

YHBA Novel Resource #4
The Boy Who Drew Birds

I. Book Information:

Author: Jacqueline Davies
Title: The Boy Who Drew Birds
Copyright date: 2004
Publisher: Houghton Mifflin Company

II. About the Author:

Jacqueline Davies was born in Cleveland, Ohio on July 25, 1962. She was a very busy child and was involved with a modern dance troupe, writing for and editing the school newspaper, reading, and calligraphy, and then went to Brown University and received a BA in 1984.

Although Jacqueline has been writing since she was five, she only started writing children's books at the age of thirty. She would much rather write books for children because they really get into what they are reading, and she would much rather have that kind of an audience than an adult audience which already has life figured out.

She enjoys historical fiction and is going to Maine for four weeks during the summer of 2007 to work on her latest novel. Jacqueline has three children and lives in Needham, Massachusetts.



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Author's connection to the book:

Jacqueline has been watching birds and listening to them since she was very young. It was through her research on the phoebe bird that she saw on a guided nature walk at a Massachusetts Audubon Society sanctuary that gave her the inspiration to write this book.

Other books by same author:

[The Lemonade War](#)

[The House Takes a Vacation](#)

[Where the Ground Meets the Sky](#)

[The Night is Singing](#)

III. Annotation:

The Boy Who Drew Birds is an account of one year in the life of John James Audubon. Davies opens the book by describing the many talents of young John including dancing, hunting, fishing, and riding. He enjoyed the walks that he took with his father near their home in France, but as his father didn't want James to fight in Napoleon's war, he sent John to a farm in America when John was eighteen years old.

John lived with a house keeper on his father's farm in Pennsylvania, and he spent many April mornings walking and looking for birds. Bird watching was John's favorite pastime and he stumbled on to a nest of pewee bird in a limestone cave. When he finally saw the birds he wondered if they were the same birds that had built the next the previous year. He wondered where the birds spent their winter.

Still excited about the birds, John went back to his house and told Madame Thomas about his discovery. She thought he should spend more time working the land and less time watching birds. John not only spent time watching birds, but he also worked in his attic room drawing them and reading some of the many books that he had on birds and nature. Each year at his birthday John would burn all of his drawings from the previous year in hopes that the next year's work would be worth keeping.

At that time little was known about the migration of birds and many people believed that birds would hibernate under water in a huddled mass. Since John had never seen this type of mass he did not believe it. He spent days observing the nest of birds and documented everything he could about them. Finally he decided to try and put a thread of string on one bird's leg to see if it would return in the spring. He learned that he would have to use a thread made of silver for which he would have to walk five miles to get in order for it to stay on the bird's leg.

When the next spring the birds returned and the one with the silver thread returned to the same area and nested close by. John's discovery was complete, and he included the behavior he called "homing" in his book Ornithological Biography.

While this is a simple and straight forward account of a very significant time in Audubon's life, this book places the events of his life on a level that is easy for young readers to understand. Perhaps this quaint story is too simplified and the readers may miss the point and the magnitude of his discovery will be lost. Either way, young readers will enjoy the story of a very real man who not only loved nature and all that it holds, but a man who almost became one with birds.

IV. Booktalk:

What if everyone thought birds lived in under the frozen water huddled in a tight ball all winter? Young John Audubon did not believe that and he had to prove it to the world. Read this realistic account of one year in the life of John James Audubon as he works to disprove that theory.

V. Characters

| Main | Traits |
|----------------------------|---|
| John James Audubon: age 18 | Brad is a very lanky boy who does not stand up for himself. His is rather embarrassed about his name and finds himself running away from bullies rather than standing up to them. He would like very much to have a friend but feels that he is a geek and lacks self-confidence. Brad is an excellent artist and loves to draw. When he is feeling frustrated with life he tends to draw things out on his sketch pad. |
| Supporting | Traits |
| Mrs. Thomas | The house keeper who had very strong work habits and religious ideas. She felt John should be doing God's work tend to the farm instead of watching birds. |
| Papa Audubon | Cared very much about nature and his son. Sent John to America to avoid Napoleon's war. |

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| The birds | The birds are a character in this story since John becomes so involved with them that they accept him and are not afraid. John seems to become part of their family. |
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VI. Conflict:

The main conflict in this novel is the question of the birds' whereabouts during the winter and if they return to the same location year after year. **This conflict is an external conflict; character vs. character or could be character vs. nature.**

VII. Conflict Resolution:

The conflict in this novel is resolved when the bird with the silver thread returns the next spring and proves that some birds return to the same area year after year.

VIII. Genre:

The genre of this novel would fall under:
Fictional Biography
Historical Fiction
Animals & Nature Fiction

IX. If you like this book, you'll love these:

Odd Boy Out: Young Albert Einstein by Don Brown
The Flower Hunter by Debora Kogan Ray
Audubon's Birds of America Coloring Book by John James Audubon
Eliza the Dragonfly by Suzie Caldwell

Recommended books by the same author:

Where the Ground Meets the Sky
The Night is Singing

X. Levels:

IL: 1-4
RL: 4.4
LEX: AD790L

XI. Read-Aloud passages:

Page 1

"It was true that John James could skate, hunt, and ride better than most.....

This passage shows that while John James Audubon was extremely interested in nature and birds he had a well rounded life and his father wanted him to be safe from war in France.

Page 7

"John James ran home through the woods. "Madame Thomas! Madame Thomas! he shouted, bursting

This passage shows the excitement that John James felt as he saw birds. This passage is important for the reader to understand that this was almost the most important thing in his life.

XII. Setting:

The setting of this novel is in Colonial America in early April of 1803 to April of the next year, on a farm in Pennsylvania.

XIII. Point of View:

The point of view of this novel is third person omniscient.

XIV. Theme:

The theme of this novel is that no matter what a person's interests might be, it is important to follow those interests.

One interpretation of the title, *The Boy Who Drew Birds*, is that John James Audubon was probably most known for his drawings of birds during his life.

XI. Across the Curriculum Connections:

• **Subject Area Connections #1**

Science: Have the students make and color drawings of birds that are indigenous to their area.

This connection will help students not only understand their own surroundings, but it will help them see and feel the way John James Audubon did when he was trying to capture the essence of the birds that he drew. It is important to remind the students that John James Audubon did many sketches of each bird and kept very few because he did not feel they were good enough to keep. After the students color both sides of their birds, laminate them, and then punch a hole in the bird and hang it from the ceiling with a piece of yarn.

Resources needed for this activity are the following:

Internet access, drawing paper, colored pencils, scissors, a hole-punch, yarn, and laminator (optional)

All of the following internet sights will help the students find birds that are in Indiana. They will choose a bird and then draw and color it as accurately as possible.

Internet sites for birds:

<http://www.wbu.com/chipperwoods/checklist.htm>

<http://www.indianaaudubon.org/ibrc/offcklst.htm>

<http://www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/FNR/FNR-165/FNR-165.html>

<http://www.birdingonthe.net/maillinglists/INDB.html>

http://www.whatbird.com/browse/objs/All/birds_na_147/38/Location/6431/Indiana/default.aspx

Pages 10, 11, 12 and 14 in the book make direct reference to his drawings of the birds.

• **Subject Area Connections #2**

Language Arts: Have students make a time line of this book to show the elements that are needed for a biographical book.

This connection to language arts is very clear in the book and the students need to take it that one step further. By doing this time line the students will see how the events in the story are reported chronologically and also give the reader a very clear picture of this time span in John James Audubon's life. Students will separate the events into 8 to 10 "chunks" of time. After the students have decided what their "chunks" of information are, they will draw a time line on a piece of butcher paper with a ruler. After the time line is drawn the students will put the events from the story on the line in the order

that they occurred. When this is completed, the students will glue the events to the time line. To make this a little more interesting, have the students listen to the bird songs from the internet.

Resources needed for this activity are the following:

Notebook paper and pencil, butcher paper, ruler, glue, colored pencils, the book, The Boy Who Drew Birds, Internet access.

Internet site for bird songs

<http://www.learnbirdsongs.com/habitat.php?id=1>

<http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/songwav.html>

<http://zeeman.ehc.edu/envs/Hopp/song.html>

Pages 5 and 11, in the book make direct reference to the bird's songs and the entire book is needed for the students to "chunk" this period of time in John James Audubon's life.

- **Subject Area Connections #3**

Language Arts: Writing prompt- Think of a time in your life that you saw something that you did not understand. Write about it and try and explain how it made you feel, and then write about how you tried to find out the answer to your question.

XII. Across the Curriculum Connection Activities:

- **Activity #1 Bringing the Biography to Life**

Indiana Academic Standard 6.3.1 Identify different types (genres) of fiction and describe the major characteristics of each form.

For this activity students will work in groups of four to bring the biography of John James Audubon to life. Each group will be assigned to two page spread to act out to the class. Each performance can be no longer than 30 seconds, but must convey what happened in the story to the rest of the class. After the groups are made and the pages given to the class they will have 5 minutes to practice. Bring the group together and perform The Boy Who Drew Birds. An extension of this activity would be to perform this for another class. Have fun!

- **Activity #2 How things can change**

Science Grade 5:

Indiana Academic Standard: The Scientific View of the World 5.1.1: Recognize and describe that results of similar scientific investigations may turn out differently because of inconsistencies in methods, materials, and observations.

Activity:

Step 1: Read *The Boy Who Drew Birds* aloud to the students.

Step 2: After hearing *The Boy Who Drew Birds* read as a read aloud have students make a list of the observations that John made during the period of the novel.

Step 3: Have the students then make a list of John's actions during his investigation.

Step 4: Have the students write the outcome of his experiment. Share this with the class. During this discussion the fact that John had to change the thread that was used to mark the bird should be addressed by the class.

Step 5: Have the students break into pairs to brainstorm how changing other variables of this experiment could change the outcome of this scientific investigation.

Step 6: Give each group an index card on which they are to write their favorite change and outcome.

Step 7: Bring the group back together and have the students put their cards on the chalk board with a magnet or tape.

Step 8: Discuss a few of the changes and outcomes of the experiment.

- **Activity #3 Who is John James Audubon?**

Language Arts Grade 3 Indiana Academic Standards 3.3.3 Determine what characters are like by what they say or do and by how the author or illustrator portrays them.

Activity:

Step 1: Read *The Boy Who Drew Birds* aloud to the students.

Step 2: Have the students brainstorm in pairs things they could draw that would represent John James Audubon.

Step 3: Have the students working in the same pairs draw the character John James Audubon and things he liked to do while you read the book to them again.

Step 4: Have the students finish their drawings.

Step 5: Have the students share their drawings with the class and explain why they drew the things they did.

XIII Discussion Questions:

Pre-reading Questions for book: There are no page numbers or chapters in this book, so start with these pre reading questions during an SSR time and then do a picture walk through the book to have the students predict what the setting will be. When that is done, read this aloud to the students.

- Where do birds go in the winter?
- Where do all birds go in the winter?
- How do we know that? (The assumption here is that someone said south.)

Begin picture walk now. (Each bullet is a page)

- What does the title of this book suggest to you?
- Where do you suppose this takes place? What time period do you think it is? Why do you think that? Why are the people wearing those funny clothes?
- Why is that man carrying a stick?
- What do we notice in the air here?

- Why are there notes and music coming out of the bird's mouth?
- Why do you suppose this man is so excited?

Begin the book now.

During Reading Questions: (Each bullet is a page)

- Who are the men in this picture and where are they?
- Where is John in this picture? Where is his father?
- Where is John standing? Why?
- Who is the woman in this picture? Why is John excited? Why are there notes and music coming out of the bird's mouth?
- What do all of these things on this page represent about John?
- What do these scientists have to say about where birds are in the winter? Do any of these ideas seem off? Which ones?
- Why did John like to be in the cave with the birds? How do you suppose he feels when he is in there?
- What do you think John's plan will be? How do you think he feels knowing that winter is coming and the birds will be gone?
- What is John's plan? Why does he do this? What goes wrong with his plan? How does he solve this problem?
- What does John do all winter? What is his goal?
- What happens that is exciting for John? What did he still wonder?
- What did he find in the hay shed that was extremely exciting? What did he do with this news? Why?

Post Reading Questions:

- Summarize what happened in this book?
- How do you suppose John felt when he got to America?
- How do you think his father felt after he sent John to America?
- What was so important about John's discovery?
- What will happen now that John has made this discovery to the works of the other famous scientists?
- What might be something else that John could try and find out the next year?
- What was the effect of John's first attempt at tying a sting on the birds leg? What happened as a result of this?

XIV. Language:

minuet: a dance done at fancy balls in France during the time of the book
commerce: business, buying and selling
crouched: bend down or squat
musee (*French spelling as found in the book*): his place to think or ponder
lichen: a greenish grey fungus
philosopher: truth seeker, thinker
naturalist: environmentalist, someone who likes nature.
falcon: large birds with long pointed wings
complex: complicated

XV. Indiana Academic Standards Met by The Boy Who Drew Birds:

Grade 3 Language Arts

Standard 1: 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.1.6

Standard 2: 3.2.9, 3.2.4,

Standard 3: 3.3.1, 3.3.3, 3.3.6, 3.3.8

Grade 4 Language Arts

Standard 1: 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.7

Standard 2: 4.2.3, 4.2.8

Standard 3: 4.3.2, 4.3.7

Grade 5 Language Arts

Standard 1: 5.1.1, 5.1.6

Standard 2: 5.2.3, 5.2.4

Standard 3: 5.3.8

Grade 6 Language Arts

Standard 1: 6.1.1, 6.1.4

Standard 2: 6.2.3, 6.2.4, 6.2.6, 6.2.7,

Standard 3: 6.3.1, 6.3.5

Grade 4 Science

Standard 1: 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.4

Grade 5 Science

Standard 1: 5.1.1, 5.1.3

Grade 6 Science

Standard 1: 6.1.2, 6.1.3

Bibliography

<http://www.jacquinedavies.net/>

<http://www.doe.state.in.us/standards>

<http://www.jacquinedavies.net/>

<http://www.audubon.org/nas/jja.html>

<http://www.lexile.com/EntrancePageFlash.html?1>

<http://www.inspire.net/>