

## Bird Watching Hike

**Materials:** Binoculars, bird identification field book\*, notepads and pencils

**Procedure: (Direct Experience)** You do not need to be an expert bird watcher to lead a bird-watching hike. There is a benefit to being as confused and excited as your students. The best time to lead a hike is first thing in the morning.

**1) Before heading out**, look at some pictures of common Island birds. These could include, black-capped chickadee, blue jay, song sparrow, hairy woodpecker, merlin, barred owl, red-breasted nuthatch, crow, goldfinch and American robin. Each of these birds has different adaptations that will develop the class's Learning Language. They have different beaks, feet and feathers.

**2) Take some time** with the class to **personalize your field guide**. Go through it, with your students, and checkmark any species you or the class knows or recognizes.

**3) On the hike, remind the class not to just look with their eyes but to listen closely with their ears.** Birds are vocal and much can be learned by listening to their calls and songs. To reinforce this, I like to stop early in the hike and have the students close their eyes and hold up their hands in two fists. Each time they hear a new bird call or song - have them put one finger. Let them listen for a minute and then have the class compare the different sounds they heard and guess where they came from.

**4) Splushing** - If there are lots of birds close by, a fun activity to do with students is to teach them to splush. Splushing is simply making a sppsssh sppsssh sppsssh sound with your mouth. It doesn't have to be particularly loud - or specific. Every birder develops their version. I like to add kissing sounds at the end. Birds are both curious and territorial, when they hear this sound, they want to investigate and will fly right in to see if a strange bird has invaded their home. It is a great way to see birds up close. It works best if you can quietly sneak into an area of dense foliage, and sit quietly for a moment.

**5) When you spot a bird, encourage the children to do their best to describe it.** Where did you find it? What kind of beak does it have? What is its body shape? Is it feeding on the ground or hunting for flying insects? Does it have noticeable field markings? These observations will help with identification, which is a process of elimination.

**Hints, tips and tricks:** The entire exercise is not about being able to identify the birds you find, but to develop the ability of your students to observe, and describe what they are seeing. Let them make field drawings, take notes and begin developing a list of familiar species. Keep a set of binoculars in the

window of your classroom and encourage the children to continue observing birds for the year and watch your list grow.

**\*Resource:** *The Sibley Guide to Birds, Second Edition*, by David Allen Sibley (Knopf, 2014).