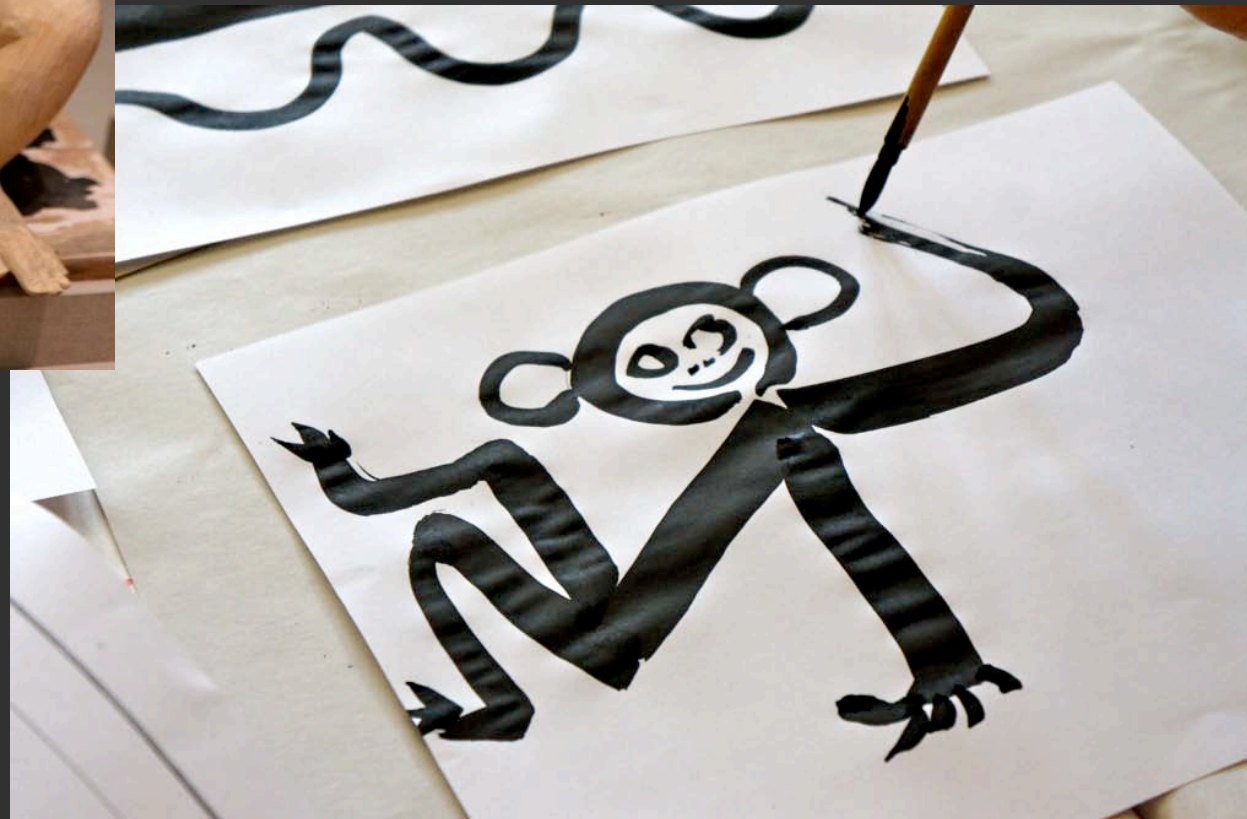


Animals in Art

Curriculum Connections:
Writing, Science, and Art

SANTA BARBARA
MUSEUM OF
ART

Finding the Animal in Your Heart



Every animal has physical characteristics that help it survive in its environment.



Animals can be small or large...





...fast or slow,





...and shy or aggressive.

Some animals are brightly colored and stand out, attracting the attention of possible mates. Other animals blend into the background, allowing them to safely hide from possible predators.



Animals, when viewed in their habitats, offer artists and writers many opportunities to look closely, record observations and reactions, and then create poems and painting in words and/or images.

This artist noticed three egrets, standing very still on their stick-like legs.

A writer can imagine being “inside” the egret, and experiences the particular moment in time depicted in this woodblock print from a bird’s perspective.

Consider all five senses. What does the egret feel, smell, taste, and hear? What catches its eye?



Ohara SHŌSON (KOSON), *Chinese Egrets*, ca. 1930

Here is one writer's journal entry, inspired by the moment captured by the artist.

To stand with egrets
under a crescent moon,
to hear the wind sing
through the rushes, to
discover clarity in the
blue of sea and sky, and
to ask patience, beauty,
and peace to enter my
soul - ah, is this not
happiness?



Ohara SHŌSON (KOSON), *Chinese Egrets*, ca. 1930

A 4th grade student jotted down this list of action verbs that he associated with a soaring raven:



Soar

Fly

Caw

Call

Prey

Sail

Attack

Swoop

Pick up

Coast

Zip

Dip

Loop-the-loop

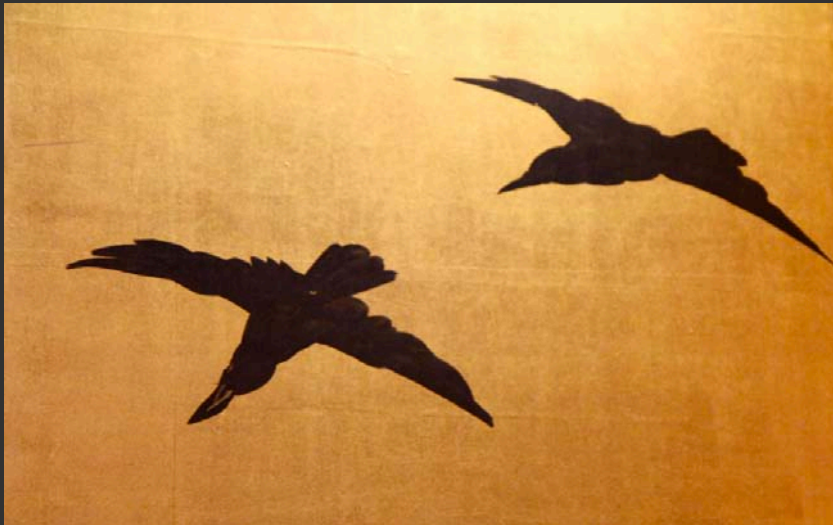
Glide

Pull in

Sink

Can you imagine this bird in flight by just reading the list?

In addition to considering the five senses, the writer can use another approach when composing a poem about an animal: what **action verbs** come to mind when you observe this creature – a raven – in flight?

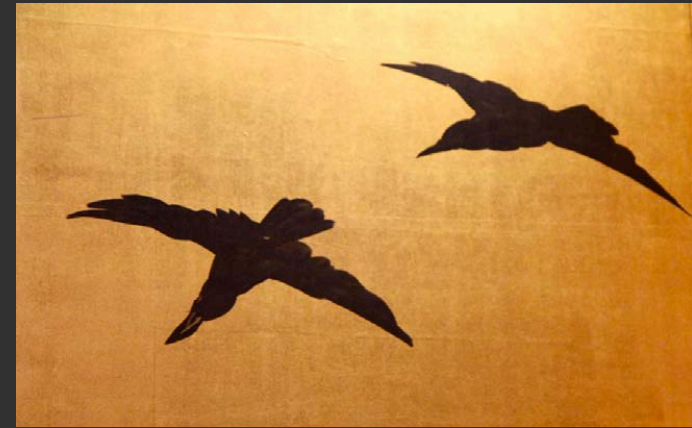


Crows in Autumn, Kishi Chikudō, Japanese 1826-1897

Here is the poem that emerged from his list
of action verbs:

Come, soar aloft into my nest.
Fly with me, up to the heavens
while we prey upon the unsuspecting.
As we sail past growling bobcats,
a cool wind combs our feathers
like the hairbrush of nature.
We fly on,
ready to attack with eyes that glisten
when food appears
...there it is!
Swoop down!
Don't pass up a chance for carrion!
Pick it up in your talons!
Fly home,
and coast back to my nest with me.
Gaze as ravens zip out,
dip down,
and loop-the-loop around us.
Glide with me on the breeze until
...there it is!
Pull in,
and sink lower and lower into the nest.
You are a duke of darkness,
a wizard of wonder,
a creator of mystery,
and a lord of life.

- TS 4th Grade



Soar
Fly
Prey
Sail
Attack
Swoop
Pick up
Coast
Zip
Dip
Loop-the-loop
Glide
Pull in
Sink

Spotted Skunk

Why are you following me?
Do you want to harm me?
I do not want to harm you!
Why are you yapping at me?
Please leave me alone.
What? You're still here?
Fine...
Come with me.
Let's scurry away,
And paddle across a pond
As if we were little fish.
As night falls,
Let's hunt for rodents.
We'll climb trees
And rob bird eggs,
And spray the crazy humans
That want to hunt us!
As morning interrupts our fun,
Let's go back into our burrow
Until nighttime,
When it is our turn to play!

- Tori, 5th grade

All animals have unique characteristics that inspire writers to play with language – even creatures who aren't typically considered "cute." In this poem, a student wrote from a skunk's perspective, and initiated a conversation with another animal in the same habitat. Notice how the writer, a fifth grade student, uses strong action verbs to enhance her poem.



Another approach is to find the animal that “lives in you” – in other words, what animal shares your characteristics or personality?

The Raven in Me

There is a raven in me.
Raven says:
I am a leader;
Intelligent,
Elegant and graceful.
My feathers reflect the sunlight.
I find precious things no one else can.
I wear silky feathers all over me.
I soar over trees,
Curious,
As I wander and wonder.
You see,
I believe in magic ---

There's a raven in me.

- Kimberly, 4th grade



Hawk Child

Her heart holds on tightly
To what she loves.
Her eyes, deep blue, are like an arrow -
Seeing everything
That you might miss.
She aims straight toward her food -
She knows how to get what she needs.
She is strong and brave,
Smart and clever.
Her wings fly to the beat of her heart.
She soars off swiftly,
Without hesitating.
Her feathers glisten in the light,
And her wings spread wide,
Just like her heart.
When you find her alone,
Not speaking,
You know that she is thinking about
What's to come.
That is why they call her...
Hawk Child.

- Lexie, 4th grade



The Otter in Me

There's an otter in me:
She has thick, glossy hair;
And when it comes to playing,
She is always in!

She is a swift swimmer,
But you can't tell because
She is usually too busy
Swimming in circles.

If any other animal or human
tries to give her a hard time,
She will give you a hard time back.
When things need to be taught
She learns it quickly.

Her intelligence allows her
to live with confidence.
She might have a lot of friends,
but she is always looking for more.

There's an otter in me.

- Ruby, 5th grade



Wild animals are very interesting, but so are pets! Here is one artist who obviously loves his dog.



Roy De Forest, *Untitled*, Pastel on Paper

Because we know our pets so well, it is easy to write poems that praise all the things we appreciate about them. Here is one student's example:

In Praise of Puppies

Maybe it's the way they wait at the front door for you
when you come home from school.

Maybe it's the way their soft fur tickles you feet
on cold mornings.

Maybe it's the way they make you giggle
when you are upset.

Maybe it's the way they lick your face to wake you up
for Saturday morning cartoons.

Maybe it's the way they make their sad eyes
when they know they're in trouble.

Maybe it's the way their tails wag excitedly
when you say the word "walk."

Maybe it's the way they cherish every moment
of their life with you –

and how that is the same way
you feel about them.

Maybe that's why I love puppies!

- Kate, 4th grade



Some writers like to take the letters that spell an animal's name and write them vertically. This is called an acrostic poem.

Each line of the poem begins with one of the letters, as this example shows:

Black cat with eyes the color of a green

Leaf, sprints

Across the road to a tree. It

Climbs up the trunk as high as a

Kite and

Catches a mouse!

And then, it runs to a rock

To meow at the moon.

- Adrianna, 4th grade



Monkeys are the perfect subject for a poem or story. What is going on in this picture?
An artist creates a visual story using images, as the next slide shows.





Can you imagine a plot to go with this picture story? Dialogue? If this picture was featured in a comic book, what would the different characters be thinking or saying to each other?



As you create a scene with monkeys, start imagining a story or poem to accompany it. Do you see a story in this image? Who is the main character? What problem might emerge?

One student wrote this poem after looking at the image:

Monkey Talk

Hey monkey,
Hanging in that tree on a warm
summer day!
You are looking so inquisitive!
I wonder what you are
curious about?
Will you tell me?
Will you show me one of
your tricks?
But before you do,
please promise me that you won't
steal my things.
OK?

- Cuyler, 3rd grade



Spend some time looking carefully at this mixed media piece by artist Aaron Morse. He titled it *The Kingdom of Nature*. What animals inhabit the kingdom?



Aaron Morse, *The Kingdom of Nature*



hummingbird

elephant

octopus

In the next three slides, see how one adult and two students wrote from the perspectives of three of the creatures in *The Kingdom of Nature*.



Can a writer or artist be a scientist at the same time? Of course!

Writers, scientists, and artists have a lot in common. They all:

- observe their subjects very closely
- note movements, sounds, physical attributes, and location
- use precise language – just the right words to describe what they observe.

What words come to mind when you observe this octopus?

The following “How To” poem demonstrates how one writer (who is also a scientist) used her careful observations of the octopus and her knowledge of marine biology to compose this piece:

How to Be an Octopus

Intelligent wonder,
You are a master of deception,
Confusing your enemies,
Changing colors,
Squirting ink,
Using dozens of suction cups
To pull up your shell-less, sac-like body
Through unseen crevices.

Lazy creature,
You can drink water
Then force it out through your siphon,
A marvelous motor
That only you possess.
But you’d rather not.
Instead, you choose to crawl and grovel
Along the ocean floor.
Silly sight,
Legs meant for flying,
Not walking!

Ruthless predator,
You grab your victims
With eight powerful arms
Injecting them with poison
From your mighty jaws.
Crabs, mussels, and snails beware!
Dracula is lurking.

Dedicated mother,
You proudly guard
Your clusters of eggs
As they hang from cave ceilings
And rocks,
Meticulously cleaning them
With strong jets.
You celebrate their hatching,
And then you die.

Gina Rester-Zodrow



Did you find the elephant in *The Kingdom of Nature*? Here is what a third grade student wrote after she discovered an elephant in the artwork:

The Elephant in Me

There is an elephant in me,
Stampeding wildly through the forest
with its friends.
Inside it is very wise.
It doesn't believe in violence or hate.
It only believes in peace and kindness.

My elephant is a she,
And her name is Zen.
Zen's skin is as gray as a dolphin's
And as wrinkly as a bulldog's.

Zen never leaves her pack.
That is the same as not leaving friends,
And neither would I.
The spirit of the elephant lives in me.

- 3rd grade student



The hummingbird in me
is intent
and nosy,
attracted to sweetness,
bright colors,
and light.

Seemingly still,
but constantly moving,
her flight does not depend
on distance
or space.

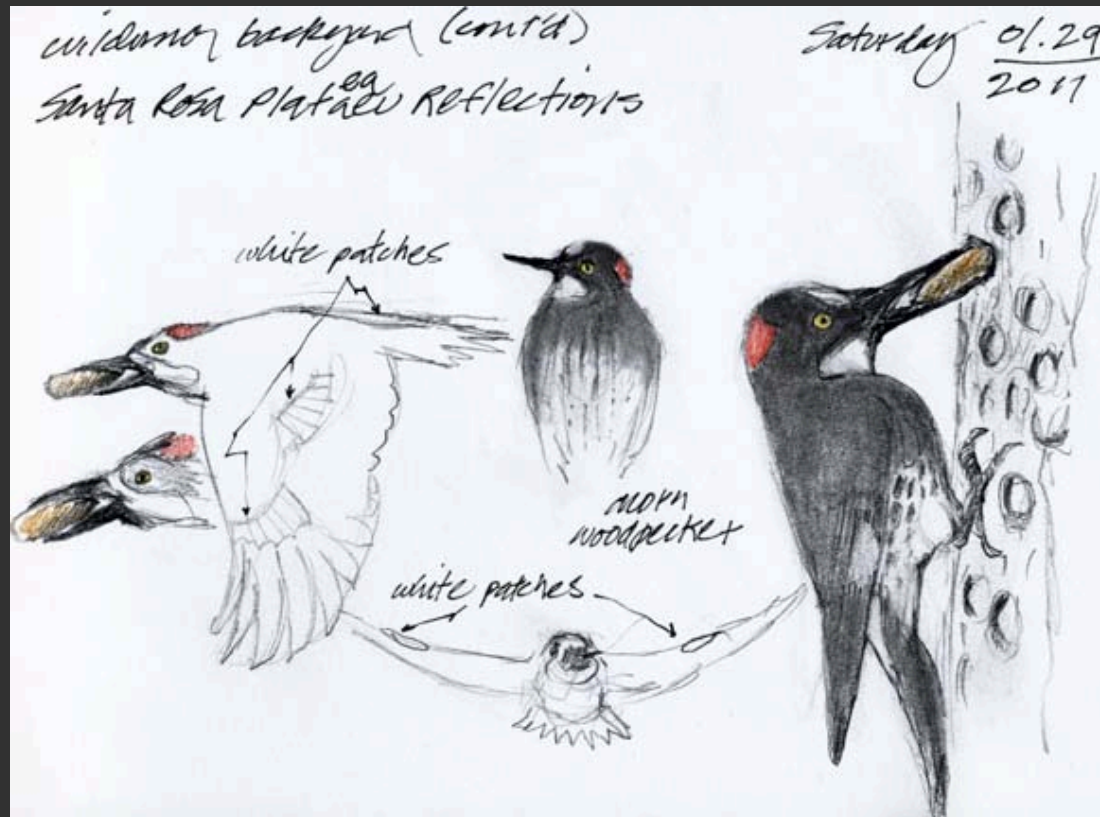
A creature of spring,
of summer,
of sunlight,
she blends into the background
if the flora is right.

She's small
and prefers it
to large and lumbering.
Her changeable coloration
lets her hide
or shine.

The hummingbird was difficult to spot
in *The Kingdom of Nature* because it is so tiny
compared to other creatures.



Nature artist Jim Lockyer noted the characteristics, habits, and movements of an acorn woodpecker in his sketchbook.



Writers, scientists, and artists have a lot in common. They:

- observe their subjects very closely
- note and record movements, sounds, physical attributes, and location
- use precise language – just the right words or visual language to describe what they observe.

In this poem, a nature writer created a written “sketch” of the same bird.



Morning Messenger

Acorn woodpecker

Your chirpy caw awakens me.
The two descriptors seem incongruous;
but there it is, a cheerful sound,
slightly more musical than the gravelly call of the crow.
I watch your shadow first, then the silhouette
of your flight:
swooping, flapping, a little bit comical,
teetering on the edge of grace.
Your slow, steady wing beats
invite my breath to keep time.
In focus now, you spread your black and white feathers
against a round, white belly and pale throat,
but it's your red-capped head that gives you away.
Such crimson – and you wear it so proudly!
Bowing that head would never be
an act of submission.
How is it that you were gifted
with such audacious color?
There is no shame in this scarlet.
You, sweet friend, are a message-bringer,
a visual trumpet call,
boldly announcing autumn
before flying off into golden light.

- Joni Chancer

Whether you are on a hiking trail, at the zoo, or in an art museum, look for animals in nature...

and then write!



Detail *Folding Screen depicting Spring Morning in the Han Palace*
Qing dynasty Kangxi Period 1662-1722
Wood and clay core covered with lacquer China

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Writing lessons and prompts were created by Joni Chancer, SBMA Program Consultant, and feature the writing of classroom students who participated in SBMA Outreach programs.

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