

Get to Know the Shorebirds Puppet Shows

Grade Level: upper elementary/middle school

Duration: 30 minutes to present the puppet shows, several class periods to create puppets and scenery and to practice the production

Skills: communication, presentation, discussion, vocabulary, team building, and visualization

Subjects: science, language arts, and fine arts

Concepts

- Shorebirds have a unique combination of physical and behavioral characteristics that help us in their identification.
- 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.

Vocabulary

- Shorebird
- Wetland
- Grassland
- Migration
- Predator
- Camouflage
- Adaptation
- Refuge
- Arctic
- Tundra
- Stopover site
- Fat-loading
- Adapted

Overview

By creating shorebird puppets and putting on a shorebird puppet show, students learn the physical and behavioral characteristics that make a bird a shorebird.

Objectives

After this activity, students will be able to:

- Describe at least three physical

characteristics common to shorebirds.

- Explain at least two behavioral characteristics common to shorebirds.
- Give three examples of threats to shorebird survival.

Materials

- An assortment of puppet-making materials, including paper lunch bags, paper plates, craft sticks, clay or papier-mâché material, tempera paint, crayons, markers, yarn, pipe cleaners, fishing line
- Copies of [shorebird coloring pages](#) to use in puppet-making or as templates (found in the Appendix)
- Magazine pictures of shorebirds and shorebird habitat

Introduction

Children love to create puppets. There are many terrific ideas for constructing puppets from very simple designs that preschool children can make and enjoy, to complex and time-consuming creations made from clay and papier-mâché. Here are a few simple ideas using materials you can probably find right in your classroom. If you are interested in creating more complicated puppets that will outlast this one production, check out these wonderful resources:

Puppet-making Books

Simple Puppets from Everyday

Author: Barbara MacDonald
Buetter

Publisher: Sterling Publishing
Company, Inc.

Puppets: Methods and Materials

Author: Cedric Flower

Publisher: Sterling Publishing
Company, Inc.

Paper Bag Puppets

Students draw, then color or paint a shorebird silhouette; cut out and

color or paint one of the shorebird coloring page illustrations; or cut out a shorebird magazine picture and glue it to the front of a brown paper lunch sack.

Bird-on-a-Stick Puppets

Students draw, then color or paint a shorebird silhouette; cut out and color or paint one of the shorebird coloring page illustrations; or cut out a shorebird magazine picture and glue it to the front of a large craft stick.

Paper Plate Puppets

Students create a shorebird head on a paper plate using construction paper, felt, or cloth material to create the bird's beak, eyes, and facial markings. To manipulate these puppets, students can either glue the shorebird heads to craft sticks or add elastic bands to the back of the plates to slip over their hands.

Shorebird Marionettes

First create a shorebird head from clay or papier-mâché using tempera paints. Thread painted Styrofoam balls on pipe cleaners or yarn to begin creating a shorebird body. Attach felt or other material to the balls for tail and wing features. Tie the fishing line or thread to different parts of the puppet to manipulate it like a marionette.

Activity Preparation

1. Collect the materials suggested for any, or all, of the puppet styles found in the Introduction to this activity. Ask students and parents to help collect materials from home.
2. Setup three stations in your classroom--one for puppet making, a second for set design, and a third for script practice.
3. Select the puppet plays (or plan to have students write their own) to use in this activity and

make seven photocopies of each one you select, one copy for each cast member and the production team.

Procedure

1. Introduce the topic of shorebirds to your students. Discuss the characteristics that make a bird a shorebird. Show your class pictures of shorebirds in your area using field guides, magazine pictures, or the posters included in this education guide.
2. Create a list of shorebird characteristics on the chalkboard. This list should include the physical attributes students can see from their pictures. Do not forget to include behavioral characteristics to the list. Below is a list of some characteristics to include.

Physical and Behavioral Characteristics of Shorebirds

Physical Traits

- They have long legs (relative to their body size) for wading.
- They have slender toes for balance while walking.
- They have long, slender beaks (relative to their body size) for probing in the mud or water.
- They have camouflage coloring.

Behavioral Traits

- Most nest on the ground.
- They nest independently.
- They prefer open habitats like wetlands and grasslands.
- They feed on invertebrates.
- They use simple vocalizations that include peeps, whistles, or short trills.
- They breed in the tundra and central grasslands.
- They make extremely long migrations between breeding grounds & nonbreeding grounds.
- They establish territory and use breeding and distraction displays.

- They have a variety of foraging habits due to many different bill types.

3. Explain to your students that the class will be learning and presenting two plays about shorebirds.
4. Divide your class into two to four groups based on the number of puppet shows you want to present and the size of your class. Provide each group a copy of the shorebird play it is to present. One copy should go to each puppeteer and one to each team of set designers, puppet designers, and the director. They can select two other shorebirds found in their area if they do not want to use the Western Sandpiper and Killdeer. Ask them to decide who in their groups will take on the following roles.

Puppeteers

(Keep in mind that if you choose to substitute either the Western Sandpiper or the Killdeer for another species of shorebird, you will probably have to edit the script. Use the *Shorebird Profiles* located in the *Appendix* for the migration patterns, food preferences, and threats for other species of shorebirds.)

- Western Sandpiper (or another local species)
- Killdeer (or another local species)
- Bird-watcher
- Narrator (an actual puppet or a student reading the narrator's commentary)

Set Designer(s)

Students who take on this job will be creating a backdrop for the puppet production. They should create a realistic habitat drawing or painting for the audience.

Puppet Designer(s)

This team creates the Western Sandpiper, Killdeer, and birdwatcher puppets, keeping in mind that they should be as realistic as possible so the audience can recognize the shorebird species and can tell them apart.

Director(s)

These students help the “actors” practice reading or memorizing their lines and manipulating their puppets.

5. Let each group work to pull its production together. Create areas in the classroom where the puppet designers can create their puppets, the set designers have all the materials to create backdrops, and the actors can practice their lines. It is certainly easier to ask the groups to create the same type of puppet (i.e. Paper Bag Puppets, Bird-on-a-Stick Puppets). However, the productions will be more interesting and the students more enthusiastic if you allow each puppet designer to choose his or her own style puppet and encourage them to try using many different materials.
6. Once each group has finished preparing for its production, assign the order of performances. Send out invitations to parents and other classrooms.
7. After each performance, ask the audience (which will include the students who are waiting to perform their own puppet shows) what they learned about shorebirds from the play. Add their responses to the original list of shorebird characteristics. Depending on the puppet show you select, your students should mention shorebird facts like the following:

- Shorebirds are long-distance migrants.
- They are birds of open spaces, including wetlands and grasslands.
- They travel in large migratory flocks.
- They stop to rest and feed at migratory stopover sites.
- Many nest in extreme northern areas like the Arctic tundra.
- Shorebirds spend the winter resting and feeding in warm, southern climates.
- Shorebirds, their eggs, and chicks are well camouflaged to help them hide from predators.
- Shorebirds have long, sensitive beaks for probing in the mud; short-tweezer-like beaks for snapping small invertebrates off the top of the sand or mud; or strong, chisel-like beaks for opening clams and mussels.
- Gulls, jaegers, foxes, peregrine falcons, snakes, skunks, crows, dogs, cats, and sometimes people are all shorebird predators.
- Wetland loss, pollution, and some types of human recreation all threaten shorebird survival.

Additional Activities



Cultural Extension

Students can incorporate a word, phrase, or sentence from one of the cultures that shorebirds migrate through, such as “hello” or the name of the bird.

Write Your Own Shorebird Puppet Production

Divide your class into teams and give each a more detailed shorebird theme to research. For example:

- Which shorebirds nest in grassland habitat?
- What types of shorebirds are found in the area?
- How do shorebirds attract a mate (courtship displays)?
- What role does camouflage play in the life of shorebirds?
- How does the presence of people affect beach-nesting shorebirds?

When they can answer the question posed, ask them to create a puppet show that will teach their audience about the shorebird question they researched.

