

Activity Plan: Creating a Bird’s Nest

Summary

The goal of this activity is to allow youth to understand the intricacies involved in birds’ nest building. Different species of birds build their nests in different locations, in different shapes, and with different nest materials depending on their habitat, nutritional requirements, predator status, etc. Different bird species also lay different numbers and colors of eggs. This activity will place youth in the shoes of a nest-building bird and allow them to create a nest and eggs resembling that of a species inhabiting Pennsylvania.

INTRODUCTION

This activity is designed to take place at a public event where a youth and their parent(s)/guardian(s) may stop by a booth to take part in an educational craft. This activity, when set up beforehand, should require 10-30 minutes depending on the age of the youth and interest level. This paper is not intended to contain rules for the activity but rather suggestions. Other materials, strategies, and discussion options may be substituted where it is fitting to do so.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The chart shown in Appendix A, laminated, should be present on the demonstration table in at least 1 copy. Other necessary materials for this demonstration are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Demonstration Materials

Demonstration Materials	Function	Quantity
Newspaper	Cover surfaces	
Paper bowls	Nest base	1 per youth
Tweezers	Pick up materials	4
Supply Baskets labeled with wild nest material	Contain materials	16

Nest building supplies typically used by local wild birds should be represented by pieces of the corresponding material (or similar material) in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Nest Building Supplies

Materials Birds Use	Craft Store Materials
Bark	Brown felt (could be peel/stick or embossed alligator cocoa)
Coarse Grasses	Dark green curling ribbon/streamers
Feathers	Naturally colored feathers
Fine Grasses	Green embroidery thread, crochet thread, or thin baby soft yarn
Fishing line	Clear thread/string
Hair	Thin sewing thread, natural color
Leaves	Leaf stickers (could be foam)
Moss	Dark green felt pieces (peel/stick is nice)
Mud	Elmer's glue/Rubber cement/mixed with Brown paint?
Reeds	Green pipe cleaners
Rootlets	White string/thin white yarn
Strips of cloth	Pieces of cloth/ribbon
Twigs	Brown pipe cleaners
Trash wrappers	Trash wrappers (clean)
Weeds	Plastic leafy stems (garlands, small flowers, ferns, eucalyptus, ivy)
Wool	Cotton balls or white pompoms
Yarn	Thick colored yarn

These materials should be cut in appropriate lengths/pieces and placed in separate containers labeled with the name of the natural nest-building material rather than the representative craft material. For example, brown pipe cleaners should be in a basket labeled “Twigs” and pieces of green felt should be in a basket labeled “Moss”.

After choosing a bird from the chart in Appendix A, each youth can collect the nest materials for their bird from the craft supplies and construct a nest from the materials. The work area should be covered with newspaper. A demonstration nest should be on hand to provide ideas on how to weave the materials together.

An explanation may be necessary to stimulate thought on the way that materials should be placed in the nest. For most nests, the courser, less comfortable materials are on the outside of the nest and provide structural support while the finer materials are on the inside of the nest to cushion the eggs and baby birds. Ask, “Which materials line the nest of your bird?” “Why do you think that is?”

Older youth may enjoy being presented with an additional challenge. They may only use a tweezers to select materials, and they may only pick up one piece of material at a time. This simulates how a bird does not have hands but must carry all materials to her nesting site with her beak.

Any of the nests constructed by youth, regardless of species, may include trash, yarn, or fishing line.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this activity is to stimulate thought about the process of nesting and give youth a chance to experience building a nest with materials similar to those available to wild birds. Questions may be used to improve discussion.

1. Which bird did you choose?
2. Why did you choose this bird?
3. Describe the kind of nest your bird makes.
4. How many eggs does it usually lay? What color?
5. Was it difficult to use all of the materials to put the nest together?
6. Why might the bird use the materials it does to build its nest?
7. How do you think the nesting materials relate to the habitat of the bird?
8. Birds are often prey to other mammals and reptiles. How might your bird use its nest materials to camouflage her nest?
9. What is the purpose of a nest? *[To hatch and raise offspring – not a yearlong place to sleep. Most birds abandon their nests after their babies are old enough to leave it.]*
10. Did you use any of the trash, yarn, or fishing line to build your nest?
11. Where might a bird find these things?
12. Do you think that trash or fishing line in a nest is safe for the bird and her young? Why not?
13. Have you ever seen a bird's nest in the wild? Where did you see it? What do you think it was made of?
14. If you do see a bird's nest, what should you do? *[You can look at it, but do not touch or remove it. Not only might you damage the nest or scare the bird away from her eggs/chicks, it is also against federal (U.S.) law to remove a wild bird nest.]*

REFERENCES

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