch • String 	3	Written language Text comprehension Phonological awareness Print awareness Oral language Alphabetic awareness	Literacy Science Motor
<p>Nocturnal Nesters—Read <i>Owl Moon</i> by Jane Yolen. Write <i>nocturnal</i> on large paper and define. Ask, “Which birds that are awake at night? (Grouse, owl, snipe, song sparrow, etc.) Most birds are light sleepers, very aware of their surroundings, waking instantly at the slightest sound. Many birds “catnap” in a flock, where some birds are always watching for danger, while others quietly roost with one eye always open. Use paper plates with ridged rims to make owls. Adult marks cutting lines on plates at 10, 2, 5, and 7 o’clock for children to cut wings. Children to paint owls brown and cut orange paper circles and triangles to glue on for eyes and beaks. Point out that the owls were constructed using paper, plates, and paint: all words beginning with Pp sound/letter. Ask children to think of Oo names for their owls. Help children print owl names on index cards to display with owls.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Owl Moon</i> by Jane Yolen • Large paper or a board • Marker • Paper plates with ridged edges • Orange construction paper • Brown paint and brushes • Scissors • Glue • Index cards (3 x 5) 	4, 6	Written language Text comprehension Phonological awareness Print awareness Oral language Alphabetic awareness	Literacy Science Motor Art

Bright Ideas for “Birds”

Learning Project Activities, continued

Children’s questions:

1. Where do birds go in winter?
2. How do birds “know” when it’s time to fly and come back?
3. How do birds fly?
4. Do birds sleep at night?

5. How do birds stay warm in winter and cool in summer?

6. How many kinds of birds are there?

7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Activity	Materials*	Children’s Questions	Early Literacy Areas	Curricular Areas
<p>Backyard Birds—Read <i>Birds in Your Backyard</i> by Barbara Herkert. Explain how tame and wild birds differ. On paper, label two columns <i>tame birds</i> and <i>wild birds</i>. Help children name birds in each category. Go “bird watching” around classroom, looking at posters and books containing birds. Let each child show picture of a bird they like. Add names to appropriate column. “Where do baby birds come from?” Explain birds build nests from twigs, mud, string, straw, feathers, and/or found objects, then lay eggs and hatch them in the nest. Show nests and eggs. Children can build nests with play dough, twigs, string, bits of cloth, and small rocks. Zigzag cut around side of a white foam cup to look like a broken eggshell half. Glue cup in nest. Glue together stretched cotton balls for a “chick.” Lightly paint; glue on wing feathers, wiggle eyes, and orange-paper beak. Glue bird to end of straw. Adult pokes other end of straw through bottom of cup and nest. Result is a hatching-chick puppet. Let children decide what type of bird their chick is. They can print the type of bird on a card to display with puppet.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Birds in Your Backyard</i> by Barbara Herkert • Large paper or board, marker • Sample bird nests and eggs • Play dough, twigs, string, cloth, rocks • Index cards (3 x 5) • Cotton balls • Paint and brushes • Scissors, glue • Orange construction paper • Wiggle eyes • White foam cups • Plastic drinking straws 	6	Written language Text comprehension Print awareness Oral language Alphabetic awareness	Literacy Motor Art Science
<p>Exotic Emu—Read <i>Edward the Emu</i> or <i>Edwina the Emu</i> by Sheena Knowles. Related to ostriches, emus can’t fly, but have strong legs and run very fast. Emus make grunting noises, hisses, and a deep drumming sound. Emus live in Australia’s desert shrub lands and sand plains. Show Australia on map. Emus are also raised on farms, and some live in zoos like the ones in the book. A male emu is a <i>boomer</i> and female a <i>flyer</i>. Write words on large paper and discuss beginning sounds. The male sits on eggs and raises chicks by himself. Take class outdoors for an emu run—flapping arms, making emu sounds. Hold up signs labeled <i>boomer</i> and <i>flyer</i> for only girls or boys to run at certain times. Have each child draw a picture of an emu and dictate a short story about why it would be fun to be an emu. Record story on paper and place next to drawing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Edward the Emu</i> or <i>Edwina the Emu</i> by Sheena Knowles • Pictures of emus • Map or globe showing Australia • Markers • Crayons • Large paper or board • Paper • <i>Boomer</i> and <i>Flyer</i> signs 	6	Text comprehension Print awareness Oral language Written language Alphabetic awareness	Literacy Science Motor

Add your own idea for a learning project activity in the space below!

* When selecting materials for any activity, please check first for allergies.

Materials and Resources

Artifacts:

- Bird figurines and toys
- Clear container of down feathers
- Feathers
- Images of birds and their habitat
- Migratory maps
- Bird feeder and birdseed
- Binoculars
- Bird nest
- Bird house
- Birdbath
- Poster of different-size bird eggs



Music, Songs, Finger Plays:

Five and Five Eggs

Five and five eggs,
(Hold up hands.)
That makes ten.
Sitting on top is mother hen.
(Fold one hand over the other.)
Crackle, crackle, crackle!
(Clap hands three times.)
What do I see?
(Circle eyes with fingers.)
Ten fluffy chicks,
As yellow as can be
(Hold up ten fingers.)

More songs and finger plays are found at:

www.hummingbirded.com

www.childfun.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=67

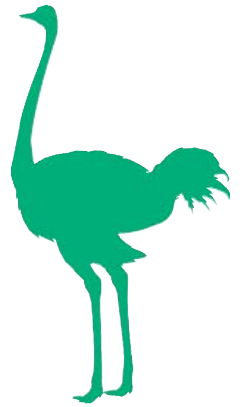
Books:

- A Mother for Choco* by Keiko Kasza
- All About Owls* by Jim Aronsky
- Are You My Mother?* by P. D. Eastman
- Arrowhawk* by Lola M. Schaefer
- Bird Calls* by Frank Gallo
- Birds in Your Backyard* by Barbara Herkert
- Birds We Know* by Margaret Friskey
- Chicken and Egg* by Christine Back and Jens Olesen
- Come Along, Daisy!* by Jane Simmons
- Counting Is for the Birds* by Frank Mazzola, Jr.
- Duck in the Truck* by Jez Alborough
- Edward the Emu* by Sheena Knowles
- Edwina the Emu* by Sheena Knowles
- Feathers for Lunch* by Lois Ehlert
- Have Your Seen Birds* by Joanne Oppenheim
- How Do Birds Find Their Way?* by Roma Gans
- I Heard Said the Bird* by Polly Berrien Berends
- Inch by Inch* by Leo Lionni
- Jack and Jim : Picture Book* by Kitty Crowther
- Little Owl* by Piers Harper
- On the Wing* by Douglas Florian
- Owl at Home* by Arnold Lobel
- Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen
- Peacocks* by Ruth Berman
- Rosie's Walk* by Pat Hutchins
- Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon
- The Best Nest* by P. D. Eastman
- The Chicken or the Egg!* by Allan Fowler
- The Emperor's Egg* by Martin Jenkins



Construction and Art Materials:

- Birdseed
- Cloth
- Colored pencils
- Construction paper
- Craft feathers
- Crayons
- Drinking straws
- Egg whites
- Feathers, down
- Glue
- Hole punch
- Index cards (3 x 5)
- Large paper or board
- Markers
- Paint, brushes
- Paper
- Paper plates with ridged rims
- Play dough
- Scissors
- Small rocks
- Stale bread
- Sticks and twigs
- Tape
- Various colors of paint
- White foam cups
- Wiggle eyes
- Yarn



On the Web:

- www.childfun.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=67
- www.hummingbirded.com
- www.enchantedlearning.com
- www.bayerus.com/msms/fun/experiment/birds.html
- www.powertolearn.com/themes_winterwonders/birds.html
- www.saskschools.ca/~gregory/winter/win5.html
- www.onenorthpole.com/ToyShop/Paperairplanes.html
- www.emu-birds.com/
- www.kidcyber.com.au/topics/emu.htm

Enhancing Classroom Centers During the Learning Project

Blocks/Construction:

Put figures of birds in the block area so the children can build habitats (farms, zoos, or forests) for them from the construction materials in the center.

Science:

Add binoculars and a bird-identification book to the area for watching birds visiting a feeder placed just outside a classroom window. Borrow a pet bird for children to tend during the project and place in this center along with bird-care supplies. Different kinds of nests and blown-out eggs along with magnifying glasses can be included.

Math/Manipulatives:

Place plastic Easter eggs in this center for children to count and sort by color. Children can also sort and count mixed birdseed. Write numerals 1 to 10 on eggs with permanent marker and let children count out and fill them with a matching number of corn kernels or sunflower seeds.

Sand/Water:

Fill sand table with birdseed and feathers. Place a bird feeder at the table for children to fill as well as scoops and funnels for them to use.

Housekeeping/Dramatic Play:

Add a barrel of “chicken feed” to center and a small chicken coop made from a cardboard box for children to gather eggs and feed chickens.

Art Center:

Stock this center with bird stencils, twigs, yarn, feathers, seeds, and glue so young artists can take flights of fancy in creating bird collages.

Book Center:

Stock center with books about wild and tame birds from the list on Page 7 for children to enjoy.

Planning for Special Guests and Field Trips

How Do You Do? (Meet & Learn with Guest Experts)

- Wildlife park ranger
- Science teacher with an interest in birds
- Parent with a pet bird
- Wild bird rehabilitation specialist
- Avian veterinarian

Guests (dates, times, notes):

Let's Go! (Field Trips)

- Pet store to see the birds
- Nature or science center/museum
- Zoo with an aviary

Field Trips (dates, times, notes):

The “Big Event” ... coming together and sharing what we’ve learned



A Bird Fair With Flair

At the completion of the project, host a bird fair. Children can draw various birds and create invitations for neighboring classrooms, friends, and family. Provide materials for visitors to make their own stale bread birdfeeders. Let children guide guests in making the feeders. Visitors can view a display of the children’s owl artwork, “Little Bird” story, the hatching-chick puppets, and other bird-themed crafts. Children can demonstrate how emus sound and share emu facts. Allow visitors to have a question-and-answer time with children. Serve cups of “hummingbird nectar” fruit juice and muffins prepared with poppy seed.

Are we there yet?

- The children are satisfied with their new knowledge.
- Further investigation would require skills the children do not have (such as advanced reading and writing).
- The children are losing interest in the topic.



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Looking Back ... evaluating our learning project

Take a look back at the children’s questions list and project web to answer the following questions:

1. What have the children learned? Did they find the answers to their questions?

2. Are there new questions for investigation? How might they be answered?

Project Sparkle is an applied research project of the Center for Innovative and Promising Practices at the Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute. Funding was provided by a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau, Administration of Children, Youth and Families (90LO0091), The Puckett Institute is a not-for-profit organization engaged in research-to-practice activities that promote the healthy functioning of children and families. Please visit us on the Internet at www.puckett.org to learn more about all of our projects and to access important information about asset-based, interest-based children’s learning opportunities and everyday learning activities for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.