

# FOR THE BIRDS: LEARNING FROM NATURE

**GRADE:** 7-12

**TIME:** Four 50-minute sessions

“Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you.” This advice from Frank Lloyd Wright stems from the architect’s core belief in the educational power of nature, a guiding philosophy that Wright first embraced during childhood summers spent on his progressive family’s farm in rural Wisconsin. Wright’s first major commission, the Hillside Home School (1887), was a boarding school sited on the family farm and founded by Wright’s aunts, Ellen and Jane Lloyd Jones. Often teaching outdoors, Ellen and Jane Lloyd Jones utilized immersive, hands-on, student-directed lessons focused on nature and the environment. Students engaged in fieldwork by birdwatching and collecting rocks, fossils, and plants. In this lesson, participants will consider how Wright fostered nature-based learning experiences through his architectural designs. Like Hillside Home School students, participants will then engage in fieldwork as they directly observe birds in their area. Finally, participants will create a scratchboard drawing of a bird native to their area.

**INTEGRATED SUBJECTS:** Visual Arts, Science, Physical Education

## OBJECTIVES

### MATERIALS | RESOURCES

Internet access for independent student research

Drawing paper

Pencils

Scratch art knives and holders

- ◇ <https://www.dickblick.com/items/inovart-skratch-n-sketch-scratch-knives-pointed-pkg-12/>
- ◇ <https://www.dickblick.com/items/inovart-skratch-n-sketch-wood-knife-holder-pkg-12/>

Pencils, markers, and/or colored pencils

**Scratchboard** (Tip: Order 11" x 14" and cut to 5.5" x 7" per student. Order enough scratchboard for extras and provide some small pieces for practice)

1. Learn about the influence of nature and nature-based learning on the work of Frank Lloyd Wright.
2. Explore the nature-based educational philosophy of the Hillside Home School.
3. Engage in a nature walk as a means for enhancing and maintaining physical and mental health.
4. Directly observe birds in the area.
5. Create an original piece of artwork using scratchboard.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What does nature teach us?
2. How did Frank Lloyd Wright’s family and upbringing influence his work?
3. How can the built environment impact how I experience the natural world?
4. How can my local environment influence my art?

# LESSON PROCEDURE

## EXPLORE

### Session One

- **Share this quote from Frank Lloyd Wright with students: “Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you.” Have students consider:** How does one study nature? What does nature teach us?

## ENGAGE

### Session One

- **In the classroom, challenge students to independently and freely study nature.** (Tip: Set a time limit for this exercise! Encourage students to freely interpret this direction. Some students may look out classroom windows and sketch while others may utilize books or online resources.)
- **Reflect on the experience with students. Have students consider:** What did I learn? How did the classroom environment impact how I studied nature? What was difficult about this exercise?
- **Display images of Frank Lloyd Wright’s architecture. Have students consider:** How did nature inspire Wright’s designs? **Focus discussion on Wright’s use of natural colors and materials, as well as how buildings are sited to maximize one’s exposure to nature.**
- **Share that Wright spent summers on his family’s farm in Spring Green, Wisconsin.** (Tip: Share images of the “Driftless Area” of Wisconsin where the farm is located!) **Have students consider:** How might Wright’s experiences on the farm have shaped how he thought about nature?
- **Have students reflect upon how and where they experience nature.**

## EXPLORE

### Session Two

- **Review Frank Lloyd Wright and the influence of nature on Wright’s work.**
- **Introduce the Hillside Home School, a nature-based boarding school located on Wright’s family farm and founded by Wright’s aunts. Introduce information about the educational philosophy at Hillside Home School. Ask students to consider the pedagogy of “learning by doing,” and to reflect on their own learning styles. Ask students why birdwatching would have been a course of study. More information can be found above and at <https://franklloydwright.org/teaching-gardens-the-sociology-of-plants/>**

## ENGAGE

### Session Two

- **Challenge students to engage in fieldwork and classification of the birds in their area. Students may want to take photographs or sketch their observations for use later in the lesson. If possible, consider a bird walk, trip to the zoo or local bird sanctuary. If a field trip is not possible, encourage students to conduct independent outdoor research about their local birds for homework. Some Chicago examples include:**
  - ◇ <https://chicagobirdalliance.org/chicago-area-birding-hotspots-1>
  - ◇ [https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/progs/env/protecting\\_and\\_enjoyingbirds.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/progs/env/protecting_and_enjoyingbirds.html)
- **Reflect on the experience with students. Have students consider:** What did I learn? How did the experience of physically being outside impact how I studied nature? What was difficult about this exercise? How did the experience differ from studying nature inside?

# LESSON PROCEDURE (continued)

## EXPLORE

Session Three

- **Review Frank Lloyd Wright and the Hillside Home School.** (Tip: Students may be interested in seeing images of the school's buildings, which were designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1887 and 1902!)
- **Introduce Frank Lloyd Wright's Wisconsin Home & Studio (Taliesin) and highlight the "birdwalk" feature of the home: the dramatic cantilevered balcony addition. Ask students to consider:** How does this design feature facilitate nature-based learning? Why might Wright want to include this feature in his home? (Tip: The balcony provides breathtaking views of the landscape while also providing a feeling of being up in the trees with the birds. More information can be found at: <https://www.travelwisconsin.com/frank-lloyd-wright>.)
- **To further discussion, highlight opportunities for one to learn about nature at the Darwin Martin House in Buffalo, NY by showing students a short virtual tour of the home:**
  - ◇ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UL\\_9XRY-RmE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UL_9XRY-RmE)
- **Have students consider:** How did Wright's design enhance one's ability to study nature? (Tip: Students may also be interested in viewing Wright's birdhouse designs for the Darwin Martin home in Buffalo, NY and the Westcott House in Springfield, OH!)
- **Introduce scratchboard art by demonstrating how to use various blades on the scratchboard paper. Ask students to experiment on a small piece of scratchboard to create a variety of marks and lines. Ask students how they can create high contrast, texture, and detail. Recommend that students not outline their drawing but instead make small marks to create texture. Resources for techniques are available on YouTube:**
  - ◇ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0bMIXKz7\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0bMIXKz7_Q)
  - ◇ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmvwkiA\\_Y1Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmvwkiA_Y1Q)

## ENGAGE

Session Three

- **Ask students to use their field experience, bird walk, or photographs to choose an image for their scratchboard. If an outdoor experience isn't available use images from books, internet, or magazines.**
  - Differentiation: If students are intimidated by working with scratchboard, encourage them to first use a pencil to draw lightly onto the scratchboard. Another option is to have students create their drawing on paper. Next, have students lay the paper on top of the scratchboard and trace over the drawing with some pressure to create a slight indentation on the scratchboard. Students can then enhance the indentations with additional pencil lines.
- **Remind students they are working by removing the dark to reveal the light areas. Strong contrast is recommended and will create a more striking drawing. This is an excellent project to remind students to slow down and be mindful while they work.**

## DESIGN

Session Three (and Session Four if necessary)

- **Have students work independently on their bird scratchboard drawings.**
- **Encourage students to ask classmates for feedback and to explore what techniques and textures are working well.**

# LESSON PROCEDURE (continued)

## CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

Session Three (and Session Four if necessary)

- **Ask students to discuss the birds they observed in their area. Expand the discussion by asking students to describe the birds' movements, habits, and descriptions.**
  - Optional Extension: Challenge students to explore migration, nest building and the importance of birdwatching for scientific purposes.
- **Display the bird drawings to create a class bird sanctuary.**
  - Optional Extension: Have students create their own Wright-inspired birdhouse design for the bird they studied!