Learning About Bird Migration

Melissa Zeglin
Crystal Lake Elementary
Lakeville, MN

Summary
Every spring, people look to see the first robin appear in their backyards. Where did the robins go, or where are they coming from? These are popular questions children ask. By teaching students about migration, we give them a better understanding of the life cycle of birds. The rationale for teaching migration is to give the students a better understanding of why birds leave for the winter months and return for the summer months.

Learning Goals

- Students will be able to understand and discuss the reasons why some birds migrate.
- Students will be able to explain some of the ways in which birds find their way.

Context for Use
This is an introductory lesson about bird migration that could be part of a larger bird unit. It was designed for a 3rd grade classroom, however, it could easily be modified for use in any elementary grade.

Subject: Biology
Resource Type: Activities: Classroom Activity
Grade Level: Intermediate (3-5)

Description and Teaching Materials

Materials:
Analogy graphic organizer (attached)
Map of the four major Flyways of North America
Map of North America
Map of the United States
How Do Birds Find Their Way? by Roma Gans
Books on various species of birds
Computers for online game
Migration reading comprehension worksheets (attached)
Writing rubric (attached)
Computers for Journey North activity

Instructional Procedures:
1. Introduce the study of bird migration. Use an analogy that likens it to a vacation to a warm climate. Discuss some facts about migration: More than one-third of the
world's birds migrate; migration allows birds to adapt to changes in the environment, because they go to habitats with more food and better weather for survival; and migrating is instinctual and most birds migrate in groups. Review the familiar concept of vacationing. Have students discuss trips they have taken to warm climates. Encourage them to discuss the details of travel, such as method of transportation, rest stops, eating habits, and energy levels, including the return trip. Use the graphic organizer to identify the similar features or characteristics of migration and traveling on vacation. Identify the dissimilar features or where the analogy does not apply. Record these in the graphic organizer. Start the discussion and complete at least half of the chart with students as a class before the read aloud. You can add more details after reading the book.

2. Inform students that you will read a book to them that describes bird migration. Read "How Do Birds Find Their Way?" by Roma Gans and add any additional comparisons that your class may want to make to the analogy chart.

3. Display the four North American migratory flyways, which are: Pacific Flyway, Central Flyway, Mississippi Flyway, Atlantic Flyway.

4. Additional migration information should be discussed in this brief instructional period such as:
   - How do birds know when it is time to migrate?
     - changes in the amount of light, temperature, and food
   - How do birds find their way?
     - magnetism, the sun and stars, and by following land formations
   - How does weather affect bird migration?
     - birds follow different air patterns which change with the season
   - What are some problems birds encounter while migrating?
     - bad weather, predators, hunters, loss of wetlands, and pollution

5. Divide the class into small groups. Give each group a book that focuses on one species of birds. Provide guiding questions with each book directing the students to find information about that species. Sample questions could include: Where does this bird spend the summer and winter? Which states and/or countries does this bird fly over when it migrates? Which North American flyway does this bird use? How far does this bird travel during migration?

6. When all questions are answered, each group will be asked to share their information with the rest of the class, making sure to use the map of the four major Flyways of North America, map of North America, or map of the United States to help illustrate their presentations.

7. Assessment - Review the new concept by having the students write a paragraph of their understanding along with drawings in their nature journals.
**Extension Activities:**

- **Migration Game (Online)**- Answer questions about migratory birds. Each correct answer will bring the wood thrush closer to her favorite forest where she'll be able to find a mate, build a nest, and lay her eggs! [http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/education/kids_stuff/woth_game/default.cfm](http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/education/kids_stuff/woth_game/default.cfm)

- Extend the children's knowledge of migration by giving them a handout that contains nonfiction text along with questions and a writing activity. This can be completed individually, with partners, in small groups, or as a whole class depending on the needs of your group. You may want to assess the writing activity with the writing rubric.

- [www.learner.org/jnorth](http://www.learner.org/jnorth) Journey North is an on-line program that explores seasonal changes. One option is for students to track robin migration from the southern states to the Arctic. Students learn to identify robin songs and calls, analyze migration maps and data, and explore the robin life cycle.

[Analogy Graphic Organizer](http://example.com)  [Migration Reading Comprehension Sheets](http://example.com)  [Primary Writing Rubric](http://example.com)