

TEACHER NOTES

Bring On the Birds

Written and illustrated by Susan Stockdale

Title: *Bring On the Birds*

Author / Illustrator Susan Stockdale

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Author / Illustrator: Susan Stockdale was born in Miami, Florida, USA. Her introduction to the world of children's books came in 1996 with the publication of *Some Sleep Standing Up*. She has since written and illustrated five more titles including *Fabulous Fishes* and *Stripes of All Types*. Her books celebrate nature with exuberance and charm and have won awards from Parents' Choice, the National Science Teachers Association and Bank Street College of Education. Susan developed her love of flora and fauna as a child growing up in Florida and Ireland. After studying art at Occidental College in Los Angeles, she worked as a textile designer for the apparel industry. Her distinctive animal imagery is also featured on puzzles, calendars and other products sold worldwide. Susan lives in Maryland. Visit her website at www.susanstockdale.com.

SYNOPSIS Birds come in all shapes, sizes and colours and many of them can do remarkable things. *Some have dull or dazzling colours, long or little legs. / But all of them have feathers, and all are hatched from eggs.* Can you imagine dancing birds, diving birds, hanging birds and hiding birds. Birds that swoop, whoop, hum, drum, and drill. They're all here. From the great horned owl and the Atlantic puffin to the keel-billed toucan and the red-bellied woodpecker. In her latest book Susan Stockdale, introduces young readers to both exotic and familiar birds in simple rhyming text. The bright bold colours and crisp clear lines of Stockdale's birds in their natural habitats can't help but grab your attention. An afterword offers fascinating facts and a closer look at each bird and where it lives.

WRITING / ILLUSTRATING STYLE

Susan Stockdale has created a delightful book that introduces young readers to information books, and the vast world of birds. *Bring On the Birds* is a perfect 'read-aloud' book. The simple rhythmic, rhyming text, invites children to join in. The words follow a particular pattern – two-word/three-syllable phrases, repeated twice, followed by a five syllable phrase -

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(Hanging birds, hiding birds, birds with jagged bills.). The text is rich with delightfully simple, descriptive and rhyming words and phrases that highlight the specific characteristics of each type of bird, *(Racing birds (the **greater roadrunner** running), riding birds (**red-billed oxpeckers** riding on the neck of a giraffe), birds that never fly. (**ostriches** on two long , sturdy legs.)* Over the last two pages, Susan lengthens the phrases, slowing down the pace of the rhythm, and leading to the satisfying conclusion that ends with the warm reassurance of a new life beginning. *Some have dull or dazzling colours, long or little legs. / But all of them have feathers, and all are hatched from eggs.*

Susan Stockwell used acrylic paint on paper for the illustrations in this book. The bright, bold, colourful illustrations clearly depict the different characteristics and behaviours of each bird, and their natural habitats. Each bird and their habitats are depicted in a simplified graphic style - from great horned owl and blue-footed booby, to Adelie penguin, ostrich and broad-tailed hummingbird. When Susan Stockdale talks with groups of children she emphasizes to them that she creates books that are non-fiction, *not* fiction. She explains that, “every detail in the text and illustrations of a nonfiction picture book, from the color of the berries that a toucan eats to the kinds of flowers found in a rainforest canopy, must be factually accurate”. (Read more about this on Susan Stockdale’s website www.susanstockdale.com). The illustrations extend the meaning of the text by providing simple but accurate details about each bird and it’s habitat – colour, size, actions, markings, tree birds, sea birds, pond birds, night birds, nesting habits, etc. The layout of the book breaks up the text page by page. Single page boxed illustrations are interspersed with full-bleed double page spreads, and thumbnail sketches, and explanations at the back of the book provide more detailed information.

DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

- This story with its simple text and expressive illustrations, invite adults and children to look at and read this book together. It is a book that can be looked at, and read with babies, toddlers, preschool and school-aged children

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- Before reading the book with a large group of children, spend time reading with individuals and small groups. This will provide an opportunity for children to share their own responses to the words and pictures
- Together, reflect on what might be happening on each page. This helps the children to create their own ‘sense’ of the story. Take time to let the children linger over each page, or move on, as they are ready
- But, don’t let talking get in the way of the enjoyment of the story. Discussions like this should be relaxed and natural, and take place over time. They can be a simple and friendly way of drawing the children’s attention to specific elements of a picture storybook
- Share your own reflections with the children. Talk about the birds. Refer to the thumbnails at the back of the book. Find out the name of each bird, why they look the way they do, why they do what they do, how they protect themselves, where in the world they are found
- You will find that the children will quickly join in the ‘reading’ of this story – it has such a toe-tapping rhythm, that you can emphasise when you are reading it. Susan Stockdale says, “*I ask the children to clap out the rhythm as I read my rhymes aloud so they can feel the "music" in the words*”
- There will be many different ways that you can share this story with children
 - All ‘reading’ together while tapping out the rhythm with your feet or hands on knees.
 - Teacher: “*Swooping birds...*, Children: *whooping birds...* Everyone together: *birds with puffy chests*”
 - Teacher: “*Humming...* Children: *birds...*” Teacher: “*drumming...* Children: *birds,*” Everyone together: *birds with bills that drill*”
 - Divide children into three groups and tell the story as above, with each group reciting a different part. With this ‘reading’ use co-workers and / or parents to help lead each group
- Find words that rhyme: *Swooping – whooping, skimming - swimming*
- Put words together into little single rhymes – emphasising the sounds and the rhythm. *Racing, riding, swooping, whooping*. Turn these rhymes into action /sound games

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- Talk with the children about the meanings of the descriptive words: *puffy, fluffy, jagged, drill, dull, dazzling*
- Use the pictures in the book as reference for children to draw, or make with collage, their own birds, and bird habitats
- Talk with them about the different colours, the shapes, the sizes of the birds and their environments
- Tell the story using the children's drawings (perhaps made into puppets)
- At the painting easel provide colours like those in the book and suggest that the children make bold, colourful paintings on large sheets of paper. The children can use the pictures in the book as reference
- Provide different coloured paper for the children to draw on. And different types of art materials – crayons, dry pastels, oil pastels, pencils, tempera or acrylic paint, coloured paper cutting, tearing, pasting
- Talk about how a horizon line can be used to separate the different colours depicting land and sky
- Dramatise the actions. Swoop like the **great horned owl**, puff out your chest like the **great frigate bird**, etc
- Use fabric in the colours of the illustrations to help set the scene for the birds – create, trees, ponds, seas, reeds, nests, etc
- Refer to the information that is included on the last pages. With the children discover the geographical region each bird is from. Use a map or an atlas
- With the children find out what birds are native to your own area. Find out more about these birds. How many have you seen – make charts with pictures of native birds sighted in your area. Make thumbnail sketches and compile information about these birds, like those in *Bring On the Birds*. Ask the local Aboriginal community if there are any traditional stories about these native birds
- Don't forget to visit Susan Stockdale's website to find out more about her books, her way of working, and her interests www.susanstockdale.com