

A Year (a Day or a Week) In My Life as a Shorebird

Adapted with permission from *Quinlan, Alaska Wildlife Week*. Special thanks to David Jaynes, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1994.

Grade Level: upper middle school/ high school

Duration: several class periods for research, discussion of the writing process, and peer editing

Skills: application, communication, presentation, spelling, vocabulary, collection of information, and visualization

Subjects: science, language arts, social studies (geography)

Concepts

- Shorebirds are birds specially adapted to live in open land and often near water.
- Most shorebirds are migratory.
- Shorebirds are international travelers that link people and places.
- Learning about representative species of shorebirds and their ecology can help us learn about birds in general.

Overview

Students imagine themselves as a shorebird and write a “first-bird” account of a day, a week, or a year in its life.

Objectives

After this activity, students will be able to:

- Describe the basic life history of one shorebird common to their area.
- Use the writing process which includes brainstorming, rough draft writing, peer editing, and re-writing to create a factually and grammatically accurate story.
- Provide feedback on content, clarity, and grammar of another writer’s work.

Materials

- Books
- Videos
- Slide shows
- Bird identification books
- *Shorebird Profiles*, located in *Appendix*, as reference material

Introduction

This activity is intended to introduce your students to creative writing as a “process”: prewriting, writing, revising, editing, and rewriting, using shorebirds as the topic. The result will be a finished product that is written to the best of the students’ abilities with good spelling, grammar, punctuation, handwriting (or typing), and requested content.

- **Prewriting:** This includes brainstorming the content elements, “mapping” and “bubbling” to organize information, researching the topic, and noting related personal experiences and observations. (For an example on how to use this technique, see the classroom activity Shorebird Bubble Map in the Assessment Activities Section of this chapter.)

- **Writing:** The author takes the prewriting ideas, converts them into sentences and paragraphs, and then organizes them into a story.

- **Revising:** The author makes changes to improve the flow of information, increases clarity, and incorporates information or ideas that may have been left out of the first draft.

- **Editing:** The project is proofread by the author, another student, and/or the teacher in order to provide feedback on content, correctness, grammar/usage, and clarity.

- **Rewriting to Final Draft:** Once the author receives editorial comments, he or she then re-writes the work accordingly.

- **Publishing and Evaluation:** The next step, in some cases, is submission to class magazines, newspapers, and bulletin boards, reading to an audience, or posting on the Shorebird Sister Schools network to share with other students.

Procedure

1. Ask each student to select a shorebird to study. Using the *Shorebird Profiles*, World Wide Web, and books from your library, give students time to research basic information about their birds. Students can also interview elders, scientists, or other knowledgeable people. Have the class brainstorm a list of questions to research about their birds. For example:
 - What does it eat?
 - Where does it spend its winters?
 - What migration route does it take to its breeding grounds?
 - Where does it breed?
 - Does it use any unique breeding displays to attract a mate?
 - What predators threaten this shorebird?
 - What other things threaten this bird’s survival?
 - What cultures encounter this shorebird?
 - How do the cultures view the shorebird differently?
 - How can people help?
2. Ask students to imagine that they are this shorebird. Ask them to write a short story in first person (“first shorebird”) that describes one day, one week, or one year of their life. The story should be based on the factual information they uncovered during their research.

3. If your class will be going on a field trip to observe shorebirds, encourage your students to observe and gather information for use in their stories. Ask students to use all their senses to observe the habitat—temperature, smells, sights from different perspectives, sounds, other species, textures of the habitat (e.g., plants, soil, air, water), and light levels—to include in their stories.
4. Review the steps of the writing process described in the *Introduction* to this activity. Ask each student to select one classmate to act as his or her peer editor who will proofread his or her text and provide comments on content, clarity, and grammar.
5. Submit your students' writing for posting on the Shorebird Sister Schools Web site, by following the guidelines posted at <http://sssp.fws.gov>.

Additional Activities



Cultural Extension

Students can include information in their report about the cultures that encounter the shorebird they study.

Shorebird Story Dilemmas

Encourage students to edit their stories to incorporate a realistic environmental crisis into them. To start, have the class brainstorm a list of possible environmental changes or crises that shorebirds face. Examples might be a wind or snow storm during migration, loss of a favorite habitat, loss of a mate or nest, flooding, or disturbance by off-road vehicles. Have the students choose one crisis appropriate to the shorebirds they have chosen and rewrite their original stories, this time including the crisis and some resolution (negative, positive, or otherwise).