

Birding Code of Ethics

Grade Level: upper elementary/ middle school, upper middle school/ high school

Duration: 60 minutes to plan and create props plus 30 minutes to role-play

Skills: observation, comparison, communication, presentation, critical thinking, discussion, and evaluation

Subjects: science and fine arts

Concepts

- Bridge the classroom and the local environment.
- Gain first hand knowledge through an outdoor experience (with follow-up On-Site Activity.)
- Discover the ecosystem through multi-sensory experiences (with follow-up On-Site Activity.)
- View shorebirds, their habitats, and what they eat (with follow-up On-Site Activity.)
- Human behavior can affect wildlife and other people.

Vocabulary

- responsible
- irresponsible
- novice

Overview

Students role-play to identify appropriate and inappropriate behavior when observing shorebirds, then develop a Birder's Code of Ethics to guide their behavior while on their field trip.

Objectives

After this activity, students will be able to:

- Give two or more examples of appropriate behavior when observing shorebirds.
- Give two or more examples of inappropriate behavior when observing shorebirds.

Materials

- One set of Birding Code of Ethics Role-Playing Cards
- 6 foot or longer piece of string

Introduction

There is no introductory information for this activity.

Props

- Three cardboard signs as described in Activity Preparation
- A large "nest"
- "Trailside plants"
- Bird-watching props for three actors (binoculars, field guides, cameras, bird calls, recorded songs, journal and pencil)
- Three backpacks with lunch wrappers, empty soda can, etc.
- A "pet" on a leash
- Trail markers of some sort
- A set of shorebird masks or puppets as described in Activity Preparation

Activity Preparation

1. Copy and cut out one set of the Birding Code of Ethics Role Playing Cards.
2. Divide students into teams to create props for this activity. Let them be creative in the selection of materials to use.
 - Cardboard or poster board signs: "Private Property," "Shorebird Nesting Area," "Shorebird Trail"
 - A lunch pack containing a collection of empty food wrappers and cans
 - A set of shorebird masks or puppets out of any materials available to you (paper plates, lunch sacks, illustrations on popsicle sticks, etc.)
 - A large shorebird nest--large enough for one student "chick" to sit in
 - Pretend pet on a leash
 - An assortment of mock-up plants to set up along a pretend trail
 - A trail within the classroom--designed and marked out by students

3. When all the props have been made, set up the scene in the classroom. Post the signs and stretch the string across an area to signify the safe-distance boundary. Place the shorebird nest behind the boundary string. Post the trailhead and lay down the trail path. Set vegetation props along side the trail.

Procedure

1. Discuss the vocabulary words with the class. What does it mean to be responsible versus to be irresponsible? What does it mean to be a novice?
2. Explain to your students that they will be participating in a role-playing activity as a shorebird, a bird-watcher, or a scene observer (audience member). Ask for six volunteers who feel comfortable acting out a specific role in front of the class.
3. Pass out one Birding Code of Ethics Role Playing Card to each volunteer before assembling the class. Have volunteers read the description on how they are to behave and then return the cards to you. They should not identify themselves to the audience. Give them a chance to ask any questions about their behaviors before the class assembles. Give them their props.
4. Have each actor take his or her place in the shorebird scene. Announce "action" to begin.
5. The scene observers should watch carefully and try to determine who these actors are representing. What are they doing? How are they behaving?



6. Announce “cut” to end the action. Ask the observers to try to identify what each actor was representing. Who were the birds? Who was a chick? In what ways were the bird-watcher’s behaviors different?
7. Now repeat the scene but allow only one bird-watcher to enter at a time. First, send in the “Bad Birder.” Ask the observers to describe the actor’s behaviors as they see them. List them on the chalkboard under the heading of Bad Birder.
8. Now send the “Good Birder” into the scene. How is this bird-watcher behaving? Make a list describing his or her behavior under the title Good Birder.
9. Lastly, send in the “Novice Birder.” How is this birder acting? Describe his or her behavior under the heading Novice Birder.
10. Lead a discussion on the effects of the “Bad Birder’s” behavior. How might this person influence a “Novice Birder”? Which type of bird-watcher would this class like to be more like? As a class, develop a birding code of ethics on a flip chart. Ask each student to come up and sign it. Post it in the classroom until the day of the field trip as a reminder to your students of what you expect of them. If possible, create a smaller version of the “contract” to include in the students’ shorebird field trip journals.

Additional Activities

Code of Ethics Sign

Have students turn their Code of Ethics contract into an informational sign to be displayed at the site. Let other visitors know how their behavior can hurt or help the wildlife of the area. Look for local community support to produce and install the sign on-site. Be sure to get prior approval from the managing agency.

Shorebird Field Study

Ask students to use what they learned in the Birding Code of Ethics activity on a local field trip to view shorebirds.



Birding Code of Ethics

Role Playing Cards

Good Birder

In this activity your role is to perform the responsible actions listed below while bird-watching. Play your role while observing the “birds” at each station.

Good Birdwatching Actions

- You respect “no trespassing” signs.”
- You enjoy birds, nests, and/or young while bird-watching from a proper distance that does not disturb birds.
- You leave no sign that you were there. You dispose of your trash properly when you break for lunch.
- You walk on the trail and do not trample vegetation.
- You leave your pets at home.
- You use tools designed to attract birds sparingly, such as “squeakers” or “pishing” or recorded calls.

Bad Birder

In this activity your role is to perform the following irresponsible actions while bird-watching. Play your role while observing the “birds” at each station.

Bad Bird-watching Actions

- You walk right past “no trespassing” signs.
- You get too close to birds, nests, and/or young while bird-watching so birds are disturbed.
- You leave trash when you eat your lunch.
- You ignore the trail marker and walk wherever you want to and trample vegetation in the process.
- You bring your pet bird-watching.
- You persistently use tools designed to attract birds, such as “squeakers,” “pishing,” or recorded calls.

Novice Birder

You are unaware of the birding code of ethics. You have new binoculars, a new bird identification book, and you are brimming with enthusiasm to see and identify birds. You are going with a bird group on your first trip and not sure what to expect.

Your role is to observe the other birders in the group and react to their behavior. Show agreement, confusion, or frustration depending on the behaviors you see.

Shorebird Chick

You are a shorebird chick. If an intruder crosses over the string (which marks a safe boundary) your parent becomes upset. You react to the situation by crouching down in the nest as low as possible, trying to blend in with the ground. You freeze but look very anxious.

Feeding Shorebird

You are a feeding shorebird. You are aware of the bird-watchers but continue to feed. If they cross over the string (which marks a safe boundary), you move a little farther away. You stop feeding to watch them more intently. The closer they get, the farther you move away from where you were feeding. Eventually you are so disturbed that you just fly away altogether (arms flapping!).

Shorebird

You are a nesting shorebird trying to protect your chick. If a bird-watcher passes over the string (which marks a safe boundary), then he or she is too close to you. You become anxious and squawk, stand up, and shake your wings, trying to scare the intruder away. If the intruder continues to come closer to you, then you leave your nest and your chick behind.

