



Birding is a great way to get students outside exploring the natural world and making observations. Preparing students for the activity using these few simple tips will help you lead a successful outing.

Before the Walk

- Set expectations: length of time, bird diversity (what might students expect to see or hear?)
- Remind students that they are most likely to hear birds before they see them and that loud or sudden movements are likely to scare birds away.
- Review birding ethics (respect birds and their environment: avoid stressing birds, limit audio playback, minimize habitat disturbance, use respectful language).
- Integrate your key messages. What is it that you want students to remember?
- Distribute and explain the use of binoculars, checklists, and/or field guides (if applicable).

During the Walk

- Have students close their eyes and listen. Can they point to where the song is coming from? You may want to teach common mnemonics like the American Robin's "cheery up, cheerio," which can be picked up on almost any bird walk in the United States. Some mnemonics for common southeastern birds include:
 - Northern Cardinal, "what-cheer, what-cheer, what-cheer"
 - Carolina Wren, "teakettle, teakettle, teakettle"
 - Blue Jay, "jay! jay!"
 - Carolina Chickadee, "Chick-a-dee-dee-dee"
- Scan fences, telephone wires, poles, open fields, and habitat edges. Don't forget to look up for soaring birds. If the option is available, visit areas near water (a pond, lake, or stream).
- Are you striking out on live birds? Point out the signs they leave behind, such as nests, feathers, cracked seeds, whitewash/droppings, or owl pellets.
- Consider having students journal their observations from a "sit spot" for five minutes. Returning to the same sit spot repeatedly will enable students to track patterns, cycles, and changes through the seasons.

After the Walk

- Wrap up the activity by reviewing the group's observations. How many birds did you see in total? How many species? Did you hear any birds without seeing them?
- Create and maintain a class checklist. Consider submitting your checklist to the eBird database.

Best Binocular Practices: Tips for Birding with Students

Before you go outside, instruct students to:

- Flex your binoculars, so the eyecups fit YOUR eyes. If you don't wear glasses, raise the eyecups. If you wear glasses, keep the eyecups lowered.
- Focus your binoculars. Use your pointing finger to find the focus wheel on the top of the barrels while you have your binoculars raised.
- Find a small object or text in the classroom to focus on. Stare at it with your naked eyes while you gently lift your binoculars with your hands. Found it? Do this with another object. Then another.

While you are outside, remind students:

- Shhhhh!
- Always keep your binoculars hanging around your neck.
- Always plant your feet while using binoculars. Never run with them.
- Stay together behind the leader.
- Keep the sun behind you whenever possible.
- Use words to describe the location of a bird. Don't point!
- Imagine a "clock in the tree" to indicate where the bird is. For example, the bird is at "2 o'clock."

