

Birds of Joy!

Inspired by John James Audubon

LEVEL: Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

This project is inspired by watching birds in our yards and hearing their melodious chirping. We are inspired by artist **John James Audubon**, who was both a naturalist and a painter of the American Wild Frontier. His passion for exploring outdoors, observing wildlife, drawing, and painting led him to become one of the greatest bird painters of all times.

John James Audubon was born in 1785 in France, but made America his home at an early age. As a young boy, John was fascinated with birds and studied their patterns of behavior, including their forms and colors. As an adult, he went on adventurous journeys across the American wilderness, when America was still a new and growing country. His goal was to collect data about the species of birds found throughout America, draw and paint the birds life size, and publish his works on large sheets of paper known as *elephant folios*. As a result, his works are compiled into four very large volumes titled *Birds of America* containing 1,065 birds.

OBJECTIVES

Gain appreciation of wildlife
Gain an understanding of ornithology
Observe wildlife through artistic and scientific lenses
Develop awareness of shapes, sizes, and textures
Improve hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills
Discover similarities and differences related to bird life

MATERIALS

- white paper
- pencils, colored pencils, crayons, pastels (whatever is at home)
- erasers, sharpener (only if needed)

VOCABULARY

ornithology: study of bird life

folio: size of a sheet of paper used in a book

Wild Frontier: referencing early years of America when the new country was still being explored

naturalist: a person who studies nature



DIRECTIONS

1. On a white sheet of paper, follow the steps and the image to draw a profile of a bird. This shows the bird from its side.
(See image 1 for steps a-g. See image 2 for step h.)

- Draw a small circle about 1 1/2 inches in diameter for the head. *Make sure to draw this a little off center and higher in the space provided in order to leave space for the rest of the body and tail.
- Draw an oval for the body that is twice the size of the head (circle) in length and proportionately broad. *Make sure the oval touches or overlaps the circle at a slight slant.
- Draw a smaller, narrower oval inside the larger one to make one side of the wing.
- Add a long tail by joining a triangular shape starting at the narrow end of the body (oval).
- Draw tiny claws with curvy lines under the bird's body.
- Draw a tiny triangle near the head to make the beak.
- Make a tiny circle to show one eye.

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h. Draw some branches with a few leaves and flowers (optional), to show the bird is perched on a branch.
*Keep the branches and leaves delicate in order to allow the emphasis on the bird.

2. Color the bird with colored pencils, crayons, pastels of your choice.

- a.** Like Audubon, try to focus on the details in your shading.
- b.** Start by shading the head with gentle, circular strokes.
- c.** Now shade the bird's breast with colors of your choice. The middle part of the body is lighter than the sides. (A contrast in colors creates special effects!)
- d.** When coloring the wing, try to make shading in short strokes to create a "feathery" effect.
- e.** Color the beak, eyes, and claws.

3. Color the tree with leaves and tiny flowers (optional).

4. Enjoy your Bird of Happiness!

EXTENSIONS

- Learn more about John James Audubon through books such as *Audubon, Painter of Birds in the Wild Frontier* by Jennifer Armstrong.
- Observe and gather data related to species of birds found in Houston and Texas.
- Visit mfah.org and search the collections to see other works of art by Audubon, and visit hmns.org and houstonaudubon.com to further your knowledge of ornithology.

VARIATIONS

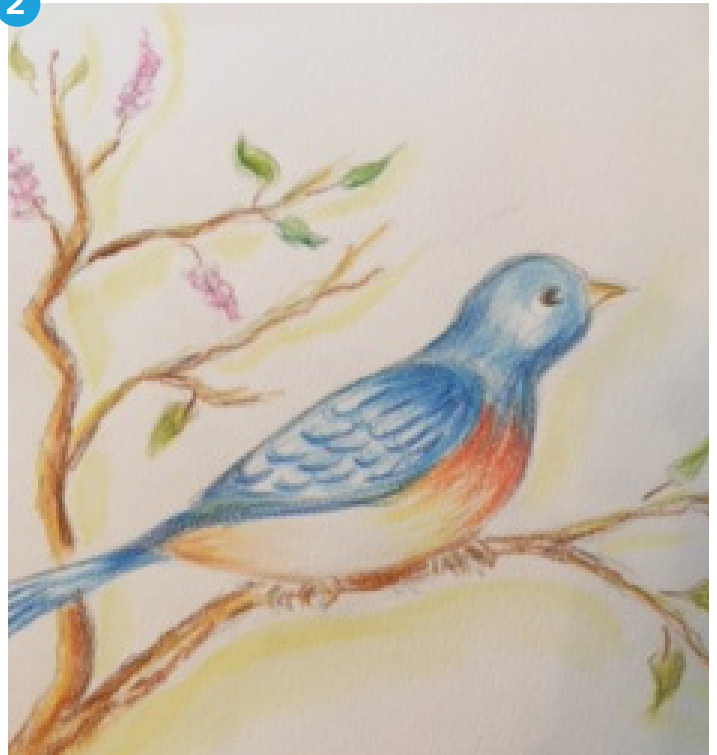
- Expand skills through drawing and painting a variety of birds in different poses or angles.
- Create a bird collage using different textures such as feathers, felt, yarn, and more.
- Compare the artistic approach and importance of birds and symbolism in Asian cultures to that of the Western world.

The Glassell Junior School, an art school for young people, is devoted to nurturing creativity and dedicated to fostering an appreciation of the arts and an awareness of the world. Classes and workshops are offered for ages 3 to 18 in the fall and spring, and for ages 4 to 18 during the summer.

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FUN FACTS

- Audubon could paint with both hands at the same time!
- He often used paints, colored pencils, pastels, and other media in each piece of art that was created.
- Audubon was self-taught and had never attended a formal art school.
- The Audubon Society, formed for the study and preservation of birds, is named in his honor.



Melchior d'Hondecoeter,
The Crow Exposed, c. 1680,
oil on canvas, Sarah Campbell
Blaffer Foundation, Houston,
BF.1978.18.